

# SAIVAM AND RITUALS

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## Introduction

Religion has always played a prominent part in ancient cultures, and this is all the more so in the case of India. On the basis of a through investigation of the objects in his book, Mohenjodaro and India civilization, John Marshall has come to the conclusion that the religion of that period was a composite one and that many cults existed side by side and continued to flourish without hindrance to one another. Of these religious cults, the mother cult and the Siva cult must have been most widely prevalent – a fact which is attested by the abundance of relevant materials unearthed in the India valley.

In the later religious history, these two cults are seen to have developed into two parallel religions of Saivism and Saktism. In the religious history of India, no religion has had such a long and continuous tradition as Saivism, few living religions can boast of such a long and unbroken tradition. The very antiquity of Saivism implies that religion must have gone through various vicissitudes in the course of its long history. A study of Saivism implies the study of the ancillary cults as well. In south Indian tradition, Siva is always represented with the subordinate divinities.

## The main six cults

We can trace the gradual evolution of this group of divinities, which are associated with Siva, Ganesa, Devi, Skanda and Surya, as installed in the places duly assigned to them in the South Indian temples. The mother cult is also seen to have been included into the Saiva-cult, so that the mother as Sakti began to be represented as the consort of Siva.

Other minor cults, like tree worship and worship of inanimate objects, which had existed separately, were later on fused into the major cults. For example, the tree worship and worship of serpents, of which traces are found in the Indus period, have been absorbed by Saivism and Vaisnavism of the Epic and Puranic periods. The serpent becomes the couch of Visnu. Siva wears the serpent as Yajnopavita and other ornaments. Tulasi and Bilva are considered sacred to Visnu and Siva respectively. Each temple in South India has its sacred tree under the designation Sthalavrksa. Even Visnu has a place duly assigned to him. Thus the main six cults, namely Saiva, Vaishnava, Sakta, Ganapatya, Kaumara and Saura, were assimilated and accommodated in South Indian temples.

## The Temples – Glorious Institutions

The temples are the most glorious institutions of our country. They are the true abodes of the Divine. It is the temples that brought about unity in religion in the whole of the country more than any other institution. They are the true symbols of the cultural unity of India, comprehending within them all classes of people. Even now, we can always observe in these temples either religious or philosophical discourses, chanting of Vedas, Puranas, Tevaram and Prabandham performance of music and dance or another devotional activity. These devotional activities are supplementary activities in a temple in which the prescribed rituals of the consecrated Gods are the main ones. This fact could be easily ascertained if any goes through the authoritative texts, namely the Agamas which deal with each and everything pertaining to temple – architecture, consecration, ritual, priests, devotees and philosophy.

The Saiva Agamas are the sole authority for the Saivaite temple, and the Pancarata and the Vaikhanasa Agamas for Vaisnava temples. The rules have laid down in these texts. From solution of the site for the temples, up to the installation of the Divine, the daily, occasional, yearly and expiation rites to be conducted in such temples, and details about the persons who are to conduct all these rituals, are all explained in these Agamas. As such the best and the most reliable literary sources for an investigation into the religious practices are certainly the Agamas.

Regarding the temple rituals as we find them in the Agamic texts and digests, we may put them into three groups. The first one is called Pratishtha. In this group the rituals from selection of a site up to the consecration of the temple and the image, which are technically called Karsanadi – Pratishtanta, are included. In this are included, Bhupariksa (examination of the site), Silka Pariksa (examination of stones for making images), Karsana (ploughing of the site), Vastupuja (worship of the deities residing in the site), Salyoddhara (removing of the unwanted material in the site), Adyestakasthapana (laying of foundation stones), Murdhestakasthapana (placing of the top stone on the temple), and Garbhanyasa (placing of a pot containing auspicious materials in the bottom of the building), which are the preliminary rites.

When the building of the temple and the images to be installed are ready, the following rituals are prescribed – Vighnesvaranujna (permission from Ganesa to perform the rituals), Mrtasangrahana

(collection of mud for sowing seeds), Ankurarpana (sowing of seeds for sprouts), Raksabandhana (tying of a cord round the wrist of the priest for protection), Punjahavacana (proclamation of meritorious day), Gramasanti (purification ceremony for the village), Raksoghna (a fine ritual to destroy evil spirits), Vastusanti (purification ceremony for the deities of the site), Yagasala – Nirmana (construction of a pavilion for fire rituals and placing of pots needed for ceremony), Kalasasthapana (placing of pots with holy water) and Yagarambha (beginning of rituals in this pavilion which will continue for three days).

Nayanonmilana (opening of the eyes of the image), Pratimadhivasa (preliminary purificatory rites for the image which include Jaladhivasa, Sayanadhivasa and Mantranyasa), then placing of the base stone for the image, Astabandhana (ghee prepared with eight substances to glue the base stone and the image). The deities to be installed are first invoked in the pots containing water, and are worshipped for three days. Also, they are worshipped in the fire in the different Kundas. The deities worshipped in the fire are transferred to the pots and these pots are taken to the temple, where the water is sprinkled and poured on the images and also on the top of the temples. This ceremony is called Kumbhabhiseka.

After installation, daily (nitya occasional naimittika), optional (kama) and expiation (prayascitta) ceremonies or rituals, which are to be conducted for the continued presence of the deity in the image installed, are also prescribed in Agamic texts.

### Nitya Rites

The daily obligatory rites, or Pujas, begin to be performed in the temples immediately after the Pratistha. In most cases these Pujas are performed six times a day. Each Puja is preceded by Abhiseka, that is the bath of the images with the prescribed materials.<sup>1</sup>

After the bath, the image is dressed in new garments and decorated with ornaments and garlands. Abhiseka, Alarikara and Diparadhana must be said to constitute the characteristic features of each Puja.<sup>2</sup> The Diparadhana consists of the waving in front of the image of various kinds of lighted lamps. This is done to the accompaniment of Vedic mantras. The Diparadhana is followed by the offering of the Upacaras<sup>3</sup>, such as Darpana, Chatra, Vyajana, Pataka and Talabrmda.

Then comes the Arcana, or the offering of flowers, usually one hundred and eight in number, and the Puja is brought to an end with the Aratrika, or the waving of lighted camphor, before the image. At the end of the Puja, representative passages from each Veda are recited<sup>4</sup>. Benedictory formulas are

also repeated, invoking the savoir and blessings (Asirvada) of the God<sup>5</sup>. Thereafter follows the singing of devotional songs, which had been composed not in Sanskrit but in the weal language of the Saiva saints.

Besides what may be called the official Nitya Pujas, there are also Arcanas, which are often performed on behalf of the devotees by the official priests of the temple. The Arcana usually consists of an offering of flowers to the accompaniment of the recital of the names of the Gods.<sup>6</sup>

The names number sixteen, one hundred and eight, or three hundred, or even one thousand Plantains<sup>7</sup>. Betel, areca nut and coconuts are offered as Naivedya, and after the Arcana, portions of these together with flowers etc. are returned to the devotee on behalf of whom that particular Arcana was performed to.

On special occasions, the Abhiseka is very elaborately performed.<sup>8</sup> It commences with the anointing of the image with taila, and the other materials used for the bath are taken up in the following order: pista, amalaka, rajam, pancagavya. ksira, dadhi, madhu, ghrta, iksusara, phalasara, nalikerodaka, anna, usnodaka, vibhuti, kunkuma, candana, gandhodaka and the sacred waters of the Ganges. The Abhiseka is followed by the wiping of the image with a soft cloth.

Silken garments, golden kavacas, precious ornaments studded with diamonds and other stones, and garlands of flowers are used for decoration of the image.

Cooked food of various kinds called citranna, masapupa, ladduka, fruits, areca nuts, betel and nalikera, form the main offerings at the Naivedya, daily and on special occasions.<sup>9</sup>

### Utsavas

Apart from the Nitya Puja, the normal procedure of which is briefly described above, each Saiva temple celebrates what is called Utsavas. The most characteristic features of such Utsava in the South, where the Agamic tradition prevails, is the Pradaksina, or the taking round in procession of the image. The image, which is thus taken round in procession, is usually made of bronze and is decorated with ornaments and garlands. It is given a pose befitting the occasion and the vehicle on which the procession is conducted.

The Utsavam are of two types: the Nitya and the Mahotsava (also called the Brahmotsava). It takes place on some fixed day or dates in the course of the year. Different temples celebrate the Mahotsava on different days. For the daily festival a special image is to be prepared. Gold or silver or copper is prescribed for the preparation of this image. The Pradaksina, or

the procession of the image, is characterized by the use of canopy umbrella, chowrie and dipan (torches) and by singing, dancing and playing various instruments. The talas to be played in the course of the procession are prescribed. Among these are pangani, vrsatala, bhrngitala, and so on. The devotees also join the procession. The celebration of the Mahotsava is much more elaborate. It commences with the Vrsayaga which is followed by the Dhrajaroaha, or the hoisting of the flag, Ankurarpana, Yagapuja, Astrayaga, Balidana, Yanakrama, Nirayana, Curnotsava and Tirtha. These various rites are described in detail in the treatises on the Saiva rituals.<sup>10</sup> The duration of the special festival varies from eighteen to twenty-seven days. The normal duration, however, is ten days.<sup>11</sup>

The Brahmotsava is so timed for the new-moon day or the full-moon day, or under special Naksatras. The festival begins with a worship offered in honour of Ganesa. The rite of Mrtsangrahana, Raksabandhana, Ankurarpana, Vastusanthi and Gramasanthi are duly gone through. The Vrsa-yaga in honour of Vrsabha is performed on the night preceding the day of the hoisting of the flag.<sup>12</sup>

For this latter rite, the Dhavja-pata is prepared, as prescribed, and these symbols of the God and other auspicious signs are drawn on it. The Pratistha rite infuses the banner with vital force. The Dhvaja-pata is then taken out in procession and brought to the flagstaff. With an invocation to the various Gods to the present the flag is hoisted. The rite of invoking the Gods is called Samastadevatavahana.<sup>13</sup>

The Yahasala is established in the north-eastern corner of the temple. Until the Avarohana of the flag, the Yagapuja has to be performed daily. Bali-s in the form of balls of rice are offered daily at the Dhavajadanda and the cardinal point at the quarters. After these rites, both in the morning and the night, the image is taken out in procession. Different vehicles are prescribed for this purpose on different days.<sup>14</sup>

The procession in the ratha, or the chariot, must be regarded as the grandest event in the last Brahmotsava. It must, however, be pointed out that the practice in this respect varies from place to place. The Curnotsava marks the end of the festival. The ceremony begins with the usual preliminary rites. Thereafter the image is taken to the Tirthasthan or a river. The Astraraja, who serves as the substitute for the principal deity, is first bathed with the Abhiseka dravyas and is then immersed in the waters of the river, which are already sanctified by purificatory rites. The Avarohana of the flag marks the end of the Brahmotsava. The deities invoked to be present on the Dhavajadana on the first day are now implored to retire to their respective abodes.

One of the most important festivals in the Saiva temples in the South is the Vaivahya Utsava, which represents the celebration of the wedding of Siva with Uma. This Utsava is invariably celebrated immediately after the Brahmotsava, that is, on the day following the Dhvaja-avarohana. In some temples the Vaivahya Utsava is celebrated before the Avarohana itself.

The Santhihoma and Prayascitta are performed at the end of elaborate rites such as Pratistha and Utsava. They are expected to bring about a peaceful atmosphere and atone for all shortcomings and discrepancies which are likely to have crept in the course of the performance of such elaborate rites of great duration, for the Pratistha and the Utsava rites, it must be remembered, each continue for several days.

### Prayascitta

The Prayascitta is the rite performed to rectify the defect and shortcomings, which may have crept in, whether knowingly or unknowingly, in the performance of the various rites and may have thus adversely affected the perfection of the ritual as a whole. Whenever any discrepancy is suspected, the Prayascitta, or expiatory rite, has to be performed. An expiatory rite is, indeed, essential for the welfare and prosperity of the performer. For, the worship, which is even slightly deficient, not only does not serve the desired purpose, but it definitely leads positive calamitous results. Various Prayascittas are, therefore, prescribed in the ritual texts, in repeat of the various kinds of violations that may have occurred.<sup>15</sup>

They sometimes take the form of Abhiseka, sometimes of home, in which Prayascittas – Ahutis are offered in the fire. It may be pointed out at this stage that, besides the expiatory rites, Santhihoma and Disahoma are prescribed to be performed at the end of Naimittika rituals, such as the one in connection with Pratistha and Utsava.<sup>16</sup>

### Conclusion

So far the temple rituals as found in the available Agamic text, have been explained in short.

Normally there seems no need for Vedic mantras for any temple rituals, but later, the four Vedas were recited in the four directions in the Yagamantapas. Later, Adhyayana Mantapas were built in temples and gradually the Vedic mantras were added with Agamic mantras in the temple rituals. This is the present state in South India. In North India, the Vedic Puja method had replaced the Agamic method. So we can just observe that all the services or Upacaras, Agnikaryas etc. and other ceremonies use Vedic mantras and left the Agamic mantras.

References:

1. CF. Skanda P.1.3.2.7. also matsya p. 267, and Agni. p. 74.65-68 abid 267, 1-15
2. CF. Siva p. dharma – samhita 40, for the reference of bathing siva – image with honey, curd, pancagavya and the offering to it of gorocana, kunkuma, cankana, bilva, lotus, camphor etc. See vama P.62. 1-14 siva p.Dharma – samtita mentions in chapters 15 and 16 nitya and naimittika rites. Linga worship and the merits accruing there from are also recounted in that connection. See also siva p. Sanatkumara – samhita.19.
3. See Karana 1.65.1-6 for details of the upacaras.
4. This is caturvedaghosa.
5. The asivada consists of a series of benedictory utterances. They are intended to invoke the blessings of the god. Each utterance is followed by the iteration of the same by the priests, who are assembled on the spot to assist the performer of the rituals.
6. The puranas also speak of similar traditions. Siva is said to have told kratu that he should worship him with those names which are held secret. Kurma P.1.20,67-70.
7. Numerous names of Siva are repeated by the rsis at darunava. Linga P.1.32.
8. See the detailed description of the abhiseka given in the rauravagama, Kriyapada, patalas 20-24.
9. CF. Karana 1.35. The details of the offerings to be made are given in 184 verses.
10. Aghorasivacarya – paddhati, mahotsavavidhi, pp1.ff.
11. See, Karana 1.141 (under astadesadinotsavavidhi and saptavimsadinotsavavidhi)
12. The dhvajarohana is a topic discussed in the Agni p. (chapters 61 and 102)
13. See, appendix to the mahotsavavidhi in aghorasivacarya paddhati.
14. Karana. 1.141 – dasadinotsavavidhipatala 78-80.
15. It may be incidentally mentioned in this connection that the debated Prayascitta-rites are prescribed in the sruta for every conceivable defect or deficiency in the performance of the sauta ritual.
16. Karana 1.144.71-242, suprabhedha, 55.

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