

THE RATIONALE OF TEMPLE WORSHIP

By S. Sankaranarayanan

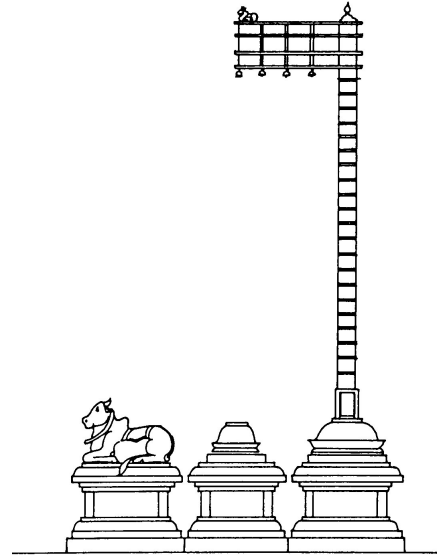
Temples are not constructed to prove or demonstrate the existence of God. They are built for a different purpose altogether, They are the means of channelling the divine energy, of creating a *pitha*, seat for the spiritual power to operate on the collective society.

One goes to the temple, not for contemplation or for meditation. This one can conveniently do at home. One goes to the temple to find God in one's own image, to find solace and comfort, to look for relief from the miseries and sufferings of life from a Power far higher than one's self, but at the same time easily approachable in a form imaged like us. Just as a we respond if called by name, the personal God responds if He/She is invoked by his/her appropriate name.

A very effective ritual which creates a vivifying bond between the worshipper and the worshipped and which is readily available for those who visit the temple is the *Archana*. Though *Archana* is the general Sanskrit term for worship, we mean particularly the act of chanting the names of the Deity by proper invocation and expressing the same by offering flowers at the feet of the deity.

Meaning of Sacrifices

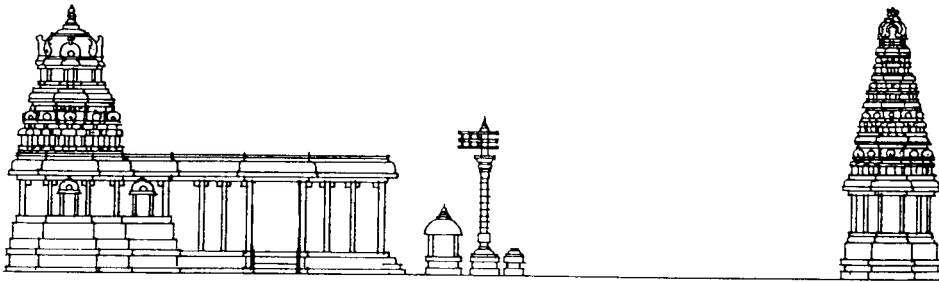
In the Vedic ritual-cum-worship the institution of sacrifice became in the course of time, transformed into the institution of temple-worship. The sacrificial post *yupa stambha* of the Vedic arena (*yaga-shala*) gave place to the flag-staff — *dhwaja-stamba*, and the Vedic altar — *vedi* to *balipitha*, the seat of offering. In every temple, the *dhwaja stambha*, proclaims the Godhead to the outside world. The *dhwaja* (flag) is the insignia of the Godhead and in certain cases more or less identified with the personality of the Godhead, as in the case of *Garuda* (the eagle) in Vishnu temples and *Vrishabha* (the bull) in the Siva temples.



"Verily to Hell he goes, who takes the icons in the temple as mere stones," declares the Agama Shastra. A properly installed icon is God Himself in his personal form, ever present to grant the wishes of his devotees.

Result Oriented

We do not go to the temple in quest of an intangible something. We want tangible concrete results. That is why the temple is built round a Personal Godhead fashioned in the human image. And by means of worship, a relationship is established between us and God. a bond intensely living and fruitful. If an intimate relation between the deity and the devotee has to be established, constant should be the worship, uninterrupted should be the invocation of the Godhead in the icon. And the icon in the temple according to the Vaishnava tradition is God himself, *archavatara* descended for the purpose of receiving worship and for blessing the devotees.



The Reason for Rituals

The presence or *sannidhya* of the deity in a temple is always maintained by means of worship. This worship does not take the form of contemplation or meditation but consists of a series of picturesque activities giving ample scope for the physical participation of the individual in the adoration of the divine. Physical participation is absolutely necessary to bring the greatest possible completeness to the adoration and one should lay one's body in full offering at the service of the deity.

Hearing of the name of God, singing his glory, constant remembrance, worship of his feet, worship with flowers, adoration, service, friendship and finally self-offering, (*sravanam, kirtanam, pada-sevanam, archanam, vandanam, dasyam, sakhyam, atmanivedanam*) are the nine ways of devotion and the ritual reflects these moods of the devotee.

As Sri Kapali Sastriar says, "Eternal ceremonies have played a notable part in the awakening of the naturally extrovert consciousness of man to the reality of an inner presence; they impinge upon the crude senses and sense-faculties of man with considerable force and leave impressions which, in the cumulative result, effect an opening through some part into the large being of himself."

In the words of Sri Paushkara Samhita:— "even if people with deluded minds chance to witness these rituals performed, their habitual bad way of thinking, their bad Will, their bad conclusions, bad ideas and bad reasoning and their atheism will start to disappear"!

Living Presence

Such is the power of worship. Besides worship offered by the worshippers who visit the temple, worship at regular intervals of the day is instituted in every temple, To keep the presence of the deity a living fact, these worships are carried on in every temple irrespective of whether people from outside come to worship in the temple or not. The *sandhyas*, the night breaking into dawn, the forenoon culminating in the noon and the day losing itself in the lap of night as dusk-these times are congenial and propitious for worship and so in most of the temples *tri-kala-puja*, worship at these periods, is instituted. The worship that has to be done in the middle of the night is for convenience conducted late in the night before the temple doors are closed, as *ardhayama puja*.

How is the worship conducted?

The Godhead in the temple is a distinct individual and He has to be worshipped by distinct acts. *Vyaktaih vyaktistham archayet*, says the Agama. The worshipper in the act sees himself not different from the deity, attributes all his daily acts to the deity. He gets up early in the morning, bathes, dresses himself, eats food, rests, works, goes to bed. just like him the deity is woken up, bathed, dressed, fed and put to sleep. This may all look childish to the sophisticated. Rather, the childish human acts assume a divine significance when these are attributed to the deity.

These rituals are powerful means devised by the Agamas to make us. the worshippers realise in every act of ours, the intimate relationship that exists between us and God. The Tamil term for temple, *koil* or *kovil* is significant. It means the abode of the King, *ko*. The Godhead installed in the temple is not considered as divinity difficult to approach, far removed and remote from us, but as the leader of mankind, the best among us, as the King, superior to us in every respect but at the same time one of us, taking our burden of welfare *yogakshema* and governing our every activity. So the Godhead is treated like a King.

It was the age-old custom in India to wake up the kings in the palaces with auspicious music, songs and praises by minstrels and bards. In the same way, at early dawn, the devotees throng to have the vision of the Universal Form, *vishwarupa darsana*, of the Lord. The God that has been put to sleep in the previous night is woken up by the blowing of conches, beating of drums, by various words of praise raised by the hosts of minstrels, by cries of victory again and again repeated and by lauds praying for awakening.

Personal Enlightenment

Does the deity that keeps constant vigil over our affairs require awakening? No devotee thinks that the blowing of the conch, or hymns of awakening (*suprabhatams*), have made the deity sit up from sleep. By this ritual, it is our own awakening, our own enlightenment *prabodha* that we are praying for. We're invoking the sleeping powers in ourselves to wake up and govern us. Similarly, in the night as a culmination of all rituals, the presiding deity and his consort, the eternal couple, are made to repair, with

due ceremony and reverence, to their *sayana-griha*, bridal chamber, in order that the act of cosmic creation may continue uninterrupted. We also play our part, insignificant though it may be, in the cosmic set up of things and help the evolution of aspiring jivas by providing embodiment on earth.

Thus, the worship is conducted with all honours due to a king and to a god, *samasta rajopachara devopachara*. The term used is *upachara*, moving in the proximity of the Godhead. It can be rendered as personal service offered to the Godhead by which an intimacy is established. The Agamas enumerate the *upacharas* differently, five, 16, 18, 36, or even 64, *chatusshastyupachara*.

The essential *upacharas* are five in number. This *panchopachara* is based on the five cosmic principles, the five elements, earth, air, fire, water and ether. Earth has the property of smell and is represented by the *upachara gandha*, scent or sandal paste offered to the deity. Ether has the property of sound and is denoted by the *upachara pushpa*, offered accompanied by the sound of the names of the Lord. Air has the quality of *sparsa*, touch or contact and is represented by the *upachara dhupa*, burning of incense. Fire has the property of delineating form and is represented in the *upacharas* by *dipa*, waving of light. Water has the quality of *rasa*, relish and fittingly it is the *upachara Naivedya* food offering, by which it is symbolised.

The *shodasa upachara*, the 16 *upacharas*, are: —

1. *asana*, offering seat 2. *svagata*, giving welcome, 3. *padya*, water for washing the feet, 4. *arghya*, water to show respect, 5. *achamana*, water to sip, 6. *achamana*, again, water to drink, 7. *madhuparka*, mixture of honey, milk, ghee and curd, 8. *snana*, bath 9. *vasana*, cloth, 10. *abharana*, Jewels, 11. *gandha*, scent, 12. *pushpa*, flowers, 13. *dhupa*, burning of incense, 14. *dipa*, waving of light, 15. *naivedya*, food offering, and 16. *vandana*, prayerful salutation,

The list differs at times. Certain *upacharas* are done more elaborately than the others; for example, *abhisheka*, *archana*, *diparadhana* and *naivedya*.



Ceremonial Bath

In all temples dedicated to Siva, the *upachara Abhisheka*, ceremonial bath, is very important. It is said, that Siva likes bath while Vishnu likes dressing tip, *alankara-priyo Vishnur abhisheka-priyah Sivah*. The *abhisheka* is usually done with *sodhodaka*, pure water.

If it is done elaborately articles like ghee, oil, milk, coconut water, fruit juices and honey are used. Water is praised in the Vedas as luminous life giving streams and signifies the movement of life, the vitality in being. It is extolled as medicine, as a panacea, as the nectar of immortality *amritam*. The five products of the cow [*panchagavya*], which, in the Vedas, are symbolic of the rays of knowledge, are extolled as five nectars *panchamritam*. In the elaborate rituals of *abhisheka*, *panchamrita snana* holds the prime of place.

By performing *abhisheka* to the deity, the devotee cleanses himself of all impurities. The Godhead that is *nitya-shuddha*, ever pure, *nirmala*, devoid of impurities, *niranjana* having no mark or stain on him does not require a bath. It is for the sake of the worshipper that the *abhisheka* is performed. *abhisheka* is a powerful ritual to cool down and ultimately remove the burning sufferings, *tapa*, of the worshipper. It is an Agamic version of the Vedic practice of invoking Varuna, the king of waters, in a *kumbha* or pot and then purifying oneself with the sacred waters sanctified by the recitation of the mantras.

Symbolism of Lamp Waving

In any temple, the evening worship consisting of the waving of lights *diparadhana* accompanied by the sounding of the temple gongs, cymbals, drums and conches is a grand sight. No other ritual can be so picturesque, so ennobling and so elevating.

Again, it is the Agama version of the *Agni upasana* of the Vedic seers. Here *dipa*, the ceremonial lamp, denotes the element fire, not the physical fire but the fire of aspiration ever burning in the heart of humanity, raising its tongues of flames heavenward. Fire is the immortal among the mortals, as the Veda extols, the only God stationed on earth helping the toiling human being to climb up to divinity.

Shedding Ignorance

Numerous are the lamps, different and variegated are their kinds. In big temples, each lamp is a magnificent piece of artistic excellence. .

By witnessing the ritual of *Diparadhana* one gets rid of the darkness in one's being; one's ignorance is removed and the light of knowledge streams forth and floods one's being.

Because God Is *svayam-prakasha* — self-effulgent, it is not for his sake that the *Diparadhana* is done. The culminating ritual *niranjana* is accompanied fittingly by this

mantra:— "Here the sun shines not, neither the moon nor the stars not these lightnings either; then where will this fire be? Everything follows Him, the effulgent. By His light all this become luminous."

Sites for Temples

"A calm quite place, full of trees, flowers and fruits, a place where grass grows soft and thick, a place fertile and watery, not burnt by fire or sun's rays, such a place is an ideal place for locating a temple" says Paushkara Samhita, one of the authoritative texts on Pancharatra Agama.

If the sight of a place is pleasing as that of one's beloved:— *janayatyasu cahladam svakantasviva darsanam*, it is a fit place for the abode of the Gods, says the Agama. One may say 'what is there in a place? Every place is as good as the other.' But nobody can deny that there are certain places where one feels uneasy, uncomfortable and that there are certain other places where one feels quite at home, in one's own element.

God With Form

Worship is effective only when it is done to a Personal Godhead, with name and form. It is alright for the philosopher to talk about the Timeless and the Formless, but the practical aspirant wants something tangible, something concrete that will respond to his prayers. Similarly, his purpose will not be served by conceiving a God who is infinite, immeasurable. He wants a finite measure, a delimited place, a demarcated spot which will make his worship effective. The holy spot, *sthalā*, the sacred place *kshetra*, is the ideal place for him to erect a temple to house the Personal Godhead.

There are, in our country, many holy spots whose origins are lost in antiquity. We can give a long list of names beginning from *Kasi*. The culture, the essential civilisation of India, has withstood the onslaughts of time.

The pilgrimage undertaken to holy places, *sthalā-yatra*, going from one holy place to another to see and be seen by the Divine as a way of increasing one's merit has always figured prominently in the religious lief of the devout.

Sthala Purana

Each place *sthalā*, has its own history, *purana*. In the *sthalā purana*, one finds that all objects in nature, the entire fauna and flora are used as outward representations symbolising the inner perceptions and the occult phenomena. Most of the temples have their *sthalā vrikshas*, the holy trees of the place. The holy tree, with its roots firmly fixed in earth, spreading its branches far and wide in the vast sky is a symbol of the aspirant with feet on Mother Earth and yearnings soaring heavenward. Even the animals, birds and insects figure in temple worship.

"A spider and an elephant offered worship here. A peacock used to cover the Lord with its plumage. Vultures come regularly, at the appointed hour to take part in the food offered to the deity, *naivedya*" — all such statements have a meaning and represent certain inner happenings and experiences that a worshipper who goes to worship at that particular place has.

Reasons for Site Selection

The presence of an enlightened person, *Siddha Purusha*, can make a place sacred. Because, of his/her meditative practice — *tapasya*, the spot where the practice took place becomes hallowed and the whole area becomes surcharged with the spiritual atmosphere. The enlightened being becomes the living God answering to the needs of the devotees. When he departs from this life, the spiritual atmosphere he has created does not depart. The mortuary shrine — *Samadhi* enshrining the mortal remains of such a *Siddha* is a great store-house of power and becomes a veritable centre for spiritual action. Unfortunately, nowadays the term *Samadhi* is used for any grave or tomb.

Samadhi is a place where the spiritual forces are well held intact — *samyak adhiyate iti samadhih* Bearing in mind the characteristics of the particular location, temples are constructed. The deity represents that particular aspect. For example, there are the five elements, earth, water, fire, wind and ether. The temple is so constructed that the deity represents that particular aspect prominent in the location.

The *pancha-linga kshetras* representing the five elements are quite famous. In Kanchi, there is the *prithvi-linga* (earth), in Tiru-vanaikkavu the *apa-linga* (water), in Tiruvannamalai the *taijasa-linga* (fire), in Kalahasti the *vayu-linga* (wind) and in Chidambaram the *akasa-linga* (ether).

Again, the same spiritual concept is reflected both in the Siva and in the Vishnu temples. The cosmos is the stage, *ranga*, the assembly, *sabha*. The Cosmic Dancer, Nataraja is *Sabhapati*, the lord of the assembly, enshrined in Chidambaram. The same concept is reflected in Srirangam where Vishnu is *Ranganatha*, the lord of the stage. Only when Siva dances, Vishnu is having his super-conscious sleep, *yoga-nidra*.

Aesthetics and Immanence

The concept of beauty is cherished in and around Madurai. Siva is *Sundareshwara*, the Lord of Beauty, *sokkar*, the infatuator, while Vishnu in the nearby Alagar Koil is *Sundararaja*, the King of Beauty, *Kallazgan*, the charmer of enthralling beauty.

In Tanjore, the conception is that of the Vastness, the *Brihat* of the Vedas, there the Lord is *Brihadiswara*, the ruler-of-the-Vast and everything in the temple, the *gopura*, the *nandi* all of them are *Brihat* of huge proportions.

If Siva has to be celebrated as *Kailasa-natha* in Kanchi, in the same place there is a temple for Vishnu as *Vaikuntha-natha*. , Again, certain spiritual concepts are so powerful that they find expression in all the temples, not only in their original place of manifestation.

Nataraja belongs to Chidambaram, no doubt; but is there any Siva temple where there is no icon for Nataraja? The murtis of *Kasi Visalakshi* or *Gangadhiswara* are found in many other "Places apart from their being in Kasi. *Varadaraja* is a common conception of the deity in many Vishnu temples though the original manifestation is enshrined in Kanchi.

Role of Masters

Can the spiritual concepts once embodied in a temple be modified? Well, this is possible by the spiritual competency of a great Master.

If we study the religious history of India, we find that no leader of a religious or philosophical movement has neglected the temples. Because that is the only way to propagate the message to the people. Legends are there to show how Acharya Sankara converted a fierce deity, *ugra murti*, of a place into a beneficent deity, and how he went about arranging for the installation of Sri Chakra at various centres of worship.

The Alwars and the Nayanmar poet-saints went from temple to temple, propagating their message of love for the Godhead by means of their soul-stirring songs of ecstatic devotion which had the magic effect of reinforcing the spiritual influence of the places they visited.

Sri Ramanuja also did the same. The story of his rescuing the icon of Sampat-kumara from the Muslims and vivifying it, is well known. Also it was he who by his great spiritual competency invoked the Godhead Vishnu in the deity at Tirupati and instituted worship there according to Vaishnava Agamas.

Festivals — Utsava

A robust optimism, an unflinching faith that all will be well, a constant and continuous emphasis on the joy and beauty of life and an appreciation of the opulence and magnificence found at various levels of existence — these have been the hallmarks of the Vedic civilisation.

A life has to be lived in all its richness for the full span of 100 years as the divine has ordained — *devahitam vadayuh*. God is everywhere and so everything reflects the divine joy and exuberance.

Following the Vedic seers, the Upanishadic bards declared that God is *Santam*, *Sivam*, *Sundaram*, Peaceful, Benevolent and Beautiful. He is the basic Bliss in all created things, the essential delight *rasa*, running through the warp and woof of the texture of creation. Who can live or breath if this extension of Bliss is not there in everything? God is *Sarva-Mangala*, *Nitya-Kalyana*, *Sada-Siva*, ever auspicious. Life on earth is one

long beautiful song without any discordant note, a glad and joyous offering of the aspiring soul to the divine.

Following the vision of the Vedas and the Upanishads, the Agama Shastra has designed the temples, the abodes of God on earth, as repositories of all beauty and bliss, as centres of all joy and happiness. The temple is intended to act as a centre of community life spreading the concept of joy and happiness, the sense of cheerful optimism all around. This is achieved by the institution of various festivals all the year around. Festival is an occasion when the aspects of life, such as joy, beauty, richness, magnificence and harmony, are all emphasised and brought to the fore so that they may govern the whole outlook on life.

Outward Symbol

The Sanskrit term for festival or festivity is *utsava*. *Utsava* again is a Vedic word. The root *su* from which *sava* is derived means to give birth, as well as to extract the juice from the Soma creeper. The extraction of Soma juice in Vedic times, for offering to the Gods is an outward symbol of an inner act of extracting the delight and bliss underlying all things in creation. Whenever this is done, this results in the aspirant having a new birth, a new outlook and perspective, *navo navo bhavati jayamanah*. So, *utsava* means a "birth upwards", that is, an uplift of the human personality, a high perception of the essential delight in existence.

The other terms used as synonyms for *utsava* are significant. One is *mahah*, "the vast", the expansive, used to denote the world of Light and the other is *uddhava*, "the call upwards". Thus *utsava* is an invocation for all the good things of life, like beauty, peace, harmony and joy, a prayer for the upliftment of all beings to the realm of light and delight.

A festival in a temple is intended to act as a rejuvenating tonic on a society jaded with its daily ills and cares. It immediately spreads a sense of cheer and joy, inculcates faith and optimism, uplifts the community from the mire of depression and despondency to expansive regions of hope and happiness. No wonder crowds and crowds of people throng on all festival occasions in a temple. No advertisement is required, no propaganda is needed. It is common experience that during a festival, the whole community life is uplifted, individually people feel the welcome invasion of hope and cheer in their drab lives.

Happy Occasions

Thus a festive occasion at a holy place, be it a *kshetra*, *tirtha* or *pitha* has always attracted crowds. From time immemorial in India, there have always been mass congregations on these occasions. It may be **Kumbha Mela**, a solar eclipse at Kurukshetra, a bath in the holy Kaveri at *Tula Sankranti*, (Sun's movement in Libra) a vision of the decorated deity on his favourite vehicle Garuda at Kanchipuram. These are the occasions when all forces of prosperity, hope, joy and well-being, all the infinite auspicious qualities *ananta kalyana guna* of the Godhead, in response to the invocation, are present in the atmosphere and anybody can easily sense the presence, *sannidhya*, of

these forces. Even when a person is not very receptive, he cannot escape being caught in the general atmosphere of mirth and optimism

Deity Worship Festive occasions in temples are always marked by special worships offered to the deity. The deity is dressed in the best attire, decorated with the most beautiful arrangement of flowers and decked with the choicest ornaments. Whatever is best in the world, the most beautiful, the most precious is offered to the deity. In fact we find our quest for beauty, bliss and richness fulfilled in the make-up of the deity during these occasions. There are many festive occasions and in some famous temples, every day is a festival day, *nityotsava*. A festival common to many temples is what is known as a purifying festival *Pavitrotsava*. This is an annual feature and is done as a reparation for all the lapses in the daily worship and rituals that might have occurred due to, as the Agama Shastra says, the incapacity or loss of freedom in thought, word and deed and lack of concentration of the mind, *mano vak kaya karmesu asvatantravat asmartavat mansasca anavasthiteh*, on the part of the worshippers.

Every temple has special proxy *murtis*, apart from the principle *murti*, in the sanctum sanctorum — *mula sthana*, for being taken out in processions. These are the *utsava murtis* and during festive occasions the power of the Godhead in the *mula sthana* is invoked and transferred on the *utsava* idol, by means of an Agamic process known as *akarshana*. The *utsava murtis* in many temples in this part of the country are exquisite pieces of workmanship and the south Indian bronzes are justly famous.

There are celebrations to suit every season and turn of event in Nature. There is the festival in spring, *vasantotsava*, then the gaiety and merriment on swings, *dolotsava*, again the float festival, the hunting expedition, the car festival, *rath-yatra* and so on.

There are special festivals celebrating a deed of the deity, like the *Sura-samhara* festival in Subrahmanya temples, or celebrating a local event famous in the Sthala Purana, like God Sundareshwara of Madurai acting as hired labour for an old woman who had to perform her share in stemming the tide in the Vaigai river, at the behest of the Pandyan King. Then there is the annual 10 day temple festival *la grande fete* — *Brahmotsava*, the great festival of the year.

Forms of Worship

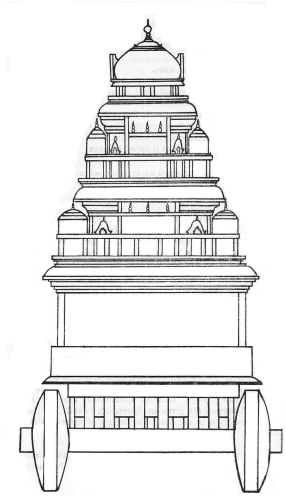
When the deity is taken out in procession, it gives an opportunity for everyone, however humble, to participate in the common worship of the deity. There are those who physically carry the decorated deity on their shoulders or drag the *ratha*, chariot, in which the deity is placed. There are the torch bearers, bearers of the royal insignia of white umbrella, ceremonial chowries, ornamental fans. Then there are the conch-blowers, the announcers on the trumpet, those who play on the drum and on all those queer-looking temple instruments. Men leading the elephants, the horses, the bulls and the camels with their picturesque attire head the procession announcing the arrival of God at your door. Then there is classical music played on *nadaswaram* to the accompaniment on drum called the *tavil*

When the deity is taken out in procession, it is always with the consort or attendant deities. In Vishnu temples, the Lord and the Devi are taken out in procession. Siva comes out with his whole family, with his two sons Ganapati and Subrahmanya, with his consort, the Divine Mother Ambika and his attendant Chandikeshwara.

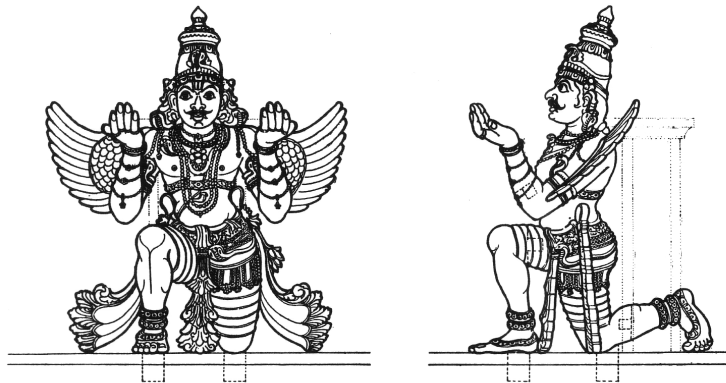
Procession of these five *pancha murtis* is a common feature in temples dedicated to Siva. Also in big Siva temples, there is a unique festival. On that day, Siva comes out in procession not only with his family members but with the full throng of his 63 poet-devotees, *nayanmars*, leaders on the pathway to God.

Ratha and Other Vehicles

The annual chariot festival in all temples is an important one. The chariot, *ratha*, had been the vehicle, conveyance of the king and nobility in olden days in India and so the deity is mounted on the *ratha* and is dragged through the four streets around the temple, that are so designed as to allow the *ratha* to ply freely without any hindrance. Also, in philosophical and spiritual literature, *ratha* is the symbol of the human body, the vehicle provided for the journey of life. As the temple is constructed as a symbol of the human body, the *ratha* also is constructed in the shape of a temple gopura. Again, like a king, the deity is carried in a palanquin or mounted on elephant or horse.



There are other mounts as well, *vahanas*, vehicles of the Godhead such as, the bull — *Vrishabha* and the hawk — *Garuda*. Every temple has a hall of vehicles, *vahana mantapa*, and the *vahanas* play an important part in the festive processions. According to Agama Shastra, each deity has his own vehicle. The vehicle carries the deity and brings it to the proximity of the worshipper. He should understand the significance of these vehicles. They are not mere quadrupeds or birds; they are more or less identified with the Godhead they carry.



That is why the festivals *Adhikara Nandi* and *Garuda Seva* are so important and attract such large crowds of worshippers, Again in the Veda, *Agni*, one of whose names is *Sikhi*, is flame-crested. *Sikhi* has become the vehicle of Skanda and has been used to signify the peacock, the symbol of fire, the crested bird with a variegated plumage. Also at times the vehicles represent the forces which the deities have so subjugated and transformed. In this category comes the *Mahisha*, buffalo, of Durga and the *mushika* (literally stealer) of *Ganapati*. It is also said that Skanda vanquished the Asura Sura transforming him as a cock and a peacock, one to be used as the emblem in the Lord's Flag and the other as his vehicle.

Thus, the festivals are as indispensable as rituals in temple worship and these are effective occasions when the whole community life is uplifted to greater heights.

Purusharthas

The genius of India formulated religion so as to encompass life on earth in its entirety, keeping in view the fourfold purpose, *purushartha*. What are these *purusharthas*? The first is **Dharma**, the law of one's own being, the cohesive moral law of the society leading to righteous living.

Next comes **Artha**, the object and purpose of endeavour, the personal and communal interest culminating in economic self-sufficiency, **Kama** is the purpose of life next in order, the desire that is the driving force behind all vital activity expressing itself in an ordered sexual behaviour in society. The highest purpose is release, **Moksha**, spiritual liberation. Each purpose has to be pursued conjoined with the other and not in isolation.

Kama should be governed by *Artha*, a meaningful purpose. An unbridled lust is not the object of life, but a channelled desire to enlarge the field of fertility of the race. *Kama* and *Artha* should both be governed by *Dharma*, righteous conduct possessive desire and economic self-sufficiency should be tied to a cohesive law of society. And lastly *Dharma*, *Artha* and *Kama*, all the three should be governed by imperative to ultimate *Moksha*, liberation.

Practical Religion

As religion is viewed as a part and parcel of life and as the temple is the religious expression of an aspiring race, stretching itself to the heights of divinity the pursuit of *purusharthas* is incorporated in the institution of temples.

The common complaint that is laid at the doors of Hinduism is that it promotes otherworldliness and a sense of defeatism by too much reliance on fate and Karma in the minds of its votaries.

But it is only one side of the story of Hinduism. God is the absolute, transcendent, beyond name and form, *Kevala*, *Nirakara*, *Nirguna*. But he is also the immanent divine, residing in the hearts of everything in creation, the *Saguna*, the Godhead with qualities,

the supreme who has condescended to descend among the mortals for their worship and adoration, *archavatara*:

God is so like us, near and dear to us, yet exceeding us in all respects. He is not an unapproachable something, beyond the ken of humanity; he can be approached, worshipped and adored in a tangible way, in a concrete definite fashion, and the concourse between the devotee and the Deity can be made quite concrete and tangible.

It is on this practical side of Hinduism that temple worship is based. To understand it otherwise is to miss the whole significance and import of such worship.

Why Pilgrimage — *Kshetratana*?

Why should a person waste time in going from *kshetra* to *kshetra*? God is everywhere and we accept that his influence can be sensed in any one of the holy spots. Then, will not going to one *kshetra* do? The answer is quite simple. Each person is essentially the same as the other person, no doubt. But at the same time everyone is an individual and distinct as an individual. Each holy spot has its own distinct features though essentially the same spiritual atmosphere reigns over all the spots.

The person who is weary in body and sick in spirit goes on a pilgrimage, *kshetratana*. One finds in this quest a place which gives solace and peace, which is quite conducive to one's mental make-up. Then one becomes cured of all maladies, and becomes *svastha*. The Sanskrit word *svastha* literally means 'standing in one's Self,' that is stationed in one's own essential being' not affected by outside factors which are the causes of all the maladies.

Abode of Peace

Many would know the story of the founding of Santiniketan. Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, father of the great poet Rabindranatha Tagore, in his wanderings in the Bholpur District of Bengal, came to a garden at nightfall where, weary and tired, he sat down under a sami tree. Immediately, without any effort on his part, he fell into deep meditation and remained in that state till daybreak. The Maharshi recognised the sacredness of the spot and chose it as the site for *Santiniketan*, the abode of Peace.

Thus, there are certain spots, inherently holy, because of the place *kshetra*, or because of the presence of the vivifying waters, *tirtha*. Naturally, temples have come up in those places. But there are also places abounding in Nature which are potentially spiritual. It is on this basis that the Agama Shastra recommends for the site of the temple, mountain-tops and banks of river, *parvatagre*, *nadi tire*, and by erecting a temple, one gives concrete shape, name and form to the particular pattern of spiritual forces. A nodus is established, a *pitha* is found, a centre of radiation is fixed for giving tangible results to the aspiring worshipper.

Ancient texts on Vastu-shastra are elaborate to the last detail on the art of temple building. The whole art itself was elevated to an act of Worship the aim being to build a

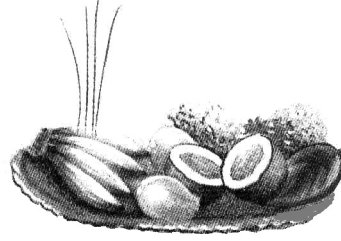
pitha of spiritual power for all times to come which would draw the devout and faithful people.

One of the most holy sites for building a temple was the bank of river where it turned towards the north during its course, as clean northward flowing water signified movement of life force towards higher goal Haridwar, Kasi, Nasik and Pandharpur — all *punya kshetras* from ancient times are located on such sites where both man and nature turn towards the Supreme with devotion.

Naivedya

Now we come to the potent ritual *naivedya*. The Sanskrit word *nivedana* means submission. *Naivedya* is the term used to denote the food-offering made to the God. Food, *annam*, represents physical matter and denotes something tangible and concrete. For physical sustenance, nourishment and protection, *naivedya* is the ritual prescribed for the devotee.

By offering food which sustains his physical that is the basis of all spiritual endeavour, to the deity, the devotee offers his whole **adhara**, physical support to the deity. The food thus offered becomes consecrated and potent, capable of giving the, necessary support to the spiritual endeavour of the worshipper.



The Great Offering

The Agama prescribes the various eatables that are to be offered, their ingredients, size, etc. In the north these are known as *bhog*, enjoyment, provided to the Lord. Whatever eatables are provided as offering, the *naivedya* is not complete unless *annam*, the physical food of sustenance, is also offered. That is why it is known as *maha-naivedya*, the great offering.

In the temples dedicated to Vishnu, the distribution of the *naivedya* offered, *viniyoga* is a ritual in itself. Vishnu is the all- pervasive force of protection, preservation and sustenance. So the offered food is *prasada*, a mark of His Grace conferring on the devotee physical sustenance and strength for the necessary, spiritual endeavour.

Prasada in a Vishnu temple is sought for and consumed as it is the tangible indication of the protection of the preserving Godhead Vishnu. There are regulations for the distribution of the *Prasada*. It cannot be given to all and sundry. The Paushkara Samhita warns that a person who gives consecrated food to the mean, degenerates even if he has achieved progress. Then what about those who aspire to climb? asks the Agama.

Thus, rituals are the life-breath of the temple and are intended to establish a personal relationship, a physical tangible intimacy, with the Personal Godhead one worships, These are done not for the sake of the deity but for the upliftment and ennoblement of the worshippers.

