

TEMPLE INDIA



VIVEKANANDA KENDRA PATRIKA

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REAL WORSHIP

Swami Vivekananda

It is in love that religion exists and not in ceremony, in the pure and sincere love in the heart. Unless a man is pure in body and mind, his coming into a temple and worshipping Shiva is useless. The prayers of those that are pure in mind and body will be answered by Shiva, and those that are impure and yet try to teach religion to others will fail in the end. External worship is only a symbol of internal worship; but internal worship and purity are the real things. Without them, external worship would be of no avail. Therefore you must all try to remember this.

People have become so degraded in this Kali Yuga that they think they can do anything, and then they can go to a holy place, and their sins will be forgiven. If a man goes with an impure mind into a temple, he adds to the sins that he had already, and goes home a worse man than when he left it. Tirtha (place of pilgrimage) is a place which is full of holy things and holy men. But if holy people live in a certain place, and if there is no temple there, even that is a Tirtha. If unholy people live in a place where there may be a hundred temples, the Tirtha has vanished from that place. And it is most difficult to live in a Tirtha; for if sin is committed in any ordinary place it can easily be removed, but sin committed in a Tirtha cannot be removed. This is the gist of all worship — to be pure and to do good to others. He who sees Shiva in the poor, in the weak, and in the diseased, really worships Shiva; and if he sees Shiva



only in the image, his worship is but preliminary. He who has served and helped one poor man seeing Shiva in him, without thinking of his caste, or creed, or race, or anything, with him Shiva is more pleased than with the man who sees Him only in temples.

A rich man had a garden and two gardeners. One of these gardeners was very lazy and did not work; but when the owner came to the garden, the lazy man would get up and fold his arms and say, "How beautiful is the face of my master", and dance before him. The other gardener would not talk much, but would work hard, and produce all sorts of fruits and vegetables which he would carry on his head to his master who lived a long way off. Of these two gardeners, which would be the more beloved of his master? Shiva is that master, and this world is His garden, and there are two sorts of gardeners here; the one who is lazy, hypocritical, and does nothing, only talking about Shiva's beauti-

ful eyes and nose and other features; and the other, who is taking care of Shiva's children, all those that are poor and weak, all animals, and all His creation. Which of these would be the more beloved of Shiva? Certainly he that serves His children. He who wants to serve the father must serve the children first. He who wants to serve Shiva must serve His children — must serve all creatures in this world first. It is said in the Shâstra that those who serve the servants of God are His greatest servants. So you will bear this in mind.

Let me tell you again that you must be pure and help any one who comes to you, as much as lies in your power. And this is good Karma. By the power of this, the heart becomes pure (Chitta-shuddhi), and then Shiva who is residing in every one will become manifest. He is always in the heart of every one. If there is dirt and dust on a mirror, we cannot see our image. So ignorance and wickedness are the dirt and dust

that are on the mirror of our hearts. Selfishness is the chief sin, thinking of ourselves first. He who thinks, "I will eat first, I will have more money than others, and I will possess everything", he who thinks, "I will get to heaven before others I will get Mukti before others" is the selfish man. The unselfish man says, "I will be last, I do not care to go to heaven, I will even go to hell if by doing so I can help my brothers." This unselfishness is the test of religion. He who has more of this unselfishness is more spiritual and nearer to Shiva. Whether he is learned or ignorant, he is nearer to Shiva than anybody else, whether he knows it or not. And if a man is selfish, even though he has visited all the temples, seen all the places of pilgrimage, and painted himself like a leopard, he is still further off from Shiva.

(Lecture delivered at Rameswaram Temple on Sivaratri day).



Acknowledgements

It is hoped that this *Kendra Patrika* on 'Temple India' will be cherished by all those who possess a copy of it. The title "Temple India" may be rather misleading in the sense that many would have expected us to talk about individual temples in the volume. Of course, a few important temples have been talked about in the volume. But, in order to give a new approach to the theme, more articles were invited on topics related to the various other aspects of the temple cult like, the origin and significance of temples, the place of temples in society, the Agamas governing the construction of temples and temple rituals etc. It is hoped that the volume will help people understand the more significant and subtler aspects of our temple cult. Most of the articles in this volume are original contributions made by distinguished scholars and academicians.

Without their support and enthusiasm, the present volume would not have become such a picturesque and worth-cherishing one. We are indeed very grateful to all the contributors who have extended their help and co-operation in response to our request. We are also thankful to the publishers who promptly granted us the necessary permission to reproduce relevant portions from the following books: -

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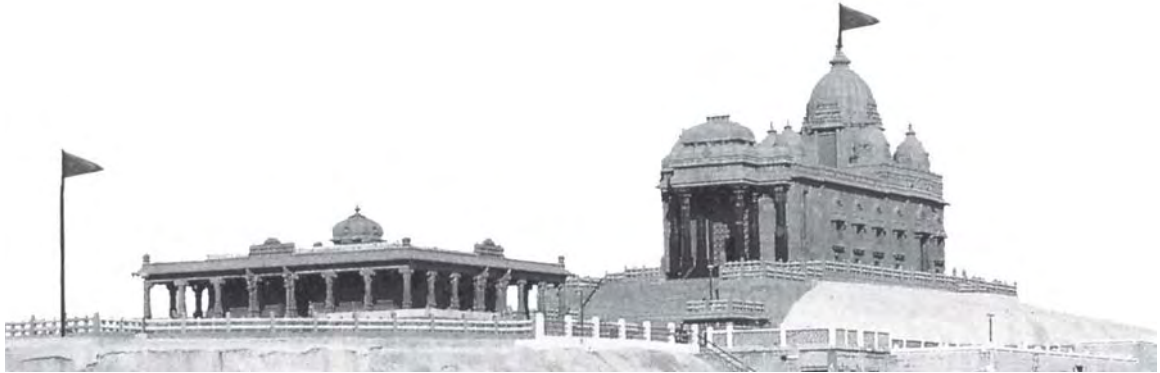
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All the photographs belong to the stone sculptures from various temples in India.



EDITORIAL



The Hindu temple is an institution of immemorial antiquity which has played a notable part not merely in the religious life of the people, but also in their social, cultural and economic history. In the millennia that span India's past, it has had, like so many other things in our life, a chequered history, now prosperous, now persecuted, now neglected and now revived.

The temple, of course, is not unique to India. It was once a world-wide institution until the rise of universal religions like Christianity and Islam when many of its functions were taken over by the church and the mosque. But in India a unique continuity has prevailed, many ancient temples still surviving and serving their primary purpose as places of worship.

Western scholars are reluctant to assign an early date to the Hindu temple, which they would fain derive from Greek or Buddhist models. No doubt, a Greco-Indian school of sculpture and architecture flourished at Gandhara at one time. But that does not necessarily mean that it ante-dates the Hindu temple. The argument is that Vedic religion is polytheistic and oriented towards fire-sacrifices, where temples have to lay stress on monotheism

and idol worship.

Hinduism has always tolerated many approaches to God. There is no reason why the way of sacrifices and that of idol worship should not have flourished side by side. It can even be shown that while the *Vedas* could be studied and sacrifices performed by select castes, temples were universal institutions in which all classes and both the sexes worshipped freely. The rise of temples is part of the liberal tradition in Hinduism, stressing the easy accessibility of God to all.

That they are earlier than the Christian era is beyond doubt.

A Besnagar inscription of the 2nd century B. C. refers to a shrine of Vasudeva. Panini, centuries earlier, refers to worshippers of God as Vaasudeva. Our two great epics of uncertain dates have references to temples. It is not outside the range of possibility that Vedic invocations to gods and offering them seats, homage, and oblations could have inspired with analogous invocations of the divine presence in diagrams like *mandalas*, *yantras* and in idols. However that may be, it should not be forgotten that the *Vedas* are not without descriptions of gods and these must have helped sculptural

representations.

The supposed contradictions between the polytheism of the *Vedas* and the monotheism of the *Agamas* on which temple worship is based, is largely a creation of Western bias. Indian opinion has never held the *Vedas* to be polytheistic. The *Rigveda* proclaims that what exists is one, though sages call it by various names. The *Upanishads* stress the concept of a Single Power manifesting itself as the universe, and they are an integral part of the *Vedas* according to Hindu tradition. Exegetical principles show how God is called by various names in various contexts in the *Vedas*. Moreover, the *Agamas* were not anti-Vedic. They prescribed Vedic *mantras*,

procedures in temple and domestic worship. They represent the liberal tradition in orthodoxy which has always sought the spiritual welfare of the masses without degrading higher philosophy or antagonising the elite.

But, after all is said and done, the origin and early history of temples in India is a highly speculative subject. We know as a matter of fact that they have served important cultural and spiritual interests almost since the beginnings of history in India. That they still continue to do so in some measure is a tribute to the sense of continuity that has marked Indian history during its march over thousands of years. Patronised by the royalty, the aristocracy

and the wealthier classes and popular with the masses, the temples grew in number, size and influence, and the roles they played in society multiplied. The cults of Vishnu, Siva and Sakti developed side by side and almost on parallel lines. Differences in philosophical tenets among them, and between them and *Vedanta* were there, but they did not affect the acceptability of the temples. In the rituals and festivals conducted by them, there were striking resemblances among the different cults. Worship in the temples became a common spiritual exercise in India long ago, and has remained so ever since. Fashions in celebrating temple festivals may have changed in minor matters, but in essentials they have remained true to their original purpose and continued to be an expression of spiritual fervour. The iconoclastic zeal of Islam and



Christianity had only a marginal effect on the Hindu attitude to temples, in spite of the rise of sects like the Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj which abandoned idol worship, in spite of the spread of skepticism, agnosticism and atheism.

In the golden age of Hinduism and even in the Middle Ages, the temple became a remarkable and unique institution. Often it would have been the creation of dedicated architects and sculptors of genius, satisfying the aesthetic taste of even connoisseurs. Today we have marvels of artistic achievement scattered all over India. Fergusson, in the last century, naturally biased in favour of Greek art, was still obliged to entertain what would be in Europe regarded as an almost blasphemous thought—to rank the temples at Belur and Halebid as equaling in their own way the Parthenon of Greece. If one represented perfection in severe, austere, classical art, the other stood for equal excellence in the ornate style. If one is the alpha, the other

is the omega of sculpture and architecture. Apart from being a beautiful creation of art and a place of worship, the temple came to assume and fulfill many other roles in course of time. In the hey-day of its glory, it was the centre of village or community life. It served as the town-hall where public assemblies could be held, the headquarters of the local government, the registry of documents of public importance, the lecture-hall, the stage, the court-hall during the visits of kings, the school, the college, the forum for academic and philosophical discussions by learned men, the library, the art-gallery, the social club, the licensing authority for dramatic performances, the dispensary, the patron of hostels and hospitals, the source of a certain amount of free or cheap food to the poor section of the community, and much more besides. It stood out as the concrete symbol of the Hindu Welfare State. Every one of these roles is proved by epigraphical inscriptions over the centuries.



In Tamilnadu, we are familiar with how the forgotten works of the *Tevaram* hymnists were recovered from the Chidambaram temple by Nambi Aandaar Nambi. There is a reference to a lost Tamil translation of the *Mahabharata* in a twelfth century inscription at Thiruvaalangaadu.

The Vishnu temple at Thirumukudal near Kanchipuram was running a school, a hostel and a hospital (*aaturasaalaa*) with fifteen beds. Provision was made in many temples for the study of different subjects and exposition of sacred texts in the *Vyaakhyaanamantapa*. The temple treasury often received endowments and arranged for their upkeep. The shore temple at Mamallapuram has an inscription giving details of a contract among villagers about the division of land and dues of land cess. The temple sometimes acted as the confessional and helped its devotees to expiate sins like that of accidentally killing a man during a hunting expedition. The Ulagalandaperumal temple at Kanchipuram testifies to 48000 residents of the city undertaking to supervise the management of the temple according to custom and usage. At Srirangam, we have an inscription about the citizens taking away the management of the temple from certain temple servants who had been misusing their authority and entrusting it to others. These few examples serve to show what important public services were being rendered by the temple in the past. Other agencies have taken over many of these. But it still remains a thing of beauty, a hallowed home of praise and prayer, a source of spiritual consolation, an incentive to moral effort, and in the opinion of the devout, a store house of Divine Power easily accessible to all.

Obviously, the subject taken up in this issue is encyclopedic in range, and we have limited ourselves to dealing with some prominent aspects only. They include with other things accounts of cults, rituals, festivals, art-treasures, styles of

architecture and some temples of all-India importance. They are sure to whet the appetite for more information, and some of them will show what we are missing by routine or mechanical visits to temples or pilgrimages of a similar kind. These may make for spiritual edification, but the spirit will be even more thoroughly satisfied by the many ways in which the temple helps fulfillment.

We thank all our contributors for kindly responding to our requests in spite of the heavy demands of their time and also. The publishers and authors for giving us permission to reproduce copyright material. Imperfections and inadequacies are regretted, but they seem inevitable in an undertaking of this kind.



SECTION ONE

Temple Worship In Pre- Epic Period (Prior to 1000 B.C.)

K. K. MENON

Idol Worship

It has become a trite saying that idolatry is bad and everyone swallows it at the present time without questioning. I once thought so, and to pay the penalty of that, I had to learn my lessons sitting at the feet of a man who realised everything from idols; I allude to Ramakrishna Paramahansa. If such Ramakrishna Paramahansas are produced by idol worship; what will you have, there former's creed or any number of idols? I want an answer. Take a thousand idols more, if you can produce Ramakrishna Paramahansa through idol worship. Yet idolatry is condemned, why? Some hundreds of years ago, some man of Jewish blood happened to condemn it. He happened to condemn everybody else's idols except his own. If God is represented in any beautiful form or any symbolic form, said the Jew, it is awfully bad; it is sin. But if He is represented in the form of a chest with two angels sitting on either side, it is the holy of holies. If God comes in the form of a dove, it is holy. But if He comes in the form of a cow, it is heathen superstition, condemn it; that is how the world goes". (*Complete works of Swami Vivekananda Vol. III*).

"The difficulty of those whose thoughts are set on the unmanifested is greater, for the goal of the unmanifested is hard to reach by the embodied beings", (*Bhagavad Gita-Dr. Radhakrishnan*), so says the *Bhagavad Gita*. Dr. Radhakrishnan explains this verse saying that the search of the transcendent Godhead is more difficult than worship of the living Supreme God; the soul of all things and persons. He quotes - Dattatreya, who asks in his *Avadhuta Gita*- "How mean I bow to him who is formless, undifferentiated, blissful and indestructible, who has thought Himself and in Himself filled up everything?"

He quotes a Bhaktha who says, with mind rapt in meditation "If mystics see the action less light, let them see. As for myself, my only yearning is that there may appear before my gladdened eyes that bluish someone who keeps romping on the shores of the Yamuna." Idols or temples or churches or books are only supports, the helps of man's childhood. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa compares them to the props and supports which we put up when we construct a house. Such worship is the lowest stage. We have to struggle to rise high. Thukaram sang:

*Be thou formless for those
who want to be
But for me take thou on a Form,
Oh! Lord*

I have fallen in love with Thy name.

The Hindu never says that the idol is God. Through *Sagunopaasana* one rises higher and higher. A stage would thereafter come to him when he can discard idols and when he can perform *Nirgunopaasana*. At this stage the construction of the mansion is

completed, there is no need for the props and supports to use the language of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. (*The Gospel of Ramakrishna* by M.). They can be removed.

What Temples Are?

We often hear people who are obsessed with what they see in churches and mosques, who attack our temples saying that they are very noisy and that worship or meditation is not possible in them. Swami Vivekananda answers them. He says, "Our temples are not churches in your sense of the word. They are not places of public worship, for, properly speaking, there is no such thing as public worship in India." Arthur Koestler, author of *Darkness at Noon* put this question to Jagadguru Kanchi Kamakoti Sankaracharya Swami. He answered thus, (*The Jagadguru-Edited* by Dr. V. Raghavan) "Our temples are not organised as places for meditation, nor for congregational worship. The purpose of a temple is different. We enjoy the good things in life such as house, food, clothing, ornaments, music, dance, etc. We pay a tribute in the form of taxes to the king-now the Government-for making it possible for us to enjoy them by giving us their protection. The king-protector is provided with a place and other paraphernalia of royalty. Even as we render homage to the king for the enjoyment of these things, we are bound to render our gratitude to God who has primarily given us the good things of life. We offer a part of these good things as a token of our gratitude to Him in the temple. We first offer to Him all that He has given us, in the shape of food, clothing, jewels, music, flowers, light, incense, etc., with

the grateful consciousness that they are His gifts to us; and we receive them back from Him as His *prasaada*. The temple is the place where these offerings are made on behalf of the collective community. Even if people do not go to the temple, it is enough if these offerings are made to God on behalf of the community. The duty of the people at the place is to see that these offerings are made in the proper manner. There are people who do not take their day's meal till the temple-bell announces that the offering to God of food for the day has been done. Then only do they take their meal as *Prasadam*." According to the *Gita* if we enjoy these things without offering them first to the giver, it would tantamount to theft. It is through our five *Indriyas*, viz., eyes, ears, nose, tongue and touch that we receive the various impulses from outside and carry them to our brain. Each of the five senses contributes to our joy in life. It is this offering of the objects of the five-fold joys that is known as *Panchopachaaraas* to God, the offerings namely *Gandha* (sandal), *Pushpa* (flowers), *Dhoopa* (incense), *Deepa* (lamps) and *Neivadya* (food). If your *jnanendriyas* and their stimuli are reverentially offered to the Paramatma, then we shall not be inclined to misuse these sense organs. By such dedications to God, we deflect these from evil propensities and sublimate them to a divine goal.

Besides the requirements which are the minimum sources of material pleasure, there are other things which make for life's comfort, like house, clothes, conveyance, etc. These too are to be used only after they are offered to God. All such offerings are inclined in what is known as

shodasopachaaras (sixteen offerings). And then there are other sources of enjoyment like music, dance, chariot, elephant, horse, etc., applicable to the case of highly placed persons and which may be regarded as luxuries for the common man. All these should also be offered to God and they are included in the 64 or *Chatushashti Upacharaas*.

Indus Valley Civilization

The Mohanjodaro and Harappa civilizations are considered to be about 5,500 years old. Col. D. H. Gordon in his *Pre-Historic Background to Indian Culture* says that the numerous female figurines in Harappa suggest the worship of such a goddess as they out-number by far similar representations of the horned god. It is probable that the Harappans embodied the worship of a horned God and mother-goddess and the sacred prototype of Siva has a very great deal to commend it. Marshall takes almost the same view. According to him, the people of Mohanjodaro and Harappa had not only reached the stage of anthropomorphising their deities but were worshipping them in that form as well as in the aniconic. Dr. Wheeler feels that there is no uncertainty attached to the divinity of the seated "Siva" of the seals-which is replete with the brooding miniatury power of the great God of historic India. He apparently refers to Dakshinamurthy. He feels that phallus was also present during the period. Dr. Ayyappan (*Bharatha Pazhama*-(Malayalam) -Dr. Ayyappan) while assessing the antiquity of Indian culture, quotes Dr. Wheeler who says that the Harappans

worshipped mother goddess, Siva and the Linga. He further says that it is now certain that the remnants of the big building 52 feet long, 40 feet wide and with walls 4 ft. thick are the remains of a temple. Many of the idols and the linga were discovered from this spot. He has no doubt that the Harappans were Hindus-and that temple worship had a place then.

Vedic Period: 2000 B.C. to 7000 B.C.

Dr. Gopinatha Rao in his *Hindu Iconography* refers to the divided opinion among the European savants about image worship in Vedic period. According to Max Mueller the religion of the Vedas know no idols, and the worship of idols in India was a secondary formation, a later degeneration of the more primitive worship of God. As against this, Gopinatha Rao quotes Dr. Bollenson who says, "Indians did not only merely in imagination assign human forms to their gods but also represented them in a sensible manner." Subsequent discoveries have shown, as mentioned supra, that such representations in a "sensible form" existed even prior to the Vedic period. Perhaps there was less prominence or some antagonism for idol worship in the Vedic age. Lt. Col. Thapur in his book on *Icons in Bronze* says that one of the reasons for the antagonism of the Vedic cult towards Saivism was due to its homage to phallic emblem. This does not seem to be correct. This view is apparently based on the interpretation of the term 'Sisnadeva,' in the *Rig Veda* by Western scholars. They interpret this term as "worshippers of phallus." But the Indian scholars like Yaska and Sayana say that this expression refers

to only sex-minded people. It has nothing to do with the worship of the phallus. Swami Vivekananda (*Complete Works of Vivekananda-Vol. I*) feels that "the worship of the Siva Linga originated from a famous hymn in the *Atharvana Veda*. Samhita sung in praise of the *Yupa Stambha*, the sacrificial post; in that hymn a description is found of



the beginningless and endless *stambha*. It is shown that the said *stambha* is put in place of the eternal Brahman. Later all these things associated with Yagna like fire, smoke, ashes, etc. were worshipped. The *Yupa stambha* gave place to Sivalinga and defined in the high Devahood of Sri Sankara." But we are now aware that linga worship was prevalent even during the Harappa period. It has, however, to be remembered that the linga has three parts, the lowest portion cut with 8 faces is called the Brahma portion; the middle portion with four faces is called the Vishnu portion and the top portion is called the Siva portion. Avudayar, the Sakthi portion is fixed to the Vishnu portion, the Brahma portion is embedded under the earth. In the path of the Sadhaka from *Sagunopasana* to *Nirgunopasana*, there are three stages. In the first stage he worships god with form. That is Nataraja. In the second stage he worships the formless form. That is the linga. It has a form but at the same time formless in as much as it has no features like head, face, etc. In the third stage he

worships the formless. That is what we do at Chidambara rahasyam, Palliyarai, etc. Thus we see that the linga form represents the intermediate stage between *Sagunopasana* and *Nirgunopasana*. In Kerala, Sastha, Bhagirathi, etc. have also such formless forms.

Taper (*Icons in Thapur-Lt. Col. Taper*) goes a

step further and says that the worship of the phallus was started by the non-Aryans and was practiced in many countries. In ancient Egypt the Phallus or Oris was idolized. The Greeks copied this custom by venerating pripus derived from Apis the big bull-god of Egypt. There were several cults of Venus in Greece. Mylitta was the Goddess of fertility in ancient Babylon. The Romans called the phallic emblem *Mutinus* which was taken out in a large and gorgeous procession with dancing and singing of lascivious songs. Such reverence was also common in Greece in the 8th century A.D. and remained in vogue in Germany till the 12th century A.D.

Sardar In the *Rig Veda*, there is no direct reference to idols or temple worship. Importance is given to Homams, Yagnams, etc. The gods we saw in the Harappa period make only brief appearances. The prominent deities are Indra, Agni, Varuna, Mitra, Ushas, Saraswathy, Rudra and others.



The Origin and Significance of Temples

S. SATYAMURTI AYYANGAR

God is everywhere but He is very much here! wrote a friend to me, years ago, from holy Badrinath. For a moment, it left me guessing whether it was at all a scholarly pronouncement from a truly knowledgeable person or a mere flourish of the pen for which my friend had a flair. But soon, I realised that what was alluded to is the special impact of the Deity, over there, on the worshippers. Well, how does God, known, in common parlance, to be all-pervading, permeating all things and beings all over, remain stationary at a particular spot and make Himself visible to all and sundry, assuming a distinct form, in which He could be worshipped by the yearning devotee, casting His spell on the latter? How does one correlate the two widely divergent aspects of Godhead, namely, the 'akhandaakaara' or 'vishvarupa' aspect of the all pervading One, invisible to the naked (physical) eye of even the most exalted *devas* in the higher echelons, and the personal God of finite form? An authoritative examination of these issues brings one right into the thick of the subject on hand.

Reference to *Brahman*, the Supreme Lord, in the scriptures, as *Nirguna*, has given rise to a school of thought, which holds that He is no more than a cold, icy, abstract entity, devoid of attributes. This does not, however, seem to be valid, seeing that every reality must have attributes and *Brahman* is a reality indeed. What is really meant is that *Brahman* is totally devoid of

the qualities of *Prakriti* (nature or unmodified cause, which produces several changes of state), which afflict all else, the *heya-gunas* or base qualities, the material limitations and imperfections generated by the triple *gunas*, *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*. What then are the *gunas* possessed by God (the *Saguna* aspect)? The scriptures specify the six main attributes of God, namely, (i) *Jnana*, that is, that He is the centre of all knowledge; (ii) *Shakti*, the power of achieving everything including what might be deemed unattainable by others; (iii) *Bala*, strength, the power of containing everything within Himself, including the so-called incompatibles; (iv) *Aisvarya*, the power of containing all the treasures of the entire universe and keeping them in order; (v) *Virya*, the power of being immutable, with no *vikaaras* or changes, unaffected by the created world of differences and modifications evolved by Him; and (vi) *Tejas*, brilliance, that is the power by which He holds Himself superior to all else. Saint Nammaazhvaar, (looked upon as the monarch of all the Aazhvaars, the peerless devotees sunk deep in the oceanic depths of divine consciousness) has right in the opening line of his scintillating hymnal of unparalleled excellence, *Tiruvaaymozhi*, thrown open the flood-gate of his mystic vision of the Lord. The saint has described God as a fountain of inexhaustible bliss that cuts out all fatigue, as full of compassion and a host of other auspicious traits, the repository of all conceivable excellences of unlimited dimensions, the very antithesis of the icy-cold, abstract God, formless and colourless, conceived by others. No doubt, God is shapeless, formless and colourless,

in His universal aspect, as the Omnipresent, the all-pervading and the infinite, the entire universe constituting as it were, His body. He can, however, take upon Himself any form or body, at His volition. The *Sruti* says; "*Jaayamaano bahudhaa vijaayate*". (The unborn gets born, in many ways.) He is signified by all names, some directly and others indirectly. 'Naaraayana', 'Vishnu', 'Vaasudeva', 'Raama', and 'Krishna' signify Him directly. In fact, the two aspects of *nirguna*, the *akhandakaara* or *vishvaroopa* and the *Saguna*, the personal God are complementary to each other and not mutually exclusive.

The five-fold form or manifestation of God, which helps Him to govern His very vast kingdom is sure to make interesting reading, in this context. Sri *Pancharatra*, which is the valid scriptural basis of Taantrik religious experience and practice, describes the five-fold hypostatic manifestation of God. They are: *para*, *vyuha*, *vibhava*, *antaryaamin* and *archaavataara*. *Paravighraha* is the transcendental form in which God manifests Himself in the *Vaikunthaloka* (Heaven); "*Vyooha*" denotes His self-assumed operative forms as Vaasudeva, Sankarshana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha, the seat of activity shifting from High Heaven to the Milk-ocean. *Vibhava* is incarnate forms, such as Raama and Krishna, the Lord assuming a form of His choice, eminently suited for the purpose of the particular *avataara* (incarnation), when He freely mingles with one and all, high and low, and exhibits many a rare quality in superb abundance. *Antaryaamivighraha* is the pervasive form of the Lord, pervading all things and beings everywhere and at all times, dwelling in

the heart-region of every being, as the Internal Controller; *Archavighraha* is the Image form in temples and houses of worshippers, in which the Lord is consecrated and which is thus the visible, worshippable form He assumes, in accordance with the wishes of His devotees. The image which a devotee makes, consecrates and worships, is as much an *avataara* or manifestation of the Lord as Raama, Krishna, etc. and not a mere child-play or beginner's tool, a mere aid to concentration in the earlier stages as the sceptical and half-hearted believers among us would want us to think. They are perhaps inclined to think that an image, made by man according to his own whim, that is, unilaterally, without prior consultation with God, can hardly depict the living presence of God, the very basis for worship. These persons will do well to turn their attention to Sri Krishna's own declaration in *Bhagavad Gita* "*Ye yatha maam prapadyante taan tathaiva bhajaa-myaham*" (IV-II). That is, He would deign to present Himself before His devotees in whatever form the latter desire to see and commune with Him. The general featuring of the Divine person naturally follows from the most desirable formation of the human form, and it should not be lightly brushed aside as idolatrous, fetish loyalty, or something anthropomorphic.

It is only on the strength of *Pancharaatra*, the oldest *aagama* of unquestionable authenticity, extolling the *archaka* aspect of God, that the several holy shrines, extant throughout this sprawling sub-continent and elsewhere too, have been instituted and God is made visible therein to our fleshy eyes. There are, of course, numerous other

aagamas which are of later origin; the *Vaikhaanasa*, the *Saivaagama*, propounded by Lord Siva, and regarding Him as the supreme deity; and the *Tantric* form of worship obtaining in Kerala, etc. Each of these acts out its own stipulations for the location and structure of the *sanctum sanctorum* and its appurtenances, specific featuring of the icons etc, and formulating its own disciplines for the conduct of worship. The *Pancharaatra* is also known as the *Bhagavat Saastra* for the reason that Narayana, the Supreme Brahman, as revealed by *Vedanta*, is Himself its promulgator. This sets forth His proper form and the means of worshipping Him. Being *Bhagavat Saastra*, it has always been deemed to be canonical. This does not mean that there were no detractors who challenged the authority of the said *Saastra*. The main adversaries were the *Mimaamsakas* of the *Bhatta* and *Prabhaakara* schools, the *Advaitins* and the *Nai-yaayikas*. In his *Aagama Praamaanya*, Yamunaa-chaarya has firmly established the authenticity of *Pancharaatra*, with exceptional dialectical skill and a wealth of incontrovertible evidence, covering a wide range of problems. The *Pancharaatra* texts abundantly reveal that they had grown out of temple service and recorded practices, such as the *Panchakaala* rituals which have been in vogue, since long.

Our concern can and shall be only with a God, who is nearest, dearest and most patent to our heart and understanding, whose greatness lies not in His might and majesty, as the Lord of Heaven, in a transcendental setting, but who has in His grace loving condescension and easy accessibility. It will, therefore, be readily

appreciated that, situated as we are, all the four anterior hypostatic manifestations of God are of no avail and we have to draw spiritual nourishment and sustenance only from the last mentioned *archaa* manifestation. Put briefly, the *Para* or the transcendental form of the Lord is like the waters, surging, on the outer periphery of the vast universe; the *Vyuuha* is centred in the remote milk-ocean, not easy of access; the *Vibhava* or the incarnate forms of the Lord, like Raama and Krishna are like the swollen floods in rivers whose waters have long ago rolled own to the ocean. The fourth, namely the *antaryaamin* aspect of God, no doubt, puts Him on very intimate terms with us, as He resides in the heart-region of everyone, as the Internal Controller. And yet, it is just like underground-water, deep inside the earth, which can be got at only by the Yogins, devoutly absorbed in single-minded devotion. On the other hand, the *archaa-avatara* (iconic manifestation) alone can be invoked by all, at all times, like unto the deep pockets of water, cool and refreshing, in the river beds, the aftermath or legacy of the flood. It was only in this aspect of God, the *archavatara*, the great *Aazhvar* saints, known for their profound Divine wisdom, imparted to them by God Himself, shorn of doubts, discrepancies, and distortions, did *prapatti*, that is, took refuge, the *Archa* (duly consecrated idol) being a veritable store-house of innumerable excellences, the final essence of all essences.

Temples derive their significance, rather acquire a meaning only in terms of the deity they enshrine, even as houses have a meaning only when they house people and

not when there are rows and rows of vacant buildings. We are discussing here the live temples, full of dynamism, the effective centres of spiritual attraction, conducive to calm contemplation and deep meditation, as distinguished from the temples in ruins, denuded of idols, and having mere archaeological interest. Nobody builds temples with their elaborate lay-out, tall-towers, majestic *mantapas* and all that, unless there are specific idols on hand, needing to be enshrined. Actually, the temples derive their names from the deities, enshrined within, such as 'Sriranganathaswamy temple', 'Sri Parthasarathyswamy temple', 'Sri Kapaaaleswarar temple', 'Sri Meenakshi temple' and so on. And so, when we deal with the origin of temples and their significance, the best part of our attention naturally goes to the significance and efficacy of Idol worship, as such.

This, therefore, emphasises the relevance of all that has been said, so far, which could still admit a little more elaboration. It is in His iconic manifestation that the Lord achieves what the vociferous *sastras* have failed to secure. At a time when rank materialism is running rampant, and the people, caught up in the vortex of earthly pursuits, have scant regard for the *sastraic* decrees and injunctions, reducing to naught the chances of their pursuing the paths of discipline prescribed for their spiritual uplift, the Lord in His iconic form casts an irresistible spell on the hitherto ungodly subjects, determined to run away from Him. Even those, who seldom go to the temples, lacking the inclination therefor, are sought out by the Deity, during the ceremonial processions, outside the temple

precincts and are enticed by His exquisite charm. Having enticed them and engendered them the requisite taste for God-head, He is right there to redeem them, who, with their new-found avidity, cling to Him and seek refuge in His image-form. In fact, the very purpose of His manifestation in *archa* is only to get hold of His errant subjects, straying away from Him.

And when He gets His catch all right, His gratification knows no bounds. The Lord's stay in the temple is not an end in itself, but only the means for the reclamation of His subjects His ultimate destination being the heart-centre, of the spiritually rejuvenated subjects. The temple, that is, the pilgrim centre, as we can call it now, is just the spring-board where God could reach the heart-centre of His devotees.

There is a vast volume of literature on temples and iconology-the lay-out of the temples, their location structure of *gopuras*, *vimanas*, *dhwajasthambhas*, *mantapas*, *the garbha-griha*, the special featuring of the Icons of the different deities in the Hindu pantheon, the deification of the idols of gods and goddesses, the stationary *Moola Vighras*, the mobile *Utsava Murtis* taken out in ceremonial procession, conduct of the diurnal worship during stated periods, the periodic and annual festivals etc.

The *Agamas* governing these are broadly classified as *Vaishnava* and *Saiva Agamas*. *Saakta* theology is closely allied to the *Saiva*. There are two Vaishnava Agamas, namely, *Pancharaatra* and *Vaikhaanasa*: likewise the *Saivaagama* comprises the *Kaaranaagama* and *Kaamikaagama*. The temples themselves fall under different

categories, depending upon the agency building them and installing the Deity. These are: *Svayam Vyakta* (the self-originated); *Divyam* (those installed by the gods); *Saidha* (those set up by *siddha purushas*) and *Maanusa* (those built by humans). The areas around the temples, up to specified limits, the extent whereof varies in relation to the particular category, are also held sacred and their sanctity should not be violated.

The temples constitute our rich heritage. It will be no exaggeration to state that the tenacity of our Hindu culture rests upon the stable base of our temples, which have been the traditional centres fostering the growth of civilisation, in all its ramifications in art, literature, painting, sculpture, dance, drama, etc. Formal schooling has not been an integral part of the upbringing of a majority of the Hindu population. I know of a *Sthapathi* (icon-maker), who stayed with me for quite some time; he had never entered a school and yet, he recited, in clear accents, the relevant Sanskrit *slokas* from the *samhitaas* pertaining to the special features of the icons. The periodic festivals in temples, particularly the Car festival, demonstrate the solid achievement of unity in diversity. The successful return of the car to the stand is indeed a grand annual declaration of our solidarity.



RAMESWARAM

There are four Dhams (places of living spiritual presence) in Bharatavarsha, namely Badrinath, in the north, Puri in the east, Dwaraka in the west and Rameswaram in the south. Rameswaram gains a plus point of these four Kshetras, as it is the only Sivakshetra, the other three being Vishnukshetras.

The sanctum sanctorum of the temple of Rameswaram contains the image, of Linga prepared by Sita and consecrated by Sri Rama. To the right of Sri Ramalinga is a shrine of Parvathavarthini, the consort of the Lord. Proceeding towards the north-west corner of the temple, one is captivated by Pallikonda Perumal in lying posture with his head facing the sky. The Nandi here is made of lime and mortar and it is 12 feet long and 9 feet high.

The water in the various 'theerthas' of the temples is reputed to contain many medicinal properties and hence a holy bath in this shrine is believed to refresh both the mind and the body. Well-known saints like Tirunavukarasar and Thirugnana-sambandhar have sung hymns in praise of the Lord during their visits here.

Nagercoil and Nagapattinam

The story is being told that while harvesting the crops, the sickle of a farmer hit a granite stone, and to the shock of all, blood oozed from the stone. Expert counselling established that the stone was Vasuki, the Serpent King. Soon a temple was set up on the spot for the Serpent King which today stands as a very famous one at



this legendary story that gave the place the name, Nagapattinam. In this temple, there is an idol of goddess Neelaya-thakshi which is said to have been brought from the region of the Nile river in Egypt.

GODDESS KANYAKUMARI

Nagercoil. The township named as Nagercoil (meaning, Temple of the Serpent) itself is indicative of the popularity of the temple there. Nagercoil is situated at a distance of about twelve miles from Kanyakumari. It is said that there are many serpents living around the temple. Strangely enough, within a radius of one mile from the temple there has not been any fatal case of snakebite. Every visitor to the temple takes a pinch of earth from the temple as the prasad. It is said that still the earth in that place has never diminished in quantity. Near the shrine of the serpent-god, there are also temples enshrining Lord Krishna and Lord Shiva.

While talking of Nagercoil, one might be reminded of another temple at Nagapattinam near Tanjore. Though the temple is dedicated to Lord Vishnu and is considered to be one of the one hundred and eight sacred places of Vaishnavites, the place acquired sanctity when the Serpent-God, that is, Nagaraja, did penance there to propitiate the lord. It is

There was a virgin by name Pushpakasi. She was very much devoted to Lord Siva and by her stern penance attained *Sayujya Moksha*. *Sayujya Moksha* means entering Heaven with human body and remaining in human form with the Supreme Lord.

Bana the Asura had won a boon that he could not be killed by anyone other than a Kannika (virgin). It became a problem how to arrest his depredations and save mankind. People approached Lord Siva for redress. Lord Siva knew that this Banasura could be killed only by a virgin. Immediately he chose Pushpakasi for the task and sent her back to earth. She killed the demon and restored peace in the land. She did not like to stay on earth after fulfilling her mission and so made further penance praying to Siva to call her back to Heaven. Parasurama, who happened to note the austere penance in which this virgin was engaged, installed her image together with a Vinayaka, in the firm belief that she alone could save the land, which had been reclaimed from the sea, from being

swallowed by it again. In this connection, it is necessary to mention here that the mainland of Bharatha Varsha had in ancient times extended far beyond the present southernmost point. The land was known as the continent of Lemuria and it probably connected Madagascar and Africa in a contiguous strip. The first Tamil Sangam was held in a place now under the sea. That area was gradually swallowed up by the ocean. Now, at the request of Parasurama, this Virgin Mother faced the South and arrested the further march of the sea.

Banasura is believed to have been killed near about Pothia Malai, north of Kanyakumari. From this mountain two rivers flow-one called the Tamravarni on the northern side, created by Sage Agastya, and the other, the Kulithurai river, in the south.

Parasurama established a Vinayaka at Kanyakumari just before establishing the Kanyakumari Amman. It was done with the idea that Vinayaka would help retaining the Amman there with all Her glory and get Her fulfil his purpose. Indra established another Vinayaka when he arrived there, called Indrakantha Vinayaka.

The processional deity in the Kanyakumari temple is called Thyagasundari. The Holy Mother, who appears in the state of being ready for marriage, is called Syamasundari. From: Temples of Tamilnadu



Temple Worship

V. S. NATARAJA

Sacred places receive their sanctity from the godly persons who had lived or are living there. The divine vibrations sent out by these holy personages constitute an unending spiritual legacy to mankind. These sanctified places provide an impetus to seekers for progress in their spiritual pursuit. This fact explains why temples are resorted to by the pious everywhere and at all times.

In India, temples were not in existence during the Vedic period and all our magnificent temples seen now are of latter-day origin. In the distant past, all beautiful and inspiring places in Nature were made use of for worship of the Creator. Sacrificial fire was utilised as the medium between man and the Deity. This mode of worship, in course of time, gave place to temple worship. Cave temples cut and carved in suitable hills gave place to structural temples embodying the same principles.

The whole universe is to be viewed as the temple of God, the cosmic life vibrant in it being treated as God. The human body is really the universe on a miniature scale. Whatever is great and glorious in Nature finds a place in man also. There is nothing in Nature superior to the human being who is verily the temple of God and has in him the potentiality to emerge in divinity if only he chooses to do so.

Symbolic Significance

The Hindu temple is a replica of the divine possibilities in man. The main entrance to



the temple is usually a sky-scraping *gopura*, termed the *Rajagopura*, which is at once a replica of the physical world and the physiological build of man. This edifice contains innumerable figures of the celestial and the terrestrial, mythological and historical, including a few uncouth and indecent figures implying that our world is a mixture of good and bad. Our body itself has a certain amount of vulgarity however much we may try to hide or overlook it. The worshipper's entry into this mighty gate indicates his setting aside the external

world and taking an introspective step. Entering the first gate, the devotee comes across the *Balipitha*-the altar of sacrifice. Here he is expected to fall prostrate on the ground as a mark of sacrificing the lower nature in him. While in that posture he is to decide to renew himself and get up a mentally purified person. The *Dhvajastambha* or the flag-staff comes next. The rectangular corridors have then to be circumambulated. This is similar to pranayama or the yogic breathing exercise which purifies the nerve currents. Next comes the *vahana* which is usually an animal or a bird. Virtually every living being is a *vahana* (vehicle) of God.

The approach to the *sanctum sanctorum* is kept dark, no window being provided. The idea is that when all the senses are shut out and when an introspective plunge is taken in meditation it is darkness alone that is encountered in the initial stage. Within the *sanctum* no one should stand in a manner obstructing the gaze of all installed Vahana which is ever directed on the presiding deity. The point conveyed is that only an uninterrupted flow of the mind unto the Supreme takes it to the goal. The ringing of the bell suggests the unuttered cosmic sound which can be heard in the totality of Nature as well as in the constitution of the *yogi*. Then the curtain is drawn aside, revealing a blaze of light. This means that the disappearance of the curtain of ignorance and the dawn of knowledge are simultaneous. The burning of the camphor leaving no residue indicates that after knowledge comes to the

Jeevatman, both the knowledge and the knower merge into the Reality.

Sublimating the Senses

Sublimation of all the five senses is another factor in temple worship. The eye is first forced to be at rest by making the devotee pass through chambers one darker than the other. While he is waiting in utter darkness, the curtain is drawn aside and God-vision presented



at the *sanctum*. The eye is taught to see God and not to seek God. The first lesson received at the *sanctum* is to be applied everywhere. The sure way of sublimating the eye is by seeing or attempting to see God in everything.

The ear hears at the sanctum the ringing of the bell and the chanting of the prayers which are all associated with God. The consecrated food sublimates the tongue. The inhalation of the aroma at the *sanctum* invokes the thought of God and in this way the olfactory-sense is sublimated. Besmearing the body with the sanctified sandal-paste instills the feeling of devotion into the sense of touch.

All the five senses are thus automatically sublimated in the act of worship in the temple. The start given there requires to be pursued permanently, thereby enabling

the devotee to recast himself in divinity.

It is customary for the devotee, after worshipping in the temple, to choose a quiet spot and sit in meditation. Now, the senses are shut out and the mind is quieted. He recapitulates the sublime thoughts that rose in his mind during the worship. He recollects the spiritual background of the temple and brings to memory the saints who sanctified the temple in the past. He broods upon the glory of the Lord and thus brings the meditation to an end.



TEMPLE RITUALS

SHRI SHANKARACHARYA SWAMIGAL OF KANCHI KAMAKOTI PEETA

There is some special feature associated with the worship in each temple. For instance, the special feature of Tirumalai is the offering of wealth which takes the form of dropping cash or jewels in the *hundi*. In Palani, people carry and offer *kavadi*. At Rameswaram, the bathing of the deity with water brought from the Ganges is considered sacred. In the West Coast, each temple has its special form of offering. At Ambalapuzha, the offering to Sri Krishna takes the form of *pal payasam* (a sweet preparation with milk and rice). The favourite offering to Sri Mahadeva at Vaikom is the conduct of feasts, at which hundreds of people are fed sumptuously. During the annual festival at another Sri Krishna temple, boat races are conducted in the water course in front of the temple. At Tripprayar, where the presiding deity is Sri Ramachandra, offerings take the form of detonation—a number of cylinders, packed with gun-powder, are set fire to and they explode one after another in quick succession with a loud report (*athir vettu*). The sound of *athir vettu* reverberates from the temple all round the clock. At Ettumanur, money is offered, as is being done at Tirumalai. At Trichur, ghee offered by devotees, is poured over the deity, with the result that the deity remains practically hidden under the solidified ghee. The temple at Trichur is a famous Siva shrine and the deity is known as Vadakunathan. The place is also referred

to as Vrishasailam. The temple is situated on the crest of a hump-like formation, the terrain sloping in all directions from the temple proper. Local tradition has it that there was a vision

of a huge bull and, thereafter, a Siva Linga was installed and consecrated. During my Kerala tour, I visited the temple on a Sivaratri, intending to remain there only for a few minutes. But the Nambudiris, who are in charge of the worship there, induced me to stay longer, representing that they would have no other opportunity of meeting me in their life. When I asked them why they thought so, they told me that they had been dedicated for performing the worship at the temple while young and that they are enjoined to lead the life of a Brahmachari (celibate) throughout their life, living always within the temple precincts. If a visit to the family home became imperative for any of them, he was escorted to and from his home in the manner a king is escorted to any place to which he goes. Members of the public take vows to perform bhajanam there for a specified number of days. During this period, the devotees remain in the premises of the temple, cutting off all contacts with the outside world. Another noteworthy feature of this temple is that the accumulated ghee within the sanctum sanctorum is removed periodically and this ghee, often a hundred years old, purchased by Ayurvedic Physicians, as *purana ghritam* (old ghee) is a specific for skin diseases. It is at this temple that the parents of Sri Sankara Bhagavatpada prayed and obtained the blessings of the Lord for getting a son. Another sacred and historic temple in Kerala is that of Lord Sri Krishna at Guruvayur.

The Lord enshrined in this temple is popularly called Guruvayurappan and He is pleased to hear the recital of Srimad Bhagavata. Every day we find a number of people sitting all over the precincts and reciting Bhagavatam. It is here that Narayana Bhattathiri composed and recited in prayer the *Narayaneeyam*, in one hundred *dasakas* and got cured of rheumatism. He ends the *Narayaneeyam*, a name which denotes both Lord Narayana in Whose praise the verses were sung and the author, Narayana, who composed it, with "*ayurarogya saukhyam*". These two words indicate that anyone devoutly reciting the verses of the *Narayaneeyam*, shall be vouchsafed with long life, health and happiness and also indicate the *Kali sankhya*, the number of the day in the *Kali* era, on which the composition was completed. This temple and the temple of Sri Ayyappan on the top of the Sabari Hills have become popular in Tamil Nadu also during recent years. It is noteworthy that Sri Sankara, in his *Siva padadi-kesa stavam*, has also prayed to *Sasta* or Ayyappan, referring to Him as the third son of Lord Siva.

The lesson that we have to draw from all these forms of worship is that we should do our duty, placing the entire responsibility for our welfare on God. This is not a philosophy of inaction or idleness. It is a philosophy of action, with the emphasis on the dedication of our action to God. If by carelessness we err from the path of our duty or *anushtana*, it tantamounts to death or *mrutyu*. That is the significance of the Gita teaching '*Yajna acharatah karma*'. When Sri Adi Sankara enjoined by his disciples to indicate in a nutshell the

importance of his teachings, he told them to recite the Vedas daily, perform the duties enjoined upon them and to dedicate their action to God. He said:

Vedo nityamadheeyatam taduditam
Karmasvanush-teeyatam
Tenesasya Vidheeyatamapachitih

It is significant that the same sentiment is expressed by Avvayar by the use of a double negative in the saying, '*Odamal oru nalum irukka vendam*'. *Odu*, in this saying, refers to the recital of the Vedas and in Malayalam, Vedic recitation is called *Othu*. The dedication of our *karma* (action) to God, will help to cleanse our hearts and lead us to God-realisation, which is the sole purpose of life.

Panchopachara

The five sense organs, namely, eyes, ears, nose, tongue and touch, give us an awareness of the fundamental elements, which, in diverse combinations, constitute the universe. Like a receiving radio set, these organs receive the various impulses from outside and carry them to our brain. That is why they are called the *jnanendriyas*. The tongue, which performs the function of a *jnanendriya* by identifying tastes with the aid of saliva, is also a *karmendriya*, because it is also employed in speech. The sense of touch is present in all parts of the body, except in the hair and in the nails. The senses, *roopa, rasa, gandha, sparsha and sabda* (form, taste, smell, touch and sound) are the five means by which we get acquainted with the external universe. Corresponding to these



is our duty to gratefully offer all these things which afford us the right kind of joy to God, the Giver, first and then enjoy them as His *prasada* or gift. According to the *Gita* if we enjoy these things without offering them first to the Giver, it would tantamount to theft. It is this offering of the objects of the five-fold joys that is known as *Panchopachara* to God,

five senses, there are five elements in the universe, which are the *asrayas* or the repositories of the senses. These elements are the *pancha bhootas* - *prithvi, apa, tejas, vayu and akasa* (earth, water, light, air and ether and they are the repositories respectively of *gandha, rasa, roopa, sparsha* and *sabda*.) Behind each element is a Devata, presiding over and investing it with the appropriate character and power. These Devatas are, in their turn, manifestations of the Supreme Being, who diversifies Himself in these forms.

Each of the five senses contributes to our joy in life. Good food, delectable music, fragrant smell, beautiful art, cool breeze and soothing moonlight add to our joy and happiness. All these good things in life come to us through God's grace, for, by ourselves, we cannot produce even a grain of rice. That being so, it behoves us to think of Him from whom they emanate, the God whose aspects are the divinities presiding over the elements, which determine the senses and their respective sensations. It

namely the offering of *gandha, pushpa, dhoopa, deepa and naivedya*. We are also enjoined to make these offerings mentally (*manasika pooja*), when performing the *japa* of a *mantra* to the presiding deity of that *mantra*. Thus if our *jnanendriyas* and their stimuli are reverentially offered to the Paramatma, then we shall not be inclined to misuse these *indriyas* or sense organs. By such dedication to God, we deflect them from evil propensities and sublimate them to a divine goal. Thereby we obtain spiritual merit or *punya*.

While *roopa, rasa, gandha, sabda and sparsa*, are the minimum sources of material pleasures there are other things which make for life's comfort, like house, clothes, conveyance, etc. These too, which we acquire, are to be used only after they have been offered to God. All such offerings are included in, what is known as *shodasopachara*. And then there are other sources of enjoyment like, music, dance, chariot, elephant, horse, etc., applicable in the case of highly-placed

persons and which may be regarded as luxuries for the common man. All these should also be offered to God before being appropriated for use by us and they are included in the 64 or *chatus-shashti upacharas*.

All these *upacharas* come within the ambit of the rituals of worship. It may be asked, "Why all these elaborate rituals? Will not silent prayer do?" The answer is to be found, if we rightly understand the significance of these ritualistic offerings, namely, that a true devotee acknowledges the ultimate source and the inner substance of these objects of his enjoyment and uses them only after tendering them to that source in humble gratitude. Since only the best and the purest should be offered to God and since nothing should be enjoyed which is not so offered, this practice will ensure that every man will seek and take delight only in such things as can be fit objects of such offering. This will go a long way in making our lives perfect and pure. If these rituals are not preserved and observed, people are apt to forget their significance and deviate from proper conduct in life.

The maximum amount of right and ennobling pleasures will be vouchsafed to us if we surrender ourselves at the feet of God. Addressing the Divine Mother in his *Arya Satakam*, Mooka Kavi sings:

*Leeye purahara- Jaye maye tava
taruna-pallanachhaye*

*Charane chandrabharane kanchee-
sarane natartisamharane.*

The poet refers to the *taruna-pallava-chhaya* of Her *charana*, the shadow of Her tender feet which assuages the afflictions of those who take refuge in them. Under

that shadow, even tortures will have no sting. Saint 'Tirunavukkarasu Nayanar, known also as Vageesa, sang in the same strain when he was thrown into an active lime kiln by his enemies. When asked how he felt within the burning kiln, he exclaimed that in his state of absolute surrender (*saranagati*) to the Lord, he enjoyed in the kiln the highest delight which each sense organ can give. The flawless music of the Veena, the cooling rays of the full moon, the bracing freshness of the southern breeze on a hot day, the verdant fullness of early spring and the satisfaction of the bees drinking honey from the lotus in bloom, all these, he said, were his in a superlative degree, while he resigned himself at the shade of his Lord's feet. The pleasures enumerated above are the enjoyments derived through the five sense organs. Though the Saint did not himself drink the nectar from the lotus, he derived satisfaction from the sight of bees hovering over the lotus flower, after drinking honey to the full, even as a hospitable householder derives satisfaction of having partaken of the food himself, while offering everything he has to his guests.

Thus God is the source of all the pleasures that we enjoy in this world and they reside in Him in their excellence and perfection. He will vouchsafe them to us, warding off our afflictions, if we would but resign ourselves absolutely at His holy feet. It is in this consciousness of deriving our joys and pleasures from Him, that we offer various things to Him in our *panchopachara*.



Vastu Shastra and Temples

PROF. P. THIRUGNANASAMBANDHAN

Ananda K. Coomaraswamy in his essay on 'Indian Architecture' observes, 'The Vedic ritual required neither images nor temples, but the non-Vedic cults such as those of the dragon (Nagas), the tree-spirits (Yakshas) and the goddesses may have had permanent shrines with images and wooden temples'. It is only in the latest phase of Vedic literature that we find reference to temples and images. Temple architecture, however, had grown up long before the Gupta period for the *Matsya Purana* refers to eighteen architects including Bhrigu, Atri, Vasishtha, Vishvakarma, Maya, Narada and several others. (ch. 255). It is traditionally held that Vishvakarma is the architect of the North and Maya of the South.

Works on architecture like *Tantrasamuccaya* and *Manasara* and Shaiva and Vaishanava *agamas* deal not only with the construction of temples, moulding and installation of images, but in certain texts also modes of worship of images. *Samaranganasutradhara* of Bhoja refers to temples of different kinds such as Meru, Mandara, Kailasa, Nandana, Sarvatobhadra, etc. numbering about twenty. Similar names with details occur in other *Vastu Shastra* texts like *Vishvakarmaprakasha* and even in *Bhavisya-purana*. Down south, saint Tirunavukkarasar refers to types of temples such as *Perunkoyil*, *Karakakkoyil*, *Jnalarkoyil*, *Kokutikkoyil*, *Ilankoyil*,

Manikkoyil, *Alakkoyiland Punkoyil*.

The temple is referred to by several names such as *devalaya*, *devatayatana*. *Mandira*, *Prasada*, *Devagriha*, etc. The *Devagriha* or temple of God is perhaps modeled on the *Rajagriha* or royal palace. One can see a number of

Bhumis or storeys in a temple as in a palace. The *Samaranganasutradhara* speaks about one to twelve storeys and gives their measurements. *Silparatna* speaks about seven storeys of *Dvaragopuras* or towers erected over the ramparts at the entrance. *Kashyapa Silpa* refers to as many as sixteen 'talas' or storeys.

Brihatsamhita says that temples may be built on the outskirts of forests, at the foot of mountains, banks of rivers and in cities with gardens (56-8).

What does the temple stand for? The *Vastu Shastras* identify the temples with the universe. Its substance and shape, says the *Vastu* section of *Agnipurana*, is *Prakriti*. The primordial Nature and the central image enshrined therein is the *Parama-purusha*, the Supreme Spirit. The entire temple is an organic whole consisting of the various limbs of that *Purusha*. *Agnipurana* (LXI. 23-25) says that the *shikara* is the head, the *dvara* (door) the mouth, *kalasa* the hair, *greeva* the throat, *shukanasa* the nose, *bhadras* the arms, *Vedi* the shoulders, pillar the foot, etc. *Ishanasivagurudevaddhati* states that the *prasada* (lit. seat of God) is made up of the presence of Shiva and Shakti and of the principles of existence (*tattvas*) beginning from the earth right up to Shakti.

Before building a temple, one has to draw a ground-plan called *Vastu-mandala*. It is divided into 64 or 81 squares. Of all the

geometrical forms the square takes the pride of place in India. If the order or division of the squares is not adhered to as laid down in the *Shilpa* texts, it may spell disaster to the builder. The central square is called *Brahmasthan* and other deities are located in particular squares, Indra in the east, Nivritti in the south-west and so on. It is believed that these gods press down the *Vastu-purusha*, an *asura* who is lying flat under the surface of the earth. In the village or town plan, the temple of Shiva is to be located in the north-west, of Vishnu in the west and so on.

The *Ishanasiva Gurudeva Paddhati* refers to three kinds of temples the one made of stone or brick (*sancita*), brick or wood (*asancita*) and brick and wood (*upasancita*). Ancient temples made of wood are naturally lost. Mahendra Pallava was the first monarch in Tamilnadu to erect stone temples without bricks, timber, metals or mortar as recorded in the 7th century Mandagappattu inscription. Temples dedicated to Shiva, Vishnu, Balarama, Muruga and Indra were in existence in the days of *Silappadikaram*. The North Indian Shilpa texts like *Vishvakarmaprakasha* deal with the temples noted for their 'amalaka' feature and texts of the southern school like *Shilparatna* deal with the *gopura* feature of temples. By and large, both the schools deal with a large number of common themes.

Texts like *Hayasirshapancharatra*, *Kamikagama*, *Agnipurana*, *Manasara* etc. deal with temples of Nagara, Vesara and Dravida types which stand for the square type, circular type and octagonal type of

the base of the structure of the main shrine respectively. Later texts like *Kasyapa Shilpa* refer to other types also like the ellipsoidal and apsidal. These types are not necessarily geographical, because they are found distributed in the same region.

Speaking about the curvilinear *shikhara* with the *amalaka* on it, Stella Kramrisch says that it pre-supposes a central shaft which having traversed the entire body of the *prasada*, would emerge above it, support and be rivetted in its crown, the *Amalaka* (*J.I.S.O.A.XEE* p.188). In shape it is a ring stone. It is also the base whence the *stupi* or the finial rises from the vessel called *amritakalasha* which is supposed to have been fashioned by Vishvakarma from the different parts of the immortal gods. This golden kalasha on the top of the *shikhara* represents the immortal region of the gods, while the *nidhikalasha* placed under the image in the *sanctum sanctorum* represents the ephemeral earthly life sustained by impermanent riches. If a man surveys the shrine from the dark chamber of *garbhagriha* with the *nidhikalasha* under it upwards, it leads him to the *amritakalasha* at the top beyond which there is nothing but cosmic space, the first manifestation of consciousness. This reminds one of the famous saying of the Upanishad '*Mrityor mamritam gamaya*' (Lead me on from death to immortality.)

The term '*vimana*' (from '*ma*' to measure) means a temple whose parts such as the pillar, wall, door, dome, finial, etc. are measured, keeping in view the due proportion as laid down in the *shilpashastras* based on engineering as well as artistic considerations. The scale of measurement to be adopted in a particular temple is

essentially related to the measurement of the central image in the *garbhagriha*. For example, *Brihatsamhita* lays down that the width of the outer wall should be twice the width of the *garbhagriha*.

A temple usually has four gateways facing the four cardinal directions. The *Ishanashiva Gurudevapaddhati* consistent with its Saiva leanings, calls the doors in the east, south and north after the names of *kalatattvas*, as *Shanti-dvara*, *Vidyadvara*, *Nivrittidvara* and *pratishtha dvara* (3.12.17).

Pillars of various number of faces in their shaft are called differently "*rucaka*" with four, '*vajra*' with eight, '*dvigunavajra*' with sixteen, '*pratinaka*' with thirty-two faces and '*vritta*' circular. In *Mayamata*, pillars with 4, 8 and 16 faces are called *Brahmakanta*, *Vishnukanta* and *Saumyakanta* and the circular one is called *Rudrakanta*.

The *garbhagriha* with the central image is the embryo, so to say, of the all-pervading Supreme Spirit. It is filled with darkness illumined by the flickering lamp. One is reminded of the Rig-Vedic passage, 'In the beginning there was darkness' (CX.129.3). The entire temple with the *garbhagriha*, *ardhamandapa*, *mahamandapa*, *snapana mandapa shalas*, *prakaras*, *gopuras*, etc. represent the world with all the living beings and inert matter. The images of gods, semi-divine beings, like *gandharvas* and *yakshas*, men birds and animals, trees and creepers, all these represent the manifestations of the Supreme Spirit, the *Satchidananda*. As one turns his face in different directions he learns sermons from the Stones; there are puranic legends that unravel the mysteries of life of the ages past and



regions afar. In short, one is able to visualise in one sweep the vast panorama drawn on the canvas of space and time.

As a man circumambulates the five prakaras starting from *maryada* and proceeding along the *bahyahara*, *madhyahara*, *antahara* and *garbhagriha* (the last one mentally), he is supposed to transcend the *annamaya*, *pranamaya*, *manomaya* and *vijnanamaya koshas* and merge in the *anandamayakosha*, the essence of his being. This circumambulatory passage, like the vertical ascent from the *garbhagriha* to the *stupi* already referred to points to the ultimate goal of human conduct viz; attainment of Supreme Bliss.



Temples in 'Divyaprabandham'

S. SATYAMURTI AYYANGAR

The extraordinary traits of God, namely, *sowlabhya* (easy accessibility), *sowshilya* (loving condescension) and *Vatsalya* (tender solicitude) which are inseparable from Him, are, no doubt, displayed by Him in the high heaven also, where He stays in His transcendental (*para*) manifestation *Vasudevosi purnah* but in that realm of perfect bliss and perpetual splendour, these qualities can hardly be perceptible, in such a marked degree as they are in this land of dark nescience, delusion and despair. There is all the difference between the two spheres, as between a light burning imperceptibly, in broad daylight and the one shining forth, in a dark room. Like unto the whole cosmos, confined in an atom, the Supreme Lord not only pervades the 'Image-form' through His unique power of omnipresence, but by virtue of His *Sowlabhya* (easy accessibility), He makes it His special abode, according to the worshipper's wish, so as to be within his/her easy reach. Here, He is the very acme of simplicity, hanging on willy-nilly to the frail mankind and trying to redeem them, at all costs. Even so, the pilgrim centres, lauded by the Azhvar saints, in their ecstatic hymns, collectively known as *Divya Prabandham*, stand on a separate footing of their own. Soaked in God-love, the way the Azhvars took to these centres was marvelous. Unlike the worldly men hurrying through temples

mechanically, like race-horses, the Azhvars, blest with mystic vision, full of radiant joy, admired every little bit, the towers and turrets, the exquisite charm of the deity, the local inhabitants, the grandeur of the dwelling houses, the adjoining fields and orchards, all these acquiring refreshing new dimensions in their songs, bespeaking their poetic excellence, well-matched with their spiritual ardour. No wonder then, the pilgrim centres, lauded by them are extolled as *Divya Deshas-divine* territories, *par excellence*. These are 108 in all, including the high heaven (*Tirunadu*) and the Milk-Ocean (*Tirupparkadal*) which are altogether on different planes outside the ken of the sense-buried, earth-bound mortals, but which the saints could envision, right from this abode, of the remaining 106 *Divya Deshas* spread over this country, eleven are in the North and the rest are in the South; there is a heavy concentration in the territory comprised in the former Chola Kingdom, the pilgrim centres in that area alone being as many as 40.

Sri Vaishnava tradition has fixed the number of the Azhvars, once for all, at twelve, including Madhurakavi and Sri Andal, since their peerless devotion is deemed unapproachable by others, however exalted their illumination or purity. Sri Ranganatha, enshrined in the temple at Srirangam, who, according to the traditional account (*Brahmanda Purana*), is the very first, self-emerged (*svayam vyakta*), iconic manifestation of *Narayana*, has also the unique distinction of having been sung by all the Azhvars, in their soul-stirring psalms, with the exception of Madhurakavi, who sang just eleven stanzas

devoted to praise solely his Master (*Nammazhvar*), other than whom he knew no God. Tiruvenkatam (Tirumala, in Andhra Pradesh) comes next, having been sung by all except Madhurakavi and Tondaradippodi Azhvar, who stood rivetted, as it were, to Ranganatha.

Although he remained seated in a lotus posture, inside the hollow of the tamarind tree in the temple at Azhvar Tirunagari (deep in the south, in Tamilnadu), Nammazhvar pined for rendering blemishless service to the Lord, enshrined in Tiruvenkatam, in ever so many ways, without intermission. This was because he could visualise, from where he was, even celestials, headed by Visvaksena, the Commander of the posts in heaven, coming down in their strength, attracted by Sri Venkateshwara's glorious trait of easy accessibility which they cannot experience in heaven, in such an ample measure. Actually, the Azhvar saw the celestials being swept off their feet by the Lord's amazing simplicity and saw them dropping on the ground, unawares: the garlands set with the colourful, non-decaying flowers of the ultra-mundane region, held in their hands. He avers that even the mere contemplation of service to the Lord in the temple at Tiruvenkatam will root out all our Sins.

Placing, in the forefront, his *akinchanya* (abject destitution) and *ananyagatitva* (exclusive dependence on the Lord), he took refuge at the feet of Sri Venkateshwara, seeking the good offices of the Divine Mother, inseparably poised on His broad chest *Tiruvaymozhi* VI: 10: 10). Likewise, he poured out his heart, in rapturous contemplation of the great glory

of the Lord as enshrined in many other temples, spread all over. Great indeed was his yearning to drink, in full, the nectarean charm of Sri Azhagar, enshrined in the temple in Tirumalirum-cholai (near Madurai, in Tamilnadu). He however, felt miserable that his own limitations thwarted the fulfillment of his inordinate longing to have his heart's fill of that infinite beauty (*ibid.* EEI-1). He also conjured up the mental vision of *Aramudhan* (insatiable-ambrosia), reclining on His serpent-bed in the temple at Tirukkudantai (Kumbakonam, Tamilnadu) and thawed down in rapturous admiration. He looked upon the deity as enshrined in the temple at Tirumohur (near Madurai), as his unfailing guide, come down to earth, to escort him on his heaven-bound journey (*ibid.* X-1). Towards the end of his grand hymnal (*Tiruvaymozhi*), which marks the consummation of his God-love and the grand finale, namely, his attainment of the Lord's lotus feet in heaven, he takes leave of the deity, as enshrined in many of these temples, in quick succession.

The first three Azhvars, in the chronological order, Poigai, Puttam and Pey, were all flower-born and they were indeed three spiritual flowers, commissioned by the Lord, to impart spiritual fragrance to the mundane world. Their three hymnals, each comprising of 100 verses, which may again be likened to three lotus flowers of one hundred petals each, reflect mostly the transcendental glory of Sri Narayana and His Divine Consort, barring stray reference, here and there, to Srirangam and Tirupati and one or two other temples like Tiruvallikeni (in Madras). Next in the chronological sequence comes Tirumazhisai Azhvar, who did a lot of weary trekking

over many a wasteland of philosophic thought, for years and finally alighted on the solid truth that Narayana is the Supreme Reality, the end of all knowledge. It is said that the deity, reclining on the serpent bed in the temple at Tiruvekka (Kanchi region), responded to his call, twice, when once he asked Him to fold up His serpent bed and follow him outside the territory and again, to get back along with him and recline on His serpent-bed, as before. This was because one of the Azhvar's disciples incurred the wrath of the king for refusing to praise him. The king later apologised. The Azhvar addressed the deity resting on His serpent-bed in Kumbakonam as follows:

"My Lord, relaxing in Kudantai
on Kaveri bank!
May I see Thee rise and speak?"

Finding the Lord about to do his bidding, the Azhvar begged His pardon. The deity he thought, must be extremely tired all that fatigue having been caused by His breath-taking exploits as Rama and Krishna. Thus he synchronises the two aspects of *Vibhava* (incarnate forms of God) and *Archa* (iconic manifestation of God). And so, he prayed that the Lord should stretch Himself, as before. Even today, one can see the deity (*Moola vighraha*) in that temple, half lying and half risen (*uttana shayi*), a posture proclaiming the Lord's inordinate love for His devotees and readiness to grant the wish of the devotee. Greatly moved by the Lord's gesture, the Azhvar sang the song of benediction.

The temple of Vatapatrashayi in Srivilliputhur (deep south) in Tamilnadu is closely linked with Periazhvar and his foster-

daughter Andal, believed to be an incarnation of Bhudevi (Mother Earth) and also canonised, included in the holy band of Azhvars. Vishnuchitta's overwhelming God-love earned him the appellation of Periazhvar (the great Azhvar), by dint of his unique concern for the Lord's safety, reversing the role of God from that of 'Protector' to 'the protected'. Father and daughter have been immortalised through their glorious hymnals, *Tiruppallandu* (where the Azhvar is seen blessing the Lord, instead of invoking His blessing), *Periazhvar Tirumozhi*, *Tiruppavai* and *Nacchiyar 'Tirumozhi*. The schematic recital in a chorus, of Andal's *Tiruppavai*, in particular, is an integral part of the daily routine in all Vaishnava temples and household worship too. The proceedings in the temple at Srivilliputhur are so conducted that one can feel the living presence of Andal and her illustrious father, even at this distance of time. Not being the daughter of an earthly, dame Andal, who was just picked up, as the immaculate child in Vishnuchitta's *tulasi* garden, elected to wed Sri Ranganatha. She swore that she would marry no mortal, being wholly earmarked for God. Ranganatha did on His part, respond well, as is His wont and commanded the parties concerned, including Vallabhadeva, the Pandyan king, to go ahead with the arrangements for the wedding. Andal was, therefore, taken in a bridal procession, all the way from Srivilliputhur to Srirangam. She ascended the soft serpent-couch of Sri Ranganatha, who pressed her more and more to His side, till she disappeared altogether from the physical vision of the mortals, gathered around. But even today Andal is gracing

the temple at Srirangam, in her iconic manifestation, in a beautiful shrine, dedicated to her near the southern entrance. Likewise, Tiruppanazhvar also passed into God, body and soul, when ushered in the Lord's immediate presence by the temple priest, under divine compulsion. This Azhvar sang just ten stanzas known as 'Amalan Adipiran', in rapturous admiration of Ranganatha on His serpent-bed and His exquisite physical charm, from the feet upwards. In the concluding stanza, he averred that his eyes would see nothing else, after having beheld Arangan, the ambrosia *par excellence*.

In the fourth decad of his hymn, known as '*Perumal Tirumozhi*', we see Kulasekhara aspiring for low positions, even those of inanimate *things-Champaka* tree, shrubby growth of grass, weeds, mountain peak, jungle stream, the foot-step in the immediate presence of Sri Venkateshwara and so on, the underlying idea being the coveted association with the sacred Mount Tiruvenkatam, under all circumstances. In the seventh stanza of the tenth decad of the said hymnal, the Azhvar affirms that he became a King, not by wearing the earthly crown on his head, but by bedecking his head with the lotus feet of the Lord as enshrined in the temple at Chidambaram.

Vipranarayana, later known as Tondaradippodi Azhvar, felt so fortified by his knowledge of the Lord's glorious name *Govinda*, that he even went to the extent of saying that he will trample upon the heads of Yama and his horde whom he was dreading earlier (first verse of *Tirumalai*). He would, however, place his head reverently at the holy feet of the godly. In

another hymnal, '*Tiruppalli Ezhucchi*' (waking up the-Ever-awake), he wakes up Sri Ranganatha, seemingly asleep on His serpent-bed in the temple at Srirangam, in ten stanzas. In the concluding verse, he prays to the Lord that he be enlisted by Him, in the service of His devotees, thereby bringing home to us that there is no greater bliss than serving the Lord's devotees, their devotees and so on, in that endless chain. Tirumangai Azhvar, the last of the Azhvars, was a natural genius and a great poet. He has bequeathed to posterity six grand works, one of which comprises as many as 1084 verses and is rightly called the Grand Apocalypse. It is the *Periya Tirumozhi*. The four works of Nammazhvar embody the essence of the four *Vedas*; the six works of Tirumangai correspond to the six *Vedangas*. Spiritually regenerated by God Himself, Parakala (as he *is* known) born in a caste full of fierce passions, became a saint of deep devotion, full of spiritual illumination, adored and revered by the highest in the land and canonised as an Azhvar. He is said to have traversed the entire country, end to end, lauding with great fervour, the Deity enshrined in several temples, the townships and their residents of great rectitude and moral conduct. During his sojourn, he dedicated a bunch of verses to the holy shrines in the north-Tiruppiruti, (on the Himalayas) Badarikashrama, salagrama (in Nepal), Naimisharanya. Ahobilam and Tiruvenkatam. Coming back south, he paid homage to the Deity at the temple at Tiruvellur, near Madras and passed on to Tiruninravur, towards Madras. The saint left the place, then moved down to Mahabalipuram after worshipping and lauding the deities in the

temples *en route* at Tiruvallikkeni (Madras city) and Tiruneermalai. Moving further south, the Azhvar reached Tiruvintalur. By the time, he started having a rapport with the Deity in the temple, the latter went out of the former's sight. Deeply grieved, the Azhvar uttered "O, Resident of Intalur! may you remain prosperous (in your seclusion!)" This melted the heart of the Deity, who let the saint enjoy His sight, as long as he wished. The grand festival celebrated in the temple at Srirangam, during the Tamil month, Margazhi, (December to January) extending over as many as twenty days is said to owe its origin to this saint. During the said festival, all the four thousand hymns of the Azhvares, comprised in that grand compendium, known as *Divya Prabandham* are sung by the temple bards, with great fervour in the grand assemblage of Sri Ranganatha and His Divine Consorts (*Utsava Murtis*), the icons of Azhvares and Acharyas also distinguished men of pedigree and learning and other worshippers, much to their delectation.

These soul-stirring, mellifluous songs, when sung in a chorus, at the temples, are bound to melt down the stoniest of hearts and naturally keep the listeners spell-bound. Thanks to the pioneering work done by Saint Nathamuni and then vigorously followed up by Saint Ramanuja, the schematic recital of these hymns, full of light, bliss and harmony, in the temples, by the holy band of Sri Vaishnavas, is in vogue down to this day.



Vaishnava Agamas

Dr. V. VARADACHARI

The *Agamas* are the ancient texts which form, like the *Vedas*, the sources for Hindu religious doctrines and practices. They are dependent upon and are posterior to the *Vedas* in date. They are very helpful for practical applications of the religious principles.

Four chief traits could be noted as characterising the *Agamas*. Firstly, *Shakti*, which is power, is held to be inert by its nature. The *Agamas* consider it to be sentient and as responsible for creation, maintenance and dissolution of the universe. It is closely associated with the Ultimate Reality as Its consort.

Secondly, the deity, which receives worship, is personal with specific names such as Vishnu, Shiva and others, Thirdly, the *yantra* or the idol is to be worshipped as God. Lastly, all people are declared to be eligible for personally offering worship to the deity. There are, of course, certain restrictions in getting eligibility.

The act of worship is varied and yet could be taken to involve four phases, namely, *mandala*, *yantra*, *nyasa* and *mudra*. Among them, the *mandala* consists in drawing of diagrams on the ground with coloured materials. What is drawn is varied and is held to be the spot for the descent of the deity. *Tantra* is the drawing of lines on sheets of metal with the letters which constitute the *mantra* of the deity to be worshipped, inscribed along the lines in accordance with the directions laid down in the *Agamas*. This then represents the body of God with the *mantras* standing

for the life of God. *Nyasa* is touching particular parts of the human body with the finger-tips, so as to arouse spiritual power. After this, the aspirant has to touch the parts of the body of the deity with the finger-tips whereupon the idol becomes God. The *mudras* are hand-poses, which are to be displayed for conveying one's intentions to the deity. The *Agamas* are of three kinds, Shakta, Shaiva and Vaishnava. In the first kind, Shakti, power, is treated as supremely high to which Shiva and others are subordinate. Shiva with Parvati (Shakti) and Vishnu with Sree (Shakti) are the deities in the Shaiva and Vaishnava *Agamas*, respectively.

The Vaishnava *Agama* is of two kinds, *Vaikhanasa* and *Pancharatra*. The Vaikhanasa kind is earlier in date. The *Mahabharata Shantiparva* tells us that exclusive worship (*ekantidharma*) was taught to Brahma by Vishnu. It was taught by Brahma to the sages, Phenapas, who in their turn transmitted it to Vaikhanasa. Soma was taught this by Vaikhanasa. This *dharma* then vanished. It was revived by Brahma who gave it to Soma from whom Rudra got it. Again, it vanished. Thus this *dharma* went out of practice for seven times and for the eighth time it was taught to Narada by Narayana. It becomes clear that the same *ekantidharma* has two representations- *Vaikhanasa* and *Pancharatra* and that the *Pancharatra* is only a later version of this *dharma*. Certain accretions were made in this. So the *Pancharatra* does not materially differ from the *Vaikhanasa* system.

The name '*Vaikhanasa*' denotes a descendant and/or a disciple of Vikhanas, an ancient sage and author of the

Kalpasutras known after his name. The *ekantidharma*, which was taught to *Vaikhanasa* by the Phenapas, was preserved by the followers of *Vaikhanasa* who were also called by this name. This *dharma* was not transmitted by them to anyone outside their group and so has remained their exclusive *dharma* for their own followers. Others have no authority to practice them. The *yantra*, *nyasa* and *mudra* were not felt by them as part of the *Agama* features and so were left out.

In this system, the Supreme Being is Narayana with Sree who represents Shakti. *Chetana* and *achetana* are the two aspects of Shakti, the former representing the *Jeevas* and the latter, the material world. At God's will, the world gets created. *Japa*, *homa*, *archana* and *yoga* are the four means for getting at the Supreme Being, but this system recommends the *archa* form as the best method.

God is called *Bhagavan*, from whom arises four deities with the names, 'Purusha', 'Satya', 'Achyuta' and 'Aniruddha'.

This *Agama* is very practical in the sense that it prescribes elaborate details, rules and regulations for the selection of sites, building the structures and conducting festivals, both private and public. The ritual of expiation for sins of omission and commission gets a very detailed exposition. Many *homas* are required to be performed in order to propitiate God.

There are texts written by Atri, Bhrigu, Kashyapa and Mareechi, who, it is held, wrote what was taught by Vaikhanasa himself.

The name '*Pancharatra*' is derived from the five-fold division of the day (*ratra*): *abhigamana*, going to the shrine in the

morning after performing religious duties, *upadana*, collection of the materials for worship, *ijya*, the actual act of worship, *svadhyaya*, study of the sacred texts and *yoga*, meditation on God. Hence the name of this system.



The Ultimate Reality is Lakshminarayana (Vishnu with Shree). Shree represents Shakti, otherwise known as *Prakriti*. In its *chetana* form, it is *Jiva* and the *achetana* aspect is the inert material world. This Reality has countless auspicious qualities without the least tinge of defect. For

practical purposes like creation, worship, or concentration to be practised by the *Jeeva*, the qualities are held to be six in number: *jnana*, (knowledge), *veerya* (virility), *bala* (strength), *aisvarya* (supremacy), *shakti*, (potentiality) and *tejas* (lustre).

The Supreme person is also called as Paravasudeva who divides Himself into Vyuha Vasudeva, Shamkarsana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha. These represent the *Vyooha* form, while the Ultimate Reality, the *Para* form. Then there are the *vibhava* forms, *avatars* (divine descents) such as Matsya, Kurma and others and also Hayagriva, Dattatreya and others. There is the *archa* form, the idol that is worshipped in places like Srirangam. The last form is that of Inner Controller, *Antaryamin*, present within each *jiva*. Thus, there are five forms of God in this system.

Like the *Vaikhyanasa* system, this too attaches importance to the temple, its construction, conduct of festivals, etc.

In the *Vaikhyanasa* system, only male members of the Brahmin community belonging to the *Vaikhyanasa-sutra*, are eligible. On the other hand, the *Pancharatra*

system is liberal in outlook and grants eligibility for one and all.

As far as temples are concerned, the descendants of Maunjyayana, Aupagayana and other three sages, who were taught this system at the beginning, have the primary eligibility for doing worship there.

Others who can get initiation, have also eligibility which is of a secondary kind. Here, only Brahmins are eligible. Either the idol or *salagrama* can be worshipped in the house. For this, all are eligible without exception.

Before getting initiation, every person shall have the *Panchasamskara*, an act of sacramental nature. It must be received from an *acarya*. The five *samskaras* are (1) *tapa*-marking the shoulder blades with the heated symbols of the discus and conch of Vishnu, (2) *pundra*-marking the forehead and specific parts of the body with vertical lines from the eyebrows drawn parallel with white mud and red vertical streak in between them, (3) *mantra* - *which* stands for the three esoteric *rahasyas*, *mula mantra*, *dvaya* and *charama sloka*, (4) *ijya*-actual worship of the deity and (5) *dasyanama*, -a name to be taken by a devotee of Vishnu. Every Vaishnava is obliged to have this. With this, a Vaishnava has to qualify himself or herself for undergoing initiation for doing *puja*. The act of initiation is *samanya* or *vishesha* according to the inheritance, tradition, aptitude and capacity.

Mantras are of two kinds, *vaidika* and *tantrika*. The *Vaikhanasa* adopts the *Vaidika mantras* alone. On the other hand, the *Pancharatra* has to make some provision for all, as there are persons who are not qualified for the study of the Vedas. Hence each deity has a *tantrika mantra* which is made up of the name of the deity, some Vedic words and *bijaksharas*. These *mantras* could be taught to anyone.

Karma, *sankhya*, *yoga* and *sarvasamnyasa*; Of these, *karma* stands for *homa* or worship of the deity in *arca* form which may be in

the form of idol or *salagrama*. *Sankhya* means knowledge of Reality. *Yoga* stands for a modified and improved version of the *Patanjala Yoga*. *Sarvasanyasa* denotes the path of self-surrender which is also known by such names as *saranagati*, *nyasa* and *prapatti*. The state of *moksha* is *sayujya*. While the tenets and practices, which are enjoined by the *Vaikhanasa* system is not open to those who are not, by birth, the followers of the *Vaikhanasa-Sutra*, those of the *Pancharatra* could be practised by all. Hence all Vaishnavites follow the *Pancharatra* tradition. *Pancasamskara*, *Prapatti*, observances like *Srijayanti*, *Narasimhajayanti* and others mark the religious aspects of the Vaishnava way of life, all of them based upon the directions contained in the *Pancharatra* texts.

The four sages of the *Vaikhanasa* system are the authors of texts on the system. Most of their compositions are lost and what is available is only one text of each author and rarely more than one. All of them teach almost the same procedure for the construction of temples, installation of idols and worship of the deity with slightly more details of some aspect or another. The home of this system cannot be ascertained. The followers of this system adopt only *Krishna yajurveda*, which is now confined to South India.

The *Pancharatra* texts are more than 200 in number and here, too, many works are lost. There is no particular author for any of them. True to the *Agama* tradition, these texts are divided into four parts, *Jnana*, *yoga*, *kriya* and *charya*. All the texts do not cover all these but have mostly the last two parts. The native home of this *Agama* seems to be Kashmir. The followers

of the tradition are not the Vaishnavite community as we have today, but the inheritors of the tradition by birth and belonging to the *Katyayanasutra* and *Shukla yajurveda*.

The *Jayakhya*, *Laksmitantra*, *Ahribudhnyasamhita*, *Sattvatasamhita*, *Pauskarsamhita*, *Sanatkumarasamhita*, *Paramesvarasamhita*, *Isvarasam-hitAnd Padmasamhita* are the most important texts.

Both the *Vaikhanasa* and the *Pancharatra* systems should have had their rich development only in South India and Tamilnadu in particular. This is evident from the use of Tamil expressions in these and from the numerous temples in the South including Andhra and Karnataka regions.

Apart from those who belong to the *Vaikhanasa sutra* and *Katyayana sutra* as their followers, the Vaishnava community as such does not fully adopt the traditions of either but bears the impact of the *Pancharatra* alone to a limited extent.

The temples in South India, which are governed by the *Vaikhanasa* are by far too many when compared to those of the *Pancharatra* tradition. The shrines at Tirumalai, Triplicane, Azhagarkoil near Madurai and others follow the *Vaikhanasa* tradition. Those at Srirangam, Kanchipuram, Melkote in the Karnataka region, Kumbakonam and others have the *Pancharatra* following. All the same, every temple of Vishnu in South India, including Kerala, is governed by the *Agama* system of worship.



The Saivagamas

M. ARUNACHALAM

The Origin of the Agamas

The Saiva Agamas are some of the earliest books in the Sanskrit language on the Saiva religion and philosophy, written over a period of several centuries before the Christian era. They represent an independent class of writing by very early seers, who had an inward experience and enlightenment from the Supreme Being and who were also perhaps influenced by the *Vedas* in their original form. Just as the *Vedas* are said to have originated from the four faces of Brahma, the *Agamas* are said to have originated from the five faces of Paramesvara. This in no way affects the statement that they were written by early seers. The Divine revelation was made to the seers who put them down in writing after a long period of oral transmission.

They had realised in their lives and thoughts the general truths taught by the early *Upanishads*. So far as Saivism is concerned, these seers were not only men from the north. They were essentially representatives of All India and they reflected in their depth of thoughts, modes of meditation and forms of worship and in their writings, the inherent Theism of the South. The Theism of the South or rather, the Saivism of the Tamilians, was the growth of an unbroken tradition probably from the pre-historic past and this had three elements fused into it. These are worship of idols and images, both in the shrines throughout the land and in the devotees' own homes, symbolism and an

inward meditation and realisation, These three were not separate compartments, but basically one harmonious integrated whole.

When the *Upanishads* were added on to the *Vedas* in the course of the later centuries, they could not but be influenced by the religion and philosophy flourishing around them. These naturally embody a considerable volume of the thought of the *Agamic* scholars, because some of the early *Agamas* were earlier than these later *Upanishads* and the *Agamas* were much more alive and vibrating with life and activity than the *Upanishads*, because they dealt with definite and concrete objects and were practised in the daily lives of a large number of people, while the others dealt only with abstract concepts. The very fact that some *Upanishads* came to be written in the later stages shows that the followers of the original *Upanishads* had to take note of *Agamic* thoughts and, to bring them also into a single common fold, adopted the device of writing *further Upanishads*, to embrace fresh thought on the same subject. The *Saiva Upanishads* such as *Brhadjabala* did certainly come into existence long after the *Agamas*.

Meaning of the Term 'Agama'

Several etymological explanations have been offered for the term "*Agama*", One is that because it emanated from God, it is called the *Agama*, that which came from God. Another is that the three letters, "*a-ga-ma*" respectively denote *pati*, *pasu* and *pasa* (the self, the soul and the bonds) and that the *Agama* deals with all these three entities and their relationship and

hence this name.

A Sanskrit verse gives an interesting meaning for the three syllables "*a*", '*ga*' and '*ma*':

Agatam siva-vaktrebhyah,
gatam ca girija-mukhe,
Matam ca siva-bhaktanam,
agamam cheti kathyate.

'The *Agamas* originated from the faces of Siva, fell on the ears of Parasakti and spread in the world as the *mata* of the *Siva-bhaktas*. The *Agamas* take their name from the first letters of the words *agatam* (originated), *gatam* (fell) and *matam* (religion).

The common noun '*Agama*' simply means 'coming' or 'acquisition.' But in the *Saiva* school, a special root-meaning is indicated for the term.

It is given as *a*- knowledge, *ga*-liberation and *ma* - removal of the bonds. The *Agama* came to be called as such, since a study and adherence to its codes liberates the soul from bondage, causes realisation of the Supreme and ultimately confers eternal bliss.

Agamas are common to the three prominent schools and they are called *Agama* in *Saivism*, *Samhita* in *Vaishnavism* and *Tantra* in *Saktaism*.

Authority of the Agamas

The *Agamas* claim Vedic authority for their doctrines. Their doctrines are indeed theistic and such theism is not foreign to the *Upanishads*. The following *Agamic* passages may be seen to affirm the derivation of the *Agamas* from the *Veda*.

'The *Siddhanta* consists of the essence of the *Veda*' (*Suprabhedagama*); 'This *tantra* is of the essence of the *Vedas*'; 'This *siddhanta* knowledge which is the significance of *Vedanta* is supremely good' (*Makuta*). It has been suggested that the *Agamic* systems were developed out of the *Brahmanas* in the same way as the *Upanishads*, though at a much later stage and that some of the later *Upanishads*, like the *Svetasvatara*, which address the Supreme Being by a sectarian title and not as *Param Brahman*, as of yore, probably grew up under the shadow of the *Agamas*. The *Agamic* cult which was that of the generality of the people and the Vedic cult which was that of the priestly classes, officiating for themselves and for others, were both indigenous; they existed and grew up side by side from the earliest times without any extraneous influence; the distinction between the two was in no sense racial.

The *Agamas* are deemed to have scriptural authority and are often called the *Veda* and the fifth *Veda*. As a matter of fact, the Sanskrit *nighantu* names the *Veda* as the *Nigama* and the *Tantra* as the *Agama*. The '*Veda*' and the '*Agama*' both seem to have been denoted by the common term '*sruti*' up to the 11th century, after which period the above distinction of *Nigama* and *Agama* seems to have been adopted.

An interesting passage in the *Skanda Purana* gives the relative places of the *Vedas* and the *Agamas* in the form of Siva:

*Asya-madhye sthito vedah,
Deva-devasya bhasura,
Aksharam tu dantam,
Jihvayam tu Sivajnanam.*

"The *Vedas* are in the middle of the mouth,

the *aksharas* are the teeth and the *Agamas* (*Sivajnana*) are from the very tongue of Siva."

Value of the Agamas

The *Agamic* (*tantric*) texts, as we know them today, had for the most part preceded Buddhism and only the *Agamic* cult had been able gradually to swallow up Buddhism on the Indian sub-continent and ultimately to banish it altogether from the Indian soil; it was not the *Upanishadic* philosophy but the *Agamic* cult that was responsible for the supplanting of Buddhism and for the fusion of the salient features into the core of the Hindu religion.

Both the *Vedas* and the *Agamas* are *sruti*, handed down by word of mouth through generations before being reduced to writing; both are considered the revealed word of God (Siva for the *Agamas*) and hence they are *apaurusheya* and *nitya* (eternal); all the *puranas* speak of them as such, together and in the same breath, as *Vedagamas*; and later the *Sastra* literature of the different schools of Hinduism and their great preceptors also speak of them as such. Thus the *Agamas* are also *sabda-pramana* and lead to the self-luminous knowledge (*avabodha-pramana*).

All schools of Hinduism base their doctrines on the *Agamas*. The *Vedas* speak of many gods and the *Upanishads* speak of One *Brahman*. The *Agamas* are no less monistic and they do call their doctrines '*advaita*'; instead of abstract monism, they take into consideration the limitations of the average human mind and preach mono-theism.

A long line of eminent Sanskrit scholars in Saivism have held that although the *Vedas* are common to all, the *Agamas* are specific and had been revealed for the benefit of all castes and both the sexes. The names and works of Srikantha, Haradatta, Sivagrayogi, Appayya Deekshita and Sivajnanaswami may be recalled here.

Hinduism is a living religion, practised by more than 500 million people in India today. To whatever denomination a Hindu may belong today, his practice of his religion is governed not by the *Vedas* or the *Upanishads*, but by the *Agamas*, as pointed out by Swami Vivekananda, from the Himalayas to Kanyakumari.

Content of the Agamas

The *Vidyapada* (called the *Jnanapada* in the Tamil *sastras*) deals with the three entities in Saiva *Siddhanta-matter*, soul and God technically called *pasa*, *pasu* and *pati*. God or *pati* is here on without a second and He is the efficient cause of the universe. His inseparable part, Sakti (or Consciousness-Force), is the instrumental cause of the universe, while *maya* is the material cause. *Pasu* is the individual self (or soul) bound up in *samsara*.

The soul is bound up in three types of bonds called *anava* (the ego or ignorance), *karma* (or the cycle of action and its effects) and *maya* (the material bond of illusion). The bonds obstruct the realisation and the knowledge of *Pati* or God. The knowledge accrues only through His Grace, to obtain which the soul has to strive by virtuous conduct and disinterested deeds and by a supreme effort of self-surrender. The *Agamas* help the soul to follow this

path of self-surrender.

The *Kriyapada* is the second. It elaborates the several types of *diksha* (or initiation into the worship of Siva), the process of building Siva temples (temple architecture), making *Siva-lingas* and other idols in stone and bronze (sculpture), the daily and periodical occasions for worship and festivals, which range from choosing the site and preparing it for temple construction, to forms of worship and festivals and expiatory, purificatory and renovating rituals.

The third is the *yogapada*, dealing with the eight steps for *yoga* such as *yama*, *niyama*, *asana*, *pranayama*, *pratyahara*, *dharana*, *dhyana* and *samadhi*. *Yoga* is union, the union of the self with the Self through concentration within one of the Supreme Self and the realisation thereof. A *yoga* of sixteen steps, called the *Prasada-yoga* which is the special discipline of Saiva *Siddhanta* is not mentioned in the *yogapada*, but only in the other *sastras*.

Lastly, the *Charya-pada* which is the fourth. This deals with human conduct, collection of materials for worship and the mode of worship. All temple worship, festivals, installation, consecration, etc. are here dealt with. Thousands of temples in this country are standing monuments to the prevalence of the *Agamic* cult from the ages past down to the present day.

Each *Agama* has a number of subsidiary *Agamas* called *Upagamas* and their total number is 207. Among the *Upagamas* the *Paushkara* and the *Mrigendra* are well-known. The list of principal *Agamas* begins with *Kamika* and ends with *Vatula*. Each *Agama* has the four *padas*. The *Vidyapada* is the philosophical part while the *kriyapada*

is the ritualistic part. The other two parts are generally very short.

The *Kriyapada* of the *Kamika Agamas* has been the most well-known in Tamilnadu and this is one of the largest of the known *Agamas*. The *Karana Agama* is even larger. It is being followed in quite a significant number of the temples. *Makuta-Agama* is generally considered to lay down the procedure for the worship of Lord Nataraja, principally in Chidambaram and also in most of the other important temples.

All the four parts are available today only in respect of *Suprabheda* and *Kirana* among the principal *Agamas* and *Mrigendra* among the *Upagamas*. The *Vidya-pada* is available for *Raurava*, *Matanga*, *Vatula* and *Paushkara*, while the *Kriyapada* is available for *Kamika Karana*, *Ajita*, *Raurava* and *Kumaratantra*.

The total number of *slokas* in all the parts of all the *Agamas* and their *Upagamas* may run to several millions, if all become available. This can easily be seen when we know that the *Kriyapada* of *Kamika* and *Karana* alone run to 12,000 and 16,151 *slokas* respectively.

Relevance of the Agamas

Temples of today are built and worshipped on the *Agamic* lines. *Puja* or worship is of two categories, *atmartha* and *parartha*; the first is for the individual who does it; the second is for the welfare of the community at large.

Hence temple worship has a large part to play in the lives of the worshipping public. The temples had been growing in importance since the days of the Saiva Samaya Acharyas-Sambandhar, Appar,

Sundarar and Manickavachagar. The Chola Kings, from the 10th century to the 13th century, had lavished all their riches on the temples and had practised a kind of religious socialism, not to be met with anywhere in history. Hundreds of new temples were built. An external form and harmony and majesty had to be evolved and observed, if such temples were really to be the abodes of the Almighty Being and to offer spiritual solace to the worshippers. To suit the different tastes of mankind in the art-world and in the thought-world, variations had to be provided for in the temples, in full unison with the general concepts of sculpture, architecture and religion and public usage. Hence some standards had to be evolved. We may now realise that such standards were laid down by the *Agamas*.

The *Agamas* differed from one another in detail and treatment, but not in the essential principles, religion or philosophy. The plan of the temple, the lay-out with reference to local traditions and legends, the position of the very many sub-temples inside the walls with reference to available space, their size, the very construction, consecration, the forms of the deities, daily modes of worship, worship on special occasions, monthly and annual festivals, celebrations by individuals, the functions of the priests and their training, the temple-tank, temple-music and dance, the flower-garden, food-arrangements-all these are regulated by the *Agamas*. An elastic, but effectively restraining code is indeed necessary in the temple, which is a public institution, in order that it does not become a mere jumble of many incongruous and inharmonious parts. Such a code was one

aspect of the *Agamas*, namely the *Kriya* and the *Charya Padas*.

The details of worship and temple consecration and the forms of the various manifestations of Siva are all only Tamilian in origin and character; they have nothing to do with the North; such rich and all-embracing spiritual and religious forms are totally lacking there. Perhaps the political turmoil in that region and the frequent invasions by the Muslims and the like may be one important factor. Anyway, the fact remains that we do have today amidst us a very rich religious legacy, not found elsewhere. The *Agamas* are the bedrock which has been keeping it in form.

In the present-day when there is a large awakening in matters of dance (*bharata-natya*) and art, there is no other scriptural authority than the *Agamas* to lay down the rules for temple dances and its parts such as *mudras*, music, instruments and the like. We should remember, that all classical dances have their origin in temple-dances and the sanction for all the dances is contained only in the *Agamas*. The *Bharatanatya* has no purpose and has no meaning, if it is not related to higher spiritual matters. Dance was dedicated in ancient Tamilnad to Siva, the Lord of the Cosmic Dance. Without such dedication, it becomes grossly material and sensuous. Such dedication lifts it from the merely sensory and sensuous matters to the highest spiritual plane. The grammar of true dance is given by the *Agamas* and, within its frame work; the dance can well fulfil its

higher purpose.

Temple rituals embody the highest philosophic concepts in Saivism. The *Agamas* are the basic texts for both the rituals and the concepts.

Study of the Agamas

The *Upanishads* are known as the *Vedanta*. The *Agamas* are known as the *Agamanta* or *Siddhanta* (and hence Saiva *Siddhanta*). *Sakta* texts had been available in the *nagari* script and they had been studied in depth by Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe) and



many volumes had been written on Saktism.

The Vaishnava samhitas had also been available in the *nagari* script and many great scholars like Schroeder had studied them and produced many volumes on that cult. But the *Saiva Agamas* had not been quite popular in North India for the simple reason that they were all written on palm-leaf manuscripts in the *grantha* characters which were unknown in the north. However the *Sivagama Paripalana Sangham* of Devakottai published some *Upagamas* in

the *nagari* script. The French Institute of Indology in Pondicherry are now publishing a series of *Agamas* in the *nagari* script. They have so far published parts of the *Matanga*, *Ajita*, *Raurava* and *Mrigendra*. They have been able to secure 23 out of the 28 principal *Agamas*.

The *Saivagamas* had been a closed book for all the Western scholars because of this handicap in script. Even within India, no great scholar had attempted to study this script and expound the thoughts contained in them. Nor had any systematic attempt been made to bring out editions of the texts in the *nagari* script. Many of the *Agamas*, it is feared, had perished, due to this neglect.

The *Agamas* have the greatest currency in the Tamil country. The great Professor S. N. Das Gupta has stated that not a single manuscript of importance is available in Benares, considered the greatest seat of Sanskrit culture. It therefore goes without saying that the *Saivagamas* have been a rare and special preserve of the *Sivacharyas* in Tamilnad.

The only writer of repute on philosophy who had studied the *Agamas* with great pains was the late Professor Surendranath Das Gupta, who has devoted a whole volume to Saivism, volume V -of his *History of Indian Philosophy*, which was published posthumously, by his wife through the Cambridge University Press. Here he has dealt with the thoughts contained in the *Matanga*, *Paushkara* and *Vatula*. The *Saivagamas* are yet a field, for philosophical exploration for ardent and sympathetic scholars.



Tantrism in Kerala Temples

SRIKANT

Modern scientific investigations, especially in the field of parapsychology, seems to be slowly finding out that behind the material phenomena there are subtle psychic and spiritual forces. This basic spiritual field has its own subtle laws which an explorer of the material world is not normally aware of. This subtle field can be explored by spiritual investigations and the serious investigator the seer-often develops the know-how to apply its subtle laws to create circumstances for the ethical and spiritual evolution of man. This method of practical application of the laws and powers of the higher levels of Supernature forms the science of *Tantra*.

Kerala has ever been a field of various experiments. People dwelling in this land of surpassing panoramic beauty have been adventurous explorers and seekers who perfected many sciences and arts. The astounding feats of the martial art, *kalarippayattu* has to be seen to be believed, as well as the subtle nuances of the classical dance-drama *kathakali*. It is no wonder that this region gave birth to great masters in the psychic and spiritual fields. This land where Sri Sankaracharya was born had nurtured many saints and *Siddhas*. In every field masters existed who perfected their fields of pursuits-medical sciences, physical feats, arts, occult sciences, etc. That is why Kerala has the unique distinction of producing some of the

greatest saints of the world as well as many talented people in the field of modern circus!

The science of installing Divine power in temples, which is an important branch of *Tantra*, was carried to perfection in Kerala. Before examining this particular aspect, let us briefly discuss the history and development of the *Tantric* sciences in India.

The *Vedas* and *Tantras* can be called as two aspects of India's exploration of the Unknown. The *Vedas* mainly form the philosophical knowledge and *Tantras*, its application. From this broad view, all the systems of *Yoga* also form the part of the *Tantra*. According to some scholars, *Tantric* practices are traceable even to as remote a period as that of the Harappa-Mohenjo-Daro civilization. Mention of *Tantric* practices are in the *Ramayana* and in the *Shanti*



Parva of the *Mahabharata*. Among the many branches of knowledge about which Bhishma tells Yudhishthira, there is mention of the *Tantras*.

Tantras form an ocean. Innumerable works have been written through the ages to such an extent that everyone can select a certain *tantric* system which suits him for practice. *Tantras* include various sciences and diverse methods. The texts generally known as *Tantras* are broadly divided into three parts, namely i) *Tantras (Shakta)*, ii) *Agamas* and iii) *Samhitas*. Of these the *Tantras (Shakta)* deal with the *Shakta* branch of practices.

The *Agamas* form the *Saiva* practices and *Samhitas*, the *Vaishnava* practices. Among the thousands of texts in these branches, 192 books are said to be still followed by practitioners in India. Out of them, 64 are considered to be most important.

In the *Tantras (Shakta)* some of the important texts are: *Nilapataka Tantra*, *Mrityunjaya Tantra*, *Tantrayogarnava*, *Maaya Tantra*, *Dakshinamurti Tantra*, *Mahanirvana Tantra*, etc.

Among the *Agamas* are; *Kalikagama*, *Chintyagama*, *Karanagama*, *Ajitagama*, *Deepagama*, *Parameshwaragama*, etc. Among the *Samhitas* are; *Iswara Samhita*,

Jayakhya Samhita, Parasara Samhita, Padma Tantra, Brihat Brahma Samhita, Bharadwaja Samhita, Vishnu Samhita, Lakshmee Tantra Samhita, Marichi Samhita, etc.

There are some other divisions of the *Tantras* according to certain characteristics, which are not relevant to this discussion.

The word *Tantra* is often misunderstood and maligned. It is because of the prevalence of a mode of *tantric* practice called *Vama Marga* in which sex, meat, fish, wine, etc. have a place in the rituals. But this is only a division of *tantric* practice and it is meant ordinarily for those who are prone to excesses in these matters which degrade them. Such people are taught by these *Tantras* to use them in an intelligent way and in a worshipful mood to discipline themselves and thus to elevate themselves culturally and spiritually, instead of recklessly and meaninglessly getting obsessed by them. There are, of course, practices of despicable black magic which are also included under the caption of *Tantras*; but such degrading practices which bring disharmony to others and ultimate ruin to the practitioners themselves, are comparable to the modern use of highly powerful atomic energy for destructive purposes. Just as the atomic science in itself is not responsible for any degradation, the science of *tantra* is also not responsible in itself for any misuse. It is the people that matter.

This great science of *Tantra* branched out into different methods of practice for aiding the evolution of man and his spiritual freedom.

Tantras are also broadly divided into three

main schools-the Kashmir school, the Bengal school and the Kerala school. The first two schools lean towards the *Vama Marga*, the left path, but the Kerala school follows the *Dakshina Marga*, the right path. Of course, there were great masters in Kerala who advanced in the left path, but the predominant trend was towards the right path which developed a system of subtle rituals and practices of a very pleasant and beautiful nature.

This approach reflects itself in the atmosphere of power, peace and well-being prevalent in houses of the *Sadhakas* and temples in Kerala.

Old works such as "*Kerala Mahatmya*", '*Kerala Charita*' etc., in which history and legends mingle, mention the 108 temples founded by Sri Parasurama on the sea-shore and mountainous terrain of Kerala. It is certain that temple worship in Kerala has a very ancient origin. The earliest places of worship were called *Kavus*, which exist even today in all parts of Kerala. A *Kavu* is a cluster of ancient trees and shrubs. Under a big tree in the centre, there will be a stone or idol that symbolises the concept of the deity worshipped there. There are such *Kavus* for Durga, Ayyappan, Vettakkoru Makan, Bhadra Kali, Subramanya and to such minor deities as Yakshi, Gandharva, divine serpents, Madan, etc. The development of these earliest places of worship to temples is an illuminating story. Even today *Kavus* exist side by side with temples. From these simple places of worship and the rituals observed there, evolved great temples built with perfected systems of architecture and elaborate rituals connected with the installation of power in temples. Along with it grew a large

mass of *tantric* literature.

Some of the ancient masters of *tantric* practices in Kerala were said to have been so powerful that there was nothing beyond their achievement. Among them were Mezhatol Agnihotri, Puliyampilli Namboodiri and many others. There were many great practitioners of the science as also great authors. The family names of some of the eminent hereditary practitioners of *Tantra* are; Manalikkara Petti, Kurkara Potti, Kulakkada Pandarathil, Thazhamon Potti, Puliyannur Namboodiri, Edappalli Namboodiri, Chennassu Namboodiripad Angaladi Namboodiripad, Pampummekattu Namboodiri and others.

Among the eminent writers of *Tantric* literature is the great *Siddha* called Naranath Bhrandhan. He reached such ultimate perfection that people called him the 'Mad Man (*Bhrandan*) of Naranath'. He is said to have been a great writer and propagandist of *Tantra* literature. He is believed to have lived some 1500 years ago. Other great writers of *Tantric* Literature were Sri Sankaracharya, Bhavatratan, Ravi, Vilvamangalam, Trivikraman, Vasudevan and others. Among the later writers was the great Chennassu Narayanan Namboodiripad, the author of the book *Tantrasamuchhayam* which is the most popular text. dealing with. the construction of temples, rituals and installation of power. He is believed to have lived around 1427 AD.

The techniques of rituals and *mantras* when applied following these great *tantric* texts, imparted power and personality to the deity in a temple. Modern science tells us that energy is everywhere in one form or another and that through certain

technology science can create certain special active centres of energy. Similarly, these *tantric* rites create special centres of active spiritual power. The power was maintained through prescribed rituals and the devotion of the people to such an extent that in many temples the deity is said to immediately answer the earnest call of a devotee.

There are thousands of temples in Kerala, big and small. Among them the more important are (beginning from south): Kanyakumari, Sucheendram, Nagercoil, Kumarakoil, Mandaikkad Padmanabhapuram, Tiruvattar (These temples were formerly in Kerala and now in Tamilnadu after the reorganisation of the States), Neyyattinkara, Malayinkil, Tiruvallam, Sri Padmanabhaswami temple. in Trivandrum, Attukal Bhagavati temple, Ullloor, Trippappur, Attingal, Varkala, Navayikulam, Anandavalleeswaram, Aryankavu, Achankoil, Sabarimala, Chengannoor, Puliyoor, Haripad, Mavelikkara, Trikkunnappuzha, Kandiyoor, Aranmula, Kaviyoor, Tiruvalla, Tirukkodithanam, Perunna, Ambalapuzha, Takazhi, Mullakkal, Tiruvizha, Sherthala, Turavoor, Paroor, Tiruvarpu, Tirunakkara, Vasudevapuram, Arpukkara, Kumaranalloor, Kidangoor, Ettumanoor, Ayamkudi, Pazhur, Ramamangalam, Muvattupuzha, Kallil, Adityapuram, Udayamperur, Tiruvaloor, Tirumoozhikulam, Trikkakkara, Trikkariyoor Kainikkara, Alwaye, Edappalli, Trippunithura, Chottanikkara, Ernakulam. Pazhayannur, Chittoor, Cheranalloor, Elamkunnappuzha, Thiruvanchikkulam, Kodungalloor, Annamanada, Thiruvairanikulam, Irinjalakkuda, Peruvanam, Uram, Mulankurkthukavu, Nelluvaya, Trichur,

Tripayar, Thiruvilvamala, Kadavallur, Chennamangalam, Trikkoor, Venganallur, Kumbalam, Guruvayoor, Mukkola, Vedaranyam, Thirunavaya, Tripprirangod, Chamravatham, Alathoor, Trikandiyoor, Kottiyoor, Thirumandham kunnu, Thirunelli, Sreeporkali, Thiruvangod, Trichambaram, Perinchelloor, Tricherukunnam, Tali in Kozhikode, Kachamkurichi, Kallayikulangara, Kongad, Killikkurissi, Trithala, Thiruvega-ppura, Trikkazhikad, Kodikkunnu, Panniyoor, Karimpuzha, Indianoor, Pandaloor, Venkotta, Keralesapuram, Ponmola, Trikkalavoor, Mannoor, Nalloor, Vettathu Visnu Narunkaita, Vallurkavu, Trikkangote, Neeleswaram and many others.

The rituals, the systems of *poojas*, the making of idols, purificating rites, things to be accepted and avoided, the festivals, etc. are so well evolved in Kerala that there are many distinguishable features. Certain prescribed rituals are almost a daily routine in many temples. From the early morning blowing of the pious sound of the conch, the rituals begin and *poojas*, *Sree Bali Pradakshinam*, etc. take place at regular intervals till the temple closes in the night after the *Attazha Seeveli*.

There is a unique style of temple construction in Kerala. Inside the great wall around, there is a spacious area called *Tirumuttam*. The gateways to the *Tirumuttam* are called *Gopuram* which distinctively differ from the usual South Indian style. Around the central shrine in the *Tirumuttam* are the shrines of the *Parivara Devatas*. The Presiding Deity is in the central shrine.

In the central shrine is the Sreekoil, the *sanctum sanctorum*. The roof of the *sanctum sanctorum* is mostly conical in

shape. This particular shape is said to have a relevance in the maintenance of power in temples.

There are many unique points of construction and other details based on the *tantric* science, which need not be discussed here. According to these sciences all these points have a certain role in the installation and maintenance of power in temples.

The popular text, *Tantrasamuchchaya* prescribes in detail the rules about the construction of temples, installation of power, *poojas*, maintenance of power, etc., for seven Deities, Vishnu, Siva, Sankaranarayana, Ganapati, Subramanya, Sastha and Durga. They are throughout considered as different aspects and powers of the all-pervasive Divine Power, Paramatma.

The voluminous text of *Tantrasamuchchaya* is divided into three parts. The first part has four chapters dealing with the laws of temple construction, making of idols and all the rituals and *mantras* connected with it. It includes the methods of the selection of the spot, the places to be avoided, the types of stones to be accepted, the types to be rejected, classification of stones into male, female and neuter genders, meticulous details of measurements, the thickness of the walls, the method of construction of doors, the decorations, the making of the idol in minute detail and such other relevant things including the *mantras*, *homas*, purificatory rites, *poojas*, etc.

Part two has four chapters on the installation of the idol and on the many *mantras*, *homas* and *poojas* connected with it. It includes the methods of purification

of the body of the performer, the purification of his *Nadis* (the subtle nervous channels of power), the methods of *Pranayama*, the creation of body power by the use of *mantras* and other rites, special methods of meditation, the rites with minute details about the installation of idols and instructions on daily poojas, etc.

The third part has four chapters and deals with various types of monthly and yearly festivals, rites, *mantras* and *homas* connected with the festivals. It also contains the details of *homakundas*, the essential materials for the *homas*, renovation of old temples, infusing of new power in old idols, re-installation of idols relevant special modes of meditation, *mudras*, etc.

Thus the great *Tantric* masters of Kerala possessing power, wisdom and the knowledge of the laws of the spiritual realm, evolved meticulously a science related to the installation of spiritual power and its maintenance in temples. Through this applied science, they identified personal gods out of the limitless spiritual power of the Ultimate Reality, the *Paramatma*. Their dedication and devotion made the protective powers of the Divine to indwell in temples, the guiding powers that lead forward many a human being through the turbulent ocean of life, cultivating in him faith, strength and peace of mind. Let us hope that modern investigators will rediscover in due course the importance of this great science of human welfare.



Temples of Tamilnadu

M. ARUNACHALAM

The Early Period

The temples of Tamilnadu, constructed during the last two millennia, fall into a few well defined periods of evolution. They may be called the Early Period, the Kochengat Chola Period, the Pandya cave temple period, the monoliths of the Pandyas and the Pallavas, the Golden Chola period, the Nayak period and the Modern period. All the periods, except the last, have made their original contribution to the development of the temple cult in Tamilnadu.

Silappadhikaram mentions several temples, the temple of the Great Lord, Siva, who is never born, the temple of Srirangam, temples of Muruga, Indra, Sasta, Surya, Baladeva, Manmata and so on. We know that during the period (2nd to 3rd century) there were the Silver Hall of Nataraja at Madurai and naturally his Golden Hall at Chidambaram.

Tirumurugairupadai of Nakkirar mentions the six camps or shrines of Muruga at Tiruparankunram, Tiruvavinankudi, Tiruveraham, Tiruchendil, Palamudir Solai and Kunrutoradal (meaning the several hill shrines in Tamilnad).

Koc-Chengat-Chola - As we go forward in time, we see that Kochengat Chola who was ruling from Uraiyur, had built 70 shrines for Siva. This is mentioned in glorious terms by Tirumangai Azhvar, a saint of the Vaishnava school who mentions approvingly

the Tirunarayur shrine built by him for Vishnu. From Appar we learn that such temples built by the Chola on a raised platform numbered 78. He had in his day built temples, perhaps in brick and mortar, pulling down the earlier temples some of which were of wood and others perhaps of mud, or brick and mud.

The Karaviram temple on the road to Tiruvarur from Kumbakonam is probably a rare example of a temple built by him in brick and mortar. This was in the 5th century. By about the same time or a little later, we find Karaikkal Ammai singing of the Nataraja temple at Tiru Alangadu.

The Pallava Period-Cave Temples

All the above were disconnected attempts at temple building. But the Pallava Emperors of Kanchi introduced a new scheme of temple-building by about 590 A.D. Mahendravarma Pallava was the first to inaugurate this scheme of scooping out temples *in situ*, making halls, pillars, sanctums and the very images out of rocks and caves. These were called cave-temples. The first such temple is the Mandahappattu temple for Brahma, Vishnu and Siva; the inscription says that Mahendra built this temple 'without the aid of brick, mortar, timber or metal'. A rare achievement indeed! He created such temples at Vallam, Dalavanur, Pallavaram, Mamandur, Mahendravadi, Siyamangalam, Tirukkalukkunram and Tiruchirappalli.

He next started the monolithic temples at the place now known as Mahabalipuram, (Mamalla-puram). This is too well-known to require any description. Mahishasuramardhini, Vishnu on the serpent couch,

Varahamurti rescuing Bhudevi, Trivikrama measuring all the worlds with His two feet and Arjuna doing penance for getting the Pasupatastra from Siva, are some of the rare figures here.

The next stage was the carving out of the monoliths now referred by the names of the Pandavas. These are called monolithic chariots. All these are glorious monuments to the highly artistic architecture of the Pallavas. The Pandyas in the south seem to have attempted to copy this new method. Kazhugumalai, famous in *Kavadi Chindu*, contains such a fine but unfinished temple scooped out of a single rock.

Stone Temples

The next stage in the same series is the construction under Rajasimha Pallava of Kanchi, (666-705). He commenced the new style of constructing temples of cut stones piled one over the other, a style which had come to stay to this day. The Kailasanatha temple of Kanchi, Iravatesvarar temple and Panaimalai temple are his creation. Besides the above feature, this Kanchi temple for the first time in history has a broad and long corridor (*prakara*) around the sanctum for the devotees to circumambulate the *Sivalinga*.

His Kailasanatha temple has a history behind it. When the day for its *kumbhabhisheka* was fixed, the Lord (Siva) appeared in the dream of the Pallava and told him that He was going to be present at the consecration of His humble Pusalar's mental temple at Tiruninriyur at the same time and so He asked the King to postpone the consecration of his temple and this was accordingly done. This unique legend

is a true story and it is corroborated in the King's inscription.

Another Kanchi temple built by the son of Rajasimha, for Vaikunta Perumal, Parameswara Vinnagaram, is equally important as reflecting the state of sculpture of the period.

The Muttaraiyar temple architecture style was something distinctive and unique. Its period was the end of the Pallava rule and the beginning of the ascent of the Chola dynasty in the middle period of the 9th century. Its characteristic representative is the Sendalai temple.

The Chola Period

The Pallava supremacy comes to an end by the middle of the 9th century in the north, while at the same time a new Chola dynasty assumes power in Central Tamilnad and builds up its empire for more than four centuries. Just as Kanchi is a city of temples in the north, Kumbakonam or Kutandai in the Saiva hymns is still a city of temples in the central region.

It has a large number of Siva and Vishnu shrines, many of them sanctified by the hymns of the Saiva Nayanmars and the Vaishnava Alvars. The famous Mahamagham festival, comparable to the Kumbhamela of Prayag, attracted here more than two million people in the recent festival in 1980 March. The Sarangapani temple has one of the tallest *gopuras* in Tamilnad. The song sung by Nammalvar on this shrine had induced Nathamunigal to go in search of the Alvar hymns and redeem the Vaishnava Four Thousand from oblivion. But the greatest Chola monument is the Rajarajesvaram or the Big Temple at

Tanjavur. It has six special features such as the *Garbhagriha*, *Ardhamandapa*, *Mahamandapa*, *Snapanamandapa*, *Narthana-mandapa* and *Vadya-mandapa*. The seven doorways to the innermost shrine have seven sets of *dvara palakas* of 18 feet height. The famous Nandi there is 12' high, 19' by 8' at the base. It is carved out of a single piece of rock. How was it brought to that place and installed? This itself is a marvel for all time.

Another feature of this temple is that it is built of stone from the base to the top of the central *vimana* over the sanctum. The coping stone on the top of the vimana called the *brahmayantra* piece is a single stone, 25 feet square, weighing 80 tons. The engineering skill that was able to lift up the stone of 80 tons to a height of 216 feet, about a thousand years ago, is something that cannot be understood but only be marvelled at. The inner corridor round the sanctum has a vast wealth of the dance poses of Siva, corresponding to the sastra of Bharatamuni. The inscriptions on the walls of the temple throw open before us, for a look as if through a window on time, the social and temple history of that ancient period.

The Gangaikonda Cholapuram temple built by Rajendra, Rajaraja's son, the Darasuram temple built by Rajaraja-2 and the Tiribhuvanam temple by Kulotthunga-3, are all of the Tanjavur model with a tall tower or vimana on the central sanctum. Each has its own artistic and sculptural excellences; the Darasuram being almost an art museum of the 12th century A.D. The Chola Emperors had earned the title of 'Temple-builders'. Chidambaram, the holy of holies for the

Saivas, has a unique temple of Nataraja on which successive Chola monarchs had lavished all their wealth. The very conception of this temple has been given an esoteric significance as portraying the physical form of a human being. The

is the towers *on* all its four gateways, all very huge and of equal size, a feature not seen in my other temple.

The Vijayanagar Period



When the Vijayanagar rulers evolved a peaceful Hindu Raj to fight and contain the expanding Muslim rule, the whole of Tamilnad came under their sway. Even after Vijayanagar fell, the cultural movements like temple-building originated by them continued under their deputies-the Nayak chiefs who ruled from Madurai, Tiruchirapalli and Tanjavur at different periods.

Tiruvannamalai temple may be taken as the representative temple of the Vijayanagar period. Annamalai, sacred to the element Agni, is most celebrated for its *karttikai deepa* festival. The temple is one of the biggest having tall towers on all the four sides, that on the east being 217 feet high, one of the tallest in the land.

This period has been responsible for many-sided expansion in temple

eastern and western towers of the temple depict all the 108 poses of *Bharatanatya* mentioned in the *Natya-sastras*, some of them very obscure and not attempted by any *natya* dancer. Another important feature of the modern Chidambaran temple

construction. The

Sreerangam temple may be taken as a specimen of the Vijayanagar temple expansion. It has seven prakaras around it, with 21 tall towers on its several entrances, indeed a colossal achievement.

The temple also depicts the sculptural glory of the Vijayanagar period.

The Nayak chiefs became great temple builders. Here and there are a score of important temples which are a monument to their sculptural art. Earlier, all temple sculpture was of divine beings, but the Nayaks decorated their temple halls with not only divine beings and celestial beings like Manmata and Rati, but also with very fine sculptures of ordinary human beings like the *kuravan* and *kuratti*. Tenkasi Visvanathar temple" has about ten artistic creations of this type, introduced by Parakrama Pandya of the first half of the 15th century. This was taken up by the Nayaks and they have introduced it in many temples they built. The Meenakshi temple at Madura has numberless such sculptures. The temple itself is like a large city, with its many sculptured entrances. The total number of sculptural figures in stone and stucco in this temple is estimated at thirty-three million-an astronomical figure indeed! The thousand-pillared hall contains many such figures. The musical pillars at Madurai, Tirunelveli and many other places are a rare piece of work combining architectural sculpture and the art of music. We find in this period rare and delicate workmanship in stone, such as a hanging chain with several links all carved out of a single piece of stone, a ball of stone inside the mouth of a lion and so on. These are yet marvels of what the human fingers can do.

The Ramaswami temple at Kumbakonam built by Raghunatha Nayak, the Murugan temple at Cheyyoor near Madurantakam and many others repeat the sculptures of human figures.

We may realise through these works of art

that the sculptors had attempted to do in stone what had for a long time back been done in woodland they had achieved a great amount of success.

Prakaras (corridors) round the sanctum came to be covered during this period, of course in stone. The famous Rameswaram corridors are a well-known example.

The temples had all been conceived of in great sizes. Very often we lose sight of the size. The human figures carved by the Nayaks are all not of natural size, but of a heroic size. We can have a conception of the size of various things which appear small at a great height, if we know that the *kalasas* on temple *vimanas* and towers which appear small from the ground level are actually about six feet in height.

The Temple Complex and Distribution- The Siva Temple

It may be interesting to note that all the temples, both Saiva and Vaishnava, follow an *agamic* code of construction. We shall take an east-facing temple. It may have three *prakaras*. On the outer *prakara*, there is the main eastern entrance, over which there is a tall *gopura*. There may be other entrances in the other directions with *gopuras*. There may be a Vinayaka temple in miniature at the *gopura* entrance, on the south side. Inside the *gopura* itself we may see Adhikara Nandi installed. Incidentally, we would like to draw attention to one important misconception. Most people call the bull mount of Siva as Nandi. This is wrong. Nandi does not have a bull face. He has just a human (*deva*) face and four arms. He is supposed to regulate with a cane in his hand the celestials and

humans who enter His presence for worship. As we go in through the several entrances, there is the central sanctum where the Sivalinga is installed. At the entrance, Ganapati and Subramanya are installed on the right and the left. There is an *ardhamandapa* and a *mahamandapa*. On the northern side of this *mandapa*, a separate *sabha* (hall) is provided for Nataraja and His Consort, Sivakamasundari. These are in bronze. The *vimanas* over all shrines have only one *kalasa*, but the *vimana* over this hall has always three or five. There is then a *palliyarai* (or sleeping room) and besides it the sanctum for the Shakti of the temple.

As we go round the first corridor around the sanctum, we see the temple kitchen installed at the south-eastern corner. On the southern outer side of the sanctum, there is Dakshinamoorti in a *koshta* (niche) on the wall. Very often we see a *nartana* (dancing) Ganapati, Jvarahara Murty and Agastya also in separate niches to the east of Dakshinamoorti, on the wall of the *ardhamandapa*. On the back side or the same outer wall we see the Lingodbhavamoorti at the centre in a *koshta*; sometimes there is Vishnu instead.

On the western side of the corridor, we see installed, in three separate sub-temples, Ganapati at the southern corner, Subramanya at the Centre and Mahalakshmi at the northern corner. Usually we see also Kasi Visvanatha installed separately at the northern corner.

On the northern outer wall of the sanctum, Brahma is installed in a *koshta* over the *gomuka* (spout through which the *abhisheka* water flows out). A little to the east, Chandesa is installed in a separate

sub-temple facing south. A little farther east, Durga is installed on the walls of the *ardhamandapa* in a *koshta*.

Then we pass on to the eastern corridor. On its eastern side the *Yagasala* is at the north-eastern corner and then we find invariably Bhairava. Surya and Sani in another enclosure.

This is the lay-out of the temple and its sub-temples. *Nalvar* and *Saptamatas* also *Arupattumooavar* may sometimes be found installed on the southern corridor in a long *mandapa*. Sometimes also Kali. But Mari and Aiyanar are never placed inside a Siva temple. The *Agamas* do not provide any place in the temple for the group of *Navagrahas* but the *Smarta influence* in society in a later day has found odd places inside the temple for installing them.

The *sthala-vruksha* (the tree sacred to the shrine) and the temple tank are other important adjuncts in the temple. The tank (*pushkarini*) is sometimes outside the temple.

About five percent of the temples may be west-facing and the same arrangement is followed here. There are no north-facing or south-facing temples in Tamilnad, except the rare one at Kulittalai which is north-facing.

The Vishnu Temple

The Vishnu temples do not have so much of detail in sub-temples. They have the entrance, the *gopura* and the *vimana*, with a separate temple for Vishnu's consort, Lakshmi. Krishna in various forms and Rama may be found installed in some; Narasimha and Varahamurthi are given importance in many temples.

Vishvakshena, who reminds one of Ganapati, is always installed in the Vishnu temple; he is the commander of His forces. Andal is found very often. The other Alvars are also installed in most temples. The *chakra* of Vishnu as the Chakrattalvar and Garuda and Hanuman are given importance in sub-temples in many places. There is greater importance to the *pushkarini*, but generally there is no *sthala-vruksha*.

Vishnu, unlike the Sivalinga, has a form here and He is installed in one of three states- the standing form, the sitting form and the reclining form. Sreerangam has the reclining form of Ranganatha on His serpent couch. The Koodal Alagar temple at Madurai has all the three forms, in three tiers, one over the other.

The sacred ash and the *kumkum* are the only *prasada* in a Siva temple. But in the Vishnu temple, the placing of *Sathari* on the head of the devotee, the *teertha* and *tulasi prasada* along with the food offering are the general rules.

The Modern Period

The modern period has not produced any new styles of sculpture or architecture in the temple. This period is democratic and commercial oriented and so is incapable of producing anything of artistic or lasting value. But, yet, through the anxiety of the devotees, many temples in deteriorating condition are being renovated at great cost. In many places, renovation adheres to the *agamic* rules, while in some places, the modern utility type of building steps in.

An important feature of modern temple building is the importance given to Mari,

Sasta and Lakshmi. Lakshmi is the consort of Vishnu. As Lakshmi, she has a place as said above in all Siva temples and as *Thayar* (Mother) she has an important place in the Vishnu temple. But the installation of a separate Lakshmi in a temple which we find today in the city has no sanction in the *agamas*.

Again, the Mari cult, which is very much on the increase in the modern day, is characteristic of the modern mind which is governed by fear and dread and not by the real values of life. Mari is known as a *dur-devata*, a deity doing ill and so her appeasement has become a necessity in the modern mind. We find many modern Mari temples flourishing with money, while great holy temples languish through want of funds to maintain them.

So also the Aiyandar cult. Aiyandar has been installed as a tutelary deity in all villages on the outskirts, like Mari Amman, but Aiyandar, unlike Mari, is a beneficent deity. But the modern craze for Aiyandar worship is a copy from Kerala.

Every small item in the temples, Siva and Vishnu, has an esoteric significance and a philosophy behind it, while the Aiyandar and the Mari worship, have, if anything, only a philosophy of fear behind them.

The Temple Culture-Architecture

The temples have nourished a number of fine arts in the country, the like of which are not to be seen elsewhere. The first and foremost is the architecture of the temple. All the temples in south India, both of Siva and Vishnu, are all built on a certain pattern which is clearly enunciated in the *Agamas* and the *Silpa-sastras*. The temple

was generally in the heart of the town and town-planning was organised round the temple. The temples had concentric corridors. The smallest temple had one corridor, while the largest had seven as in Sreerangam. Three and five are quite common. The innermost sanctum is conceived as the heart-place of the *virat-purusha*, while all the other parts are the other organs of that *purusha*. There is then an *ardha-mandapa*, a *mahamandapa* for the worshippers, a *mukha-mandapa* or entrance hall, several sub-temples in the innermost corridor and the next, usually a *vimana* over the sanctum sanctorum (*garbha-griha*), a large and high outer wall enclosing all the corridors and very tall *gopura* over the main entrance on the outer wall and in many cases, over the other three walls also. The whole complex is fashioned like a place for the King of Kings, on quite a grand scale, with everything in its proper place.

The whole of Tamilnad is dotted with temples, particularly the Chola territory being the Kaveri delta, so much that the Chola monarchs were characterised by outside historians as a race of temple-builders'.

Sculpture

Then the sculpture in stone and bronze. What a wealth of highly artistic sculptures each temple possesses! They are all not realistic forms, but idealistic forms fashioned on spiritual considerations and having an esoteric meaning, unlike the Greek sculptures which are only realistic and fashioned on mere material values. It is well to remember what Lord Rothenstein,

the Curator of the British museum, said a long time back: "Though the Greek sculptures possess fine realistic and artistic beauty, there is nothing to equal the dynamic form of Lord Nataraja which is the highest perfection in transcendental art which the human mind can reach and the hands can mould". We have about a thousand images of Nataraja in bronze, but one is not like another and each has a beauty and significance of its own. Similar are the forms of Sakti, Muruga and some others. Each has an indefinable mystic quality which holds the mind spellbound and enthralled. A perceptive round of a single average temple is enough to teach the receptive mind all the glory of our rich heritage.

A word about the choice of material used for shaping the images. All stone images are of granite. Other stones do not stand the test of time. They get gradually corroded and lose their shape. The Kanchi Kailasanathar temple, built by Rajasimha Pallava by the end of the ninth century, is a visual museum of what wind and rain can do to inferior stone. This ravage of time is not seen in any other temple.

Then, let us turn our attention to the metal images. In a land where silver and gold were available in plenty (under the Chola Emperors) nowhere do we find these precious metals, used for the icons. The rulers felt that when art was worked upon a precious metal, the public would value the metal and forget the art form. Hence they chose only bronze, both for its cheapness and for its strength. Only the Nataraja image at Chidambaram is considered to have a large proportion of gold in its making.

Precious stones were ignored because of their intrinsic value. A rare ruby Nataraja, *Ratna Sabhapati*, is preserved in Chidambaram and some other temples like Tirunallaru possess a Sivalinga in emerald. These are mere curiosities. For the same reason, ivory was not generally used. Yet we find a high image of Lakshmi done in ivory found in the excavations of the city of Pompe in Italy which was destroyed in a volcanic eruption in 78 A.D. This ivory image went to Pompe from the west coast of Tamilnad (now called Kerala) perhaps in the first century B.C.

Painting

What magic have the ancients evolved through colours! The colours from natural herbs which they had used have not faded with the passing of ten or twelve centuries of time. This has baffled the research and experiments of modern artists. The Ellora and Ajanta paintings, the Tanjavur temple paintings and the frescoes at the Kanchi Kailasanatha temple are some of the many temples which possess such frescoes. They inspire modern workers with the brush and will go on inspiring them till the end of time.

Music

In the fields of music and dance, we should remember that there could be no Carnatic music but for the temples. Each of them had a temple orchestra from the days of the Chola Emperors who had laid down that *gita*, *vadya* and *nritta* as part of the 16 *upacharas* were to be done daily to the main deities in the temple on the chief occasions of worship. *Gita-vadya* Was

instrumental music and *Tevaram* songs were refreshingly sweet. The *nadasvaram* orchestra was played in the temple on all occasions of daily worship, which were six in major temples and at least three in small minor temples. The orchestra consisted of a minimum of four players and it might be much larger. The Cholas had made many grand grants for the maintenance of these instrument players, to enable them to lead a contented life with the grants, without waiting for outside patronage from any individual. The local deity was their patron and they were thus enabled to pour forth all their music on God. So their music attained a spiritual quality. This had two great results. One was the preservation of the pure music, the music of the Tamil people from the remote past as we see in *Silappadhikaram*, handed down to the *nadasvaram vidwans* through the songs of the saint for music, Tirugnanasambandar (first half of the seventh century). The *nadasvaram* players had taken up this music, preserved it over the most turbulent periods of Tamilnad political history in a pure and original condition and handed it down to posterity in the form of what has today come to be called *Carnatic music* which is nothing but the continuation of the pure Tamil music of 2,000 years ago. The second was the education of the public, not the elite but the masses, in the art and science of music and the appreciation thereof. Music being dedicated to the Divinity in the temple, was available to the public who had become music-lovers and connoisseurs in the art.

Tevaram songs were sung in the temples in their original tunes and the singers had lavish grants from the Cholas, through the

temples, for their own maintenance. Sixteen blind men were taught in a school attached to the Tiruamattoor temple in the singing of the *Tevaram* songs and they were maintained by special funds, along with a common cook and two guides.

There were besides many rare musical instruments attached to the temples, a remnant of the class being the two *panchamukha vadyas*, kept at Tiruvarur and Tirutaruppundi and being played even today.

Dance

Nataka and *natya* were divisions of Tamil in the past. As Siva himself was the King of Dance as Nataraja, the temple was the greatest patron of Dance. Dance poses were carved in many temples and there was dance or *natya* in most temples till a few decades back. The dancers, being again maintained by special funds from the temple, dedicated their art to God and had preserved this great art down the centuries and have made possible what is today known as *Bharata-natya*. What was till sometime back a spiritually oriented art practised by a single community of dedicated temple artistes, has today been vulgarised as a commercial mimicry because of the practising of the art by the higher classes in society.



Literature

One of the greatest achievements of the temples is the vast volume of Tamil literature (and to a smaller extent, Sanskrit literature) which has been written round it. Beginning from the hymns of the Nayanmars and the Azhvars, almost all the Tamil literary output from the seventh to the nineteenth centuries centred round the temple. For lack of space, we are not dwelling much upon it.

Other Aspects

Then let us go into the jewellery of the deities, the tapestries lined on the temple cars in procession, the wealth of the accessories used during the time of worship! Wood-work naturally decays after a long period of time. But yet the Chidambaram and the Tiruvenkadu temples, preserve for us some of the finest workmanship of the human hand on timber in the temple Cars. The temples had besides maintained schools of Vedic learning with attached dormitories and had also run hospitals and destitute homes. In all these ways, the temples had been the hub of all human activity in the Chola period governing people's life and worship, education and arts and had been a powerful force in the moulding of character, personal and social, through a vigorous but devotional and spiritual discipline.



The Cosmic Dance of Siva

S. PADMANABHAN

The word 'Siva' means that which is eternally happy or auspicious, in other words *parama-mangala*. 'Om' and 'Siva' are one. The *Mandukya Upanishad* says, "*Santam Sivam Advaitam*". Lord Siva is the Supreme Reality. He is called Maheshwara. He is the creator, preserver and destroyer - all in One. The Saiva traditions in south India speaks of 25 *moortams* (images) or rather image-forms of Lord Siva. Among them, Nataraja, the dancing form of Siva, is the most important.

The origin of Nataraja goes back to the period of the Indus Valley civilisation of the fourth millennium B.C. One of the statuettes found at Harappa is the figure of a male dancer, standing on his right leg, with the left leg raised high. It is nothing but the prototype representation of Nataraja.

The iconographic study of Nataraja is fascinating. The image is a synthesis of science, religion and art. According to the modern scientists, the atom is nothing but a microscopic particle in perpetual motion within a circle. If there is such a motion, there must be a mover. If the mover is immanent, he must be in motion too. In the figure of Nataraja, both the mover and the moved are depicted in life-like shapes. Here science is personified in art combined *with* religion. The conception of Nataraja is a fine example of the artistic genius of the south. It can be considered as the greatest work of religious art in the



scientific world.

The dance of Siva represents the rhythm and movement of the world spirit. You can witness the dance of Siva in the rising sun, in the waves of the ocean, in the rotation of the planets, in lightning and thunder and in cosmic *pralaya*. The whole cosmic play or activity or *Lila* is the dance of Siva. All the movements within the cosmos are His dance. Without Him, no one moves. He dances quite gently. If He dances vehemently, the whole earth will sink down at once. He dances with His eyes closed, because the sparks from His eyes will consume the entire Universe.

Nataraja has four hands which signify that

He dances in all the four directions of the universe. He is omnipresent and all-pervasive. His loose and whirling matted locks and the oscillating belt around his waist show that He always dances without any rest. His upper right hand holds a small drum. It indicates that God is the source of sound. In philosophical language, He is said to be *Nada-Brahman*. The sounds of all the letters of the alphabet have come out of the play of the drum. It represents 'Om' from which all languages are born. The very figure of Nataraja also stands for the *pranava*, '*Giram Asmi Ekam Aksharam*' (of utterances, I am the mono-syllable "Om") says the *Bhagavad Gita* (10-25).

The upper left hand in *ardhachandra mudra* carries a blazing fire, the instrument for the final destruction of the universe. We know that fire is the only element that destroys matter. The lower right hand in *abaya mudra* bestows protection. The lower left hand in the *gajahasta* posture which points to the lifted foot, shows that His feet are the sole refuge of individual souls. The lifted foot stands for release from *Maya*. The dance of Siva is for the welfare of the World. The object of His dance is to free the souls from the fetters of *Maya*. At His dance, the evil forces and darkneses quiver and vanish. He is dancing over the body of *Muyalaka* who is the embodiment of ignorance, the destruction of which is the pre-requisite to enlightenment, true wisdom and release from the bondage of mundane existence. The *prabhamandala* around the figure of Nataraja symbolises the dance of Nature (*Prakriti*), the never ending life-struggle of creatures in the universe.

The number 'five' is closely associated with

Nataraja. The dance is also identified with *panchakshara*. It is a maha-mantra which is composed of five syllables 'Na-Ma-Si-Va-Ya' which denote the *Panchakriyas* or the five functions of the Lord, namely, *Srishti* (creation), *Sthiti* (preservation), *Samhara* (destruction), *Tirobhava* (veiling or illusion) and *Anugraha* (blessing). All the creations evolve from the combination of the five elements; earth, water, fire, air and ether. Tradition says that in the South, there are five Sivalingas corresponding to the five elements. Lord Siva is worshipped as *Prithvi* or earth at Kanchipuram, as *Apah* or water at Jambukeswaram, as *Tejas* or fire at Tiruvannamalai, as *Vayu* or air at Kalahasti and as *Akasa* or ether at Chidambaram. Our ancient scholars classified the dance of Siva into five categories such as *Adputha Tandava* (wonderful), *Ananda Tandava* (blissful), *Anavarata Tandava* (incessant), *Samhara Tandava* (destructive) and finally *Pralaya Tandava* (connected with cosmic dissolution). They believed that the eternal dances take place in Kuttralam, Chidambaram, Madurai, Tirunelveli and Tiruvalankadu respectively for the welfare of mankind. They are also called Chitra Sabha (Hall of Paintings), Ponnambalam (Hall of God), Velliyambalam (Hall of Silver), Thamra Sabha (Hall of Copper) and Ratna Sabha (Hall of Gems).

Tirumoolar in his *Tirumandiram* writes that "the dance of Lord Siva takes place in the heart of every individual". That is why Manickavachagar aptly puts it that "Lord Siva is of South India, but He is the God of all nations."



The Lord of The Seven Hills

PONNI S. RAVI

It is three o'clock in the morning. Darkness is getting ready to depart to facilitate the arrival of the bright rays of the sun. At this hour of twilight, the melodious notes of the '*Suprabhatam*' begin reverberating around the picturesque seven hills of Tirupathi, waking up even the most persistent dawn-sleeper. The presiding deity of Tirupathi-Sri Venkatachalapathi-is slowly awakened from His rather insufficient slumber through this devotional

melody of '*Suprabhatam*'. The singing of '*Suprabhatam*' is incidentally the first of the many rituals that are conducted every day at this earthly abode of Lord Venkateswara.

A temple that is being visited by over six thousand pilgrims a day, does not require any formal introduction. Considered to be one of the wealthiest shrines of India, Tirupathi in Andhra Pradesh, is one of the 108 sacred shrines of the Vaishnavites. It is also considered as one of the three important earthly abodes of Vishnu in South India. The other two abodes are at Kancheepuram and Srirangam, both in Tamil Nadu. In a country with a high degree of religious and linguistic variations, the shrine of Tirupathi spreads universal harmony by being visited by people from all walks of life, all regions and religions.

According to the *puranas*, the seven hills surrounding Tirupathi are said to represent

the seven hoods of *Adishesha* (the serpent) and the conception of the hills is representative of the body of the serpent-bed on which Lord Vishnu relaxes. There is no clear indication in any of our ancient mythological texts to ascertain the exact date of construction of the temple. Mamulanar, the *sangam* poet is said to have made a passing remark about this temple in one of his earlier poems. By common belief, the temple is said to be a *soayambhu*. References to Tirupathi are also found in *Tholkappiam*, an old Tamil literary work and in *Silappadhikaram*, a popular Tamil epic wherein Sri Venkateswara is depicted as the embodiment of Vishnu with a discus and conch.

Brief History

There is an interesting story behind the installation of Lord Venkateswara as a deity of Tirumala Hills. Among the many *avatars* of Vishnu, it is said that He once took the human form and descended on to the earth. His consort, Lakshmi, too followed her husband's foot-steps and chose to be born as a daughter of King Akasa Raja, assuming the name of Padmavathi. It so happened that Lord Vishnu sought the very hands of Padmavathi in marriage during this *avatara*. As she was the daughter of a wealthy king, her marriage required heavy financial assistance to be celebrated with the pomp and gaiety associated with the wedding of a princess. Lord Vishnu (known as 'Sreenivasa' in this *avatar*) in His anxiety to marry Padmavathi, decided to borrow the required sum from Kubera, the heavenly financier. Incidentally, Kubera charged exorbitant interest-rates and the loan

taken from him rose to a very high figure when added with the interest payable.

The Lord of the seven Hills is said to have promised to repay the loan by the end of *Kaliyug* and until such time, chose to remain in the Hills as a deity for worship. It is said that the amount recovered from the coffers of the temple accounts for the interest alone, leaving the original loan intact. (This would give an indication of what a huge sum the loan must have been!) Shri Govinda Raja Swami enshrined in the temple at the foot of the hills, is reported to be Kubera himself regulating the loan repayable by Lord Vishnu.

The temple at Tirupathi is a classic example of the Dravidian architectural splendour. The temple envelops an area of approximately two acres and shows a rectangular shape. The structure of the temple can be divided into two parts : i) the *prakaras*, ii) the *gopuras*. There are three *prakaras* aptly titled Mukkoti Pradakshini, Vimana Pradakshini and the Sampangi Pradakshini and there are two beautiful *gopuras* majestically welcoming the pilgrims to this holy shrine. The *Ananda Vimana* over the *sanctum sanctorum* is an imposing three-storeyed structure rising to a height of above 35 feet and the *kalasa*, on the top of the *vimana* glitters in bright sunlight evoking the visual response of the devotees even from a long distance.

To stand in the *sanctum-sanctorum* of the temple, in front of the benevolent Deity, is a moment full of spiritual joy and devotional upliftment. The Deity is in the standing posture, seven feet high with the left hand pointed towards the left thigh and the right hand in the posture of the *varada-hasta*. As the surging crowd pushes one onwards,

a devotee may be lucky to receive only a few seconds of *darshan* of the presiding deity. But within these few seconds of spiritual ecstasy, the devotee becomes totally aware of the supreme mercy and benevolence of Sri Venkatachalapathi. Later, as one circumambulates around the *prakara*, the memory of those blissful moments keep recurring in the mind.

The Daily Rituals

Venkatachala Itihasa Mala is a book that contains details of the daily rituals and their mode of conducting them. The rules and regulations laid down in this book are strictly adhered to while performing the daily rituals of the temple. Next to the '*Suprabhatam*' sung in the early hours of the morning to awaken the Lord is the performing of the *Thomala Seva* which is followed by the chanting of *Sahasranama archana*. Throughout the day, several poojas are conducted and devotional hymns are broadcast nonstop for the benefit of waiting devotees. The day ends when it is nearing midnight after the performance of '*ekanta seva*'.

The *Venkatachala Itihasa Mala* is a sacred text divided into seven parts. The initial three parts purport to the Vaishnava connection of the Deity and the later portion is full of details of the works of Sri Ramanuja and his prescription of the daily rituals at the temple according to the *Vaikhanasa Agama*. Saint Ramanuja is said to have conducted exclusive repairs on the *Ananda Vimana* on finding it in a ruined state.

Among the varied customs at the temple, mention may be made of the ever-popular

one of tonsure. This offering of hair is a custom common in several South Indian temples, especially in the hill-shrines of Lord Muruga. It may not be an exaggeration to state that every second pilgrim to Tirupathi returns with his head shaven in fulfilment of his vow to the Lord. Less known, but still popular is the custom of anointing the body of the Lord with camphor. Both the customs are ageless and their origin have never been suitably established. The performance of *Angapradakshina* (the act of rolling on the ground around the corridors of the temple) is also one of the strenuous vows undertaken by devotees.

It is to the credit of the Devasthanam authorities that despite the increasing number of pilgrims to this shrine every day, they have been able to provide accommodation to one and all in the several cottages and choultries near the temple. Several social welfare institutions are run by the temple funds which are maintained adequately and efficiently.

May be, the huge number of pilgrims visiting Tirupathi on all days makes every day a festive day at this holy abode. But there are certain important festivals conducted in the temple. The Telugu New Year's Day is celebrated as *Nityotsava*, *Vaikunta Ekadasi* is celebrated in the month of September. The ever-increasing number of pilgrims to this sacred shrine, irrespective of all caste, creed, linguistic barriers, is a supreme testimony to the glory of our temples and never aging unique monument in this world.



SECTION TWO

Temple Architecture In South India

K.R.SRINIVASAN

The temples of Tamilnadu as extant in great numbers offer a coherent and uninterrupted series of fanes that begins in point of time from the seventh century A.D. and extends to the present-day constructions. They remain preserved, since they are of enduring stone, the earliest extant structures being monolithic as the well-known *rathas* of Mahabalipuram. These are followed closely by structural constructions built from the base or the *upana* at ground level to the finial or *stooji* at the apex of the primary structure, the *vimana* that is raised over a pedestal or *adhishtana* and contains the sanctum or *garbha-griha* in its body (womb=*garbha*). It carries a super-structure, rising as a pyramid of super-posed stages or the *talas*, one or more in number. The ultimate roof or *shikhara* (head) on the top-most storey or *tala*, square, octagonal or circular in section, all dome shaped or apsidal or of rectangular section with roof shaped like a wagon-top, is raised up by a clerestory or *greeva* (neck) of identical plan; the *summit* of the *shikhara* carrying the finial or *stooji*, single in the dome-shaped ones and many in a row on the top ridge of the wagon-topped and apsidal ones. In its primary form, the temple unit consists of the *vimana* that enshrines in its sanctum cell the deity *in* worship with an *ardha-mandapa* or *antarala*

(vestibule) in front and a large hall, the *mahamandapa* preceding it.

In its complex form, the central unit consisting of the principal *vimana* with its axial *ardha* and *maha-mandapas* is surrounded by an enclosure wall, the *prakara* with an area of perambulation or circuit, called the *pradakshinapatha*, between it and the central unit. The *prakara* wall is pierced by a storeyed gateway carrying a pyramidal super-structure of *talas*, even as the *vimana* does, the *gopura*, a feature that is found to be the characteristic and the most developed feature in the southern temples, particularly the temple-complexes of Tamilnadu. There can be more such *gopura* entrances on one or more of the other three sides or cardinals.

The *gopura* carries on top a wagon-top-shaped *shikhara* or roof with a row of *stoojis* or finials and has the main passage way through its ground-floor and similar ones open at both ends on every *tala* or storey.

Inside the *prakara* or enclosure wall there is a series of lesser *vimanas* for the subsidiary deities, the *parivara* shrines as they are called, set close to the inner face of the wall, along the four sides and at the corners, most often inter-connected by lengths of *mandapas* forming a cloister called the *malika* (garland) by virtue of the string investing the principal *vimana*, even as a garland does. This is the name by which the peripheral *cloister* is referred to in the *shilpa* texts and the inscriptions on the temples.

This pattern on ground-plan of the central structure having its body or ground *tala* (*moolatala*) surrounded by the peripheral cloister stringing a number of lesser shrines

is reproduced in essence, on every stage or *tala* on the rise of the *vimana*. In its super-structure of super-posed *talas* of gradually diminishing magnitude and dimensions, that results in the characteristic pyramidal form, the central body of *tala-harmya* is surrounded by a number of aedicules or shrine motifs strung together by inter-connecting lengths of cloister or walls of lesser height than the aedicules they connect. This is repeated on every storey till the ultimate clerestory (*greeva*) and head or roof (*shikhara*) is reached. The elements of this encircling string of aedicules of the *hara* as it is called, constitute in the most developed cases of the larger multi-storeyed *vimanas*, the square ones at the corners with domical roof and single finial-the *karnakootas* (*koota* forms at the comers or *kama*), while in the centre they are oblong in plan with wagon-top roofs, the *shalas* or *koshthas*-there may be more such *shalas* on either side of the centre on each face, the third element being the miniature apsidal form, the *needa* or *panjara*. The inter-connecting cloister or wall-lengths, in miniature again, are the *harantara*, the whole forming the *hara* (garland), even as the *malika* (garland) does at the ground level. This forms the essential concept of the southern storeyed *vimana* described in the simplest terms. It, therefore, differs perceptibly from the form and rise of the northern temples or *prasadas*.

While the earlier *vimanas* are totally of stone from base to apex (with some few exceptions), those after about the thirteenth century have the super-structural *talas*, with the ultimate *greeva* and *shikhara*, rising above the stone-work

adhishtana and *moolaharmya* built in brick.

The *gopuras* in the earlier phase, also all stone structures, are of proportionately lesser magnitude than the main *vimana* of the temple complex. But they too increase in magnitude, but are still subordinate to the main *vimana* as in the all-stone *vimana* built by the great Rajaraja Chola-1, (985-1016). The great *vimanas* of the temples in Gangaikonda Cholapuram (Rajendra Chola (1012-1024), Darasuram (Rajaraja Chola-2, 1146-1173) and Tribhuvanam (Kulottunga Chola-3, 1178-1218) are all stone structures that come next only to those of Thanjavur in magnitude. Later the *gopuras* tend to exceed the size and height of the principal *vimana* and dominate the architectural composition and their superstructures come to be built of brick over the stone-body. With the number of *prakara* circuits, concentrically increased to three, five and seven, the complexity of the temple is not only increased and enlarged in its lay-out, but also the number of *gopuras* increased. This happens when the original nucleus is added to from time to time and we have the examples of the huge temple complexes of Tiruvannamalai, Chidambaram, Madurai and Sreerangam, to mention a few among many such. The *gopuras* on each cardinal, one before the other too, are of proportionately increased magnitude. The number of storeys or *talas* reached in the outermost *gopuras* is eleven at the maximum and we have the examples in Kalahasti, Kanchi (Ekamreshvara), Tiruvannamalai (east, for instance, which were built by the great Krishnadevaraya of the Vijayanagar dynasty (1509-1529) and are popularly called *Rayagopurams*).

After the monolithic *vimanas* of Mahabalipuram, the so-called rathas, what can be considered to be the last among them, locally called the northern Pidari *ratha*, (c.700) and all the structural *vimanas* from that period (700-728) onwards to date, cease to have a *hara* on the topmost *tala* surrounding the *greeva*. This is also the case of the Pandyan monolith, the *Vettuvan koil*, (c.800) in Kazhugumalai in the district of Tirunelveli. But what comes to be a fixed feature on the top-most *tala* of the Tamilnad *vimanas* from that time is the positioning of the *vahanas* or *lanchanas* (vehicles or distinctive symbols) of the deity enshrined in the *garbha-griha* of the *moolalaia* sanctum at the four corners of this top-most *uparitala*, as it called. They are *bhootas* or bulls in the case of Shiva temples, lion or Garuda in the case of Vishnu temples, elephant or peacock in the case of Subrahmanya-Kartikeya temples and *mooshika* (mouse) in the case of Ganesa temples, lion in the case of Jaina temples and so on. We have no examples of a Buddhist temple (*vimana*) extant and possibly it carried miniature *stoopta* forms as the *lanchanas*, even as the Indonesian *Tjandis* (*Chandis*) or temples do. This special feature of placing the *vahana* or *lanchana*, appropriate to the deity consecrated in the *vimanas*, makes one recognise the creedal nature of the *vimana* even from outside and from a distance. The *lanchanas* on each corner, instead of being single as in the earlier cases, tend to be doubled in the much later cases, the two often coalesced as bi-corporate (two-bodied) forms with a single neck and head still later. The deities inside the four cardinal niches

(*mahanasikas*), projected from the four sides of the *greeva* and *shikhara* combined, as also the three niches (*dvakoshthas*) on the two side-walls and the rear-wall of the *moola-harmya* below get also to be definitely polarised, as Indra or Shiva in the east *mahanasika*, *Dakshinamoorthi* on the south *mahanasika*, Vishnu in the west *mahanasika* and Brahma in the north *mahanasika*; likewise lower down *Dakshinamoorti* in the south *devakoshta* niche of the *moolaharmya*, Vishnu (or alternatively Harihara, Ardhanari or Lingodbhava) in the *moolaharmya devakoshtha* or external wall niche of the *ardha-mandapa* is to enshrine Ganapati, (often the dancing form, or otherwise seated) and the corresponding *devakoshtha* niche on the north Durga, standing over the severed head of Mahisha, the buffalo-demon or on a *padmapeetha*. While this is the case prescribed and in practice in all Shaivite temples throughout from the 8th century onwards, the prescription, though equally applicable to Vishnu temples of both the *Vaikhanasa* and *Pancharatra agamic* persuasions, is varied in later times. We find the earlier *agamic* prescription followed in some of the early Vishnu *vimanas* extant as, for example, in the temple of Tiruvadandai near Mahabalipuram and at Sreerangam. The temples dedicated to Devi can have the three *shakti* forms, Iccha, Kriya and Jnana, in the three *moolaharmya* niches.

Dakshinamoorti, the form of Shiva as the great teacher and expounder of 'Truth', is a special Tamilian concept, which has its roots in the early *Sangam* times. He is referred to as *Al-amar-shelvan*, the god

seated under the peepal tree, as a young *yogin* with four aged *rishi* disciples seated in front. The Dakshinamoorti is an obligate icon on the southern niche of the *moolaharmya* of the *vimana* as also in the top *mahanasika* as stated before and the south side niche of the intervening *talas*, carry often the other forms of Dakshinamoorti such as Yoga, Jnana, Vyakya, Medha and Veenadhara Dakshinamurtis.

The Hindu Trinity-the Trimooorti, namely, Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu-find an equal place with equal importance (*sama-pradhana*) in the earliest rock-cut cave-temples of Pallava Mahendra (late sixth century), at Mandakapatru-(district south Arcot) as also in the Trimooorti cave-temple of Mahabalipuram of three contiguous shrine cells enshrining Brahmanya (in place of Brahma) in the northern cell, Shiva in the central cell and Vishnu in the southern cell, with the difference that the central Shiva shrine-front is advanced a little more forwards to give it a relatively greater prominence than the other two. But in the time of Rajasimha Pallava (A.D. 700-728) in his Shiva Temples, Brahma and Vishnu, come to occupy a secondary position on the inner wall faces of the *ardha-mandapa* of the structural temples and subsequently the rear and the northern outer niches or *deoakoshthas* of the *vimanas moolaharmya* as mentioned before, as again on the western and northern *mahanasikas* of the *greeva-shikhara* region. The icons of Brahma and Vishnu also find place in the northern and western cardinal niches of the *talas* in between, the Vishnu forms varied as Narasimha, Varaha, etc. Vishnu on the western *devakoshtha* of the

moolaharmya is replaced by Annam-alaiyar or Arunachala Moorti or Lingodbhava with Vishnu tunneling down in the form of Varaha to discover the feet (root or origin, symbolically) of the all-pervading, infinite and formless or amorphous linga (Shiva) and Brahma soaring up as *ahamsa* to discover the crest or apex (or end) of the same infinity. Often Shiva in iconic form (*sakala*) is shown as emanating from the left in the *linga (nishkala)* as if revealing himself and besides, the symbolic representation of Vishnu and Brahma, as Varaha and Hamsa respectively, they are shown in anthropomorphic form as *moortis* standing on either side in worship.

As against this suggestion of dominance of Shiva, we have the syncretic icon of Harihara where the right half is Shiva and the left Vishnu. Here Vishnu takes the place of Shiva's consort, Uma, in the other syncretic hermaphrodite form of Ardhanari Shiva and is thus equated with her. This is echoed by the early Shaiva saint, Appar, in his *Tevaram* (v.4556) in a hymn which says that the God of Aiyaru (Tiruvaiyaru) has no *devi* or consort other than *Ari* (Hari or Vishnu.)

This Vishnu-Durga relationship is found emphasised by Durga being placed in proximity to Vishnu, especially Anantashayin Vishnu as one sees in the arrangement of the opposed sculptural panels in the Mahishasura-mardhinee cave-temple in Mahabalipuram (7th century), the sculpture compositions here recalling, particularly the first and subsequent chapters of the *Devi -mahatmya (Chandi or Durgasaptasati)* of the *Markandeya Purana* (4th-5th centuries A.D.). In the Trimoorti cave-temple, aforesaid, in

Mahabalipuram, there is an *ashtabuja* Durga form in an elaborate niche-like shrine-front adjoining and to the south of the Vishnu shrine of the group, we find again the association of Durga-sculpture-niche on the head-side of Anantashayin- Vishnu in the cave-temple in Singavaram, near Senji in the South Arcot District. In the Shore-temple complex in Mahabalipuram, where recumbent Vishnu occupies the shrine between the east and west-facing *vimanas* of Shiva, we have the sculpture called 'Durga lion' on the head side of Vishnu, with a sculpture of Mahisha-suramardhinee Durga inside a deep niche cut into the chest of the *sejant* lion sitting on its haunches. In the far south again in Tiruttangal, (Ramanathapuram), there is a Durga-Mahishasuramardhinee panel in a niche round the corner beyond the head-side of the Anantashayin of the Pandyan rock-cut cave-temple. The Tamil epic, the *Shilappadikkaram* (vi, 59), describes Korravai or Durga as the younger sister of Mal or Vishnu. It is the relationship that underlies her famous festival in Madurai of Azhagar (Vishnu-Sundararaja) from Azhagarkoil coming over to Madurai in the context of his sister Meenakshi's wedding and that of Ranganatha of Srirangam sending presents to the Devi of Samayapuram across the Kollidam river on the day after the Pongal festival. The *Vaivakikamoorti* groups in bronze and stone in the Tamilian temples depicting the wedding of Shiva and Uma has a figure of Vishnu (the brother) accompanied by his consort Lakshmi as giving away the bride, Uma, to Shiva in marriage with oblations of water (*kannika-dhana*), while Brahma as the priest performs the connected *homa*

or fire rites. The group of bronze discovered from Tiruvenkadu (district Thanjavur) now on view in the Art gallery, Thanjavur is an exquisite example of this. Such are generally called Kalyanasundara recalling the annual wedding festival of Meenakshi and Sundareshwaramoorti in Madurai.

Ganapathi, ever since his advent (c.A.D. 700) as a deity in worship in Tamilnadu in the early structural temple of Rajasimha-Pallava, the Kailasanatha in Kanchi and the contemporary and later cave-temples of the Pandya Muttavaiyar area further south in Tamilnadu, is always found associated with the Saptamatrika group next to the last of the Seven Mothers, Chamunda (Durga); the series preceded by Shiva as Veerabhadra (often by other forms of Shiva too) coming before Brahmi. This proximal association of Durga and Ganapati gets repeated in the representation of these two forms in the north and south exterior *devakoshthas* or the *ardha-mandapa* noticed above.

The Somaskanda cult, in the iconic representation of which Shiva is seated with Uma with baby Skanda in between, is as old as the seventh century A.D. The group of Shiva, Uma and Skanda is flanked on either side by Brahma and Vishnu as in attendance in the representations found in the cave-temples of the Pallavas. In the earlier cave-temples of Mahendra Pallava (580-630) there is no sculpture of any sort occupying the hind wall of the sanctum and in the Orukalmandapam cave-temple of his son Mamalla (630-668) in Tirukkazhukkunram, the theme was possibly painted or picked out in stucco in the hind wall of the sanctum, for we have the sculptures in relief of Brahma and Vishnu

on the hind wall of the *mandapa* outside, flanking the shrine-front projection. From the time of Parameshvara, when this vogue commenced, the group comes to be depicted in bas-relief sculptures too on the hind wall of the sanctum in the cave-temples. (e.g. Ramanuja-mandapa, a triple-celled cave-temple where the flanking cells for Brahma and Vishnu contain their painted representations, the Atinarachanda cave-temple in Saluvankuppam (Rajasimha), the Vedagireesvara structural temple on the top of Tirukkazhukkundram hill and in all the other Pallava structural temples beginning from the time of Rajasimha (700-728) to the middle of the 9th century as in the apsidal Virattaneeshavara temple in Tirutthani (Aparajita Pallava). The cult comes to claim greater prominence as the *Vitanka* cult in the Chela country, thereafter, where we have six out of the seven Vitanka temples, round about the most important one in Tiruvarur, in the Kaveri delta. The seventh, in Tiruvanmiyur, Madras in Tondaimandalam or the Pallava home country. Further south in the Pandya country, the Somaskanda form is found on the hind wall of the Shiva shrine in the Tirupparankundram cave temple (late 8th century), while in the Pandya cave-temple in Piranmalai (district Ramanathapuram) Shiva and Uma alone are represented as seated together on the sanctum hind wall, as also in the lateral wall of the cave-temple in Kunnandar Koil (district Pudukottai). These two exceptions, which are merely Uma-Shakta-muktis possibly bear a greater relation to the *Vaivahika* form (Kalyanasundra) than to the Somaskanda form.

The Tiruvaroor Vitankan or Veedi vitankan

or simply Arooran, as referred to in the inscriptions, later came to be called Tyagaraja from the 15th century onwards. It is only the bronze sculpture of the Somaskanda group placed in the *ardha-mandapa* of the stone *vimana* of the Tiruvaroor temple complex, built in the times of Chola Rajendra I (in A.D. 1030) that is in worship and the sanctum where one would expect the stone representation to be enshrined as the *moolabeera* is empty, denoting a *rahasya* as in the Nataraja shrine in Chidambaram. The bronze group, perhaps formed as the processional deity, for we have Appar, the early Shaiva saint, as referring to it in his hymns. Particularly in his hymn- *Tevaram* 5297 -he refers to the Vitankar being taken out in procession. Like the bronze Adavallan or Nataraja of Chidambaram, Vitankar of Thiru-Aroor or Arooran, was a favourite deity of the Cholas, for we have Rajaraja-1 (985-1016) installing the copper image of Arooran by the name Dakshinameeru-Vitankar (Dakshinameeru refers to the Brihadeesvara temple in Thanjavur) along with Adavallan. No wonder we have the celebrated Somaskanda-Tyagaraja shrine in the temple of Tiruvotriyoor near Madras, since the Adipureeshavara (the name of the main shrine) as it is called, was built by Rajendra I, Chola, in whose time the stone-temple of Vitankar in Tiruvaroor was also constructed. The Tyagaraja bronzes which are Somaskanda forms with shrines and festivals of their own are common in the temples of the Chola country. Though the early Tamil works of the *Sangam* period assign the type of dance called *Kodukotti* to Shiva and various *tandava* forms are represented in sculpture all over India and

more so referred to in the hymns of the Shaiva Nayanmars-it is their sublimation into the *Ananda tandava* of Natesha or Adavallan that is universally accepted as the most important contribution of the Tamil country in the realm of concept, art, iconography and esoteric symbolism. It ranks with the concept of the icon of the Buddha as evolved in the north as the unique contribution of India to world art. While the other forms of Tandava Shiva are depicted in the early sculptures and corroborated in the description of the *Tevaram* hymnists, the climax of the concept, the quite essence of the *panchakritya* of Shiva as evolved in the Shaivism of the Tamil country, appears to have been reached only towards the end of the 9th century. The characteristic form of Adavallan in significant poise and pose of arms, the upper two holding up the little drum and fire and the lower in *abhaya* and *gajahasta*, dancing on one foot placed on the recumbent Muyalahan (Apsmara Purusha) and the other raised in the blissful *kunchita*, the entire poise suggesting movement all round, as evolved in the Tamil country is found for the first time in a small panel on the *hara* aedicule facing south in the early Pandya structural temple (c.890) in Tiruvaleesvaram (district Tirunelveli). Another early example in the Chola country is the nearly free-standing Nataraja in the *ananda-tandava* in a niche *torana* the arch of the festoon framing the front of a *devakoshtha* in Punjai (district Thanjavur). A virtually free-standing image in the Tiruvadaturai temple depicting the *nadanta* or *ananda-tandava* mode, appears in the *devakoshiha* on the south wall of the *ardha-mandapa* of the Koneerirajapuram temple

(c.969-976). These forms would appear to be stone copies of the form first realised in bronzes and it is the early Chola copper or bronze icons of Nataraja, that more than the stone sculptures mark the acme of perfection and have drawn the appreciation of aesthetes the world over. The first mention of *ananda-tandava* as *ananda-k-koottu* is by saint Manikkavachagar in his *Tiruvachakam* (588, *Tiruvarttai* 42 V.3) all in the same work (3: *Keertti-t-tiru akaval*). He states that Shiva danced the *ananda-koottu* for the sake of the sage, Patanjali. In the early temples of 10th-11th centuries the Nataraja icon, in relief, comes to occupy a niche on the exterior of the south-west of the *ardhamandapa* next to Ganapathi. In the later Chola temples, they are found in one of the many *devakoshthas* on the wall of the *vimana* itself as in Thanjavur, Gangaikonda Cholapuram and Darasuram. Adavallan, the presiding deity of the Chidambaram temple, was the favourite of the Cholas, for it was in Chidambaram that they performed their ritual coronation. Rajaraja I made an exquisite metal icon of Nataraja-Adavallan of which a precise technical description is given in his inscription on the temple at Thanjavur. There is no Shiva temple of any importance in Tamilnadu without a metal icon of Nataraja. He came to be installed in separate *mandapa* temple called the *Sabha-mandapa* or *Sabha-nayakar kovil* built facing south, always in the precincts of a temple complex. Such a *mandapa* with a *sabha-nayaka* shrine with a bronze icon of the god became the *sine* quonon of any Tamilian temple complex. The *Arudra* (Tiruvadirai) festival which falls in December every year is sacred to Nataraja and the

Arudradarshana is the most noted festival in Chidambaram.

Another unique feature of the Tamilian temple is the inclusion of Chandesha in the *parivara* as an essential deity, with a shrine or *vimana* of his own. He is one of the 63 canonised Shaiva saints or Nayanmars and is considered to be the *moolabritya* (chief servant or devotee) of Shiva, to whom he endeared himself by his readiness to chastise even his own father, who interrupted his devoted worship to Shiva. The boy devotee was specially blessed by Shiva who bestowed the (*Chandesha padam* himself, investing the devotee with the *parivattam* (the garland or upper cloth worn by Him) round the boy's head. This is a way of specially honouring a great servant or devotee in Tamilian temples and persists even today to honour great benefactors, devotees and important personages who visit a temple. Chandesha thus came to be the chief guardian and seneschal of the Shiva temple. Its properties and affairs, gift deeds and the like are made in the name of Chandesha. The magnificent Chola sculpture group of Chandeshanugrahamoorti of the Brihadeeshvara in Gangaikondacholapuram is the classical example of this theme, though many other Shiva temples have sculptures, or bronzes of the same. The earliest extant sculptural example of this theme is found in the intermediate *tala* of the Dharmaraja ratha in Mahabalipuram and a beautiful miniature in the *hara* line of the Tiruvaleesvaram temple. An icon of Chandesha thus became an obligate feature of the Tamilian Shiva temple and one can see his large sculptuory in the north-east corner of the cloister of

subsidiary *vimanas* that surround the court round the Rajasimheshvara of the Kanchi Kailasanatha complex. Subsequently he is seen in a shrine or *vimana* of his own among the *ashtaparivara* (eight *parivara* subshrines), usually in the one on the north of the main *vimana*, in the temples of the late eight-ninth centuries. It is by the time of Rajaraja Chola-1, that the Chandeshvara shrine got moved from the general *parivara* line closer to the main *vimana*, on its north and to the east of the *pranala* (or *gomukam*) that projects from the inside of the northern side of the main *vimana* as a chute that throws out the *abhishekam* water. This position determined by Rajaraja I, evidently in order to emphasise the importance of Chandesha, becomes a fixture for all times thereafter. The temple bronzes include one of Chandesha too and in any festival procession of the god and goddess preceded by Ganesha too and Subhramanya, Chandesha brings the rear. This is called the *Panchamoorti* procession. The most salient feature of the Tamilian temple, however, would be the inclusion in the temple complex of a *vimana* or shrine of Devi as the consort of the god in the main sanctum, with equal prominence in rites as for the god himself. These are popularly called *Amman* shrines or *Ambal Sannidhi* as against the name *Svami* shrine or *sannidhi* of the principal god consecrated in the temple. The inscriptions call these by the name *Tirukama-kottam*. While they are not to be found in the earliest temple complexes, with the advent of this cult and mode in the late eleventh or the early twelfth century, these earlier temples came to be provided with such *Amman* shrines. These face south usually and in temple

complexes of lesser magnitude are attached to the north side of the *mahamandapa*. In larger lay-outs the *Tirukama-kottam* occupies a place in one of the outer courts on the north side and often face the same direction (east usually) as the principal *vimana* of the god of the temple. (e.g. the Darasuram complex and Madurai Meenakshi-Sundareshvara). Even as the presiding gods have distinctive local names, their Devis too have corresponding appellations, the Tamil names derived from the *Tevaram* or *Divya Prabhandam* hymns or the local *sthalapurana* often Sanskritised. Examples would be Kapalishvara-Karpagambal (Mylapore), Ekamreshvara-Kamakshi (Kanchi), Brihadishwara-Brihannayaki (Thanjavur), Nataraja-Sivakamasundari (Chidambaram), Jambukeshvara-Akhilandanayaki (Tiruchirappalli), Ramanatha-Parvathavardhinee (Rameswaram), Sundareshvara-Meenakshi (Madurai) and so on. The Tamilian mores could not conceive of the presiding deity in Kasi (Varanasi, the all-India centre of Hinduism), Vishveshvara, without a consort with the result that a temple for Visalakshi has been built there. As in the Shiva temples, the Vishnu temples too have their Devi or *Nachchiar* shrines dedicated to Lakshmi with a local name, corresponding to that of the God, e.g. Ranganatha-Ranganayaki, (Sreerangam), Varadaraja-Perundevi. (Kanchi), etc. Since the maiden devotee of Sreevilliputtoor, who fell in intense love with Her god, Vishnu and poured her heart out in many devotional hymns in praise of her chosen lord, was deified as Andal or Godai, she too came to have a shrine of her own in Vishnu temples of Tamilnadu. It should be stated here that

temples dedicated to Devi did exist from early times, much before the advent of the Tirukkamakottam but they were quite independent ones dedicated to Durga and cognate fierce aspects of Devi, the village goddesses, the guardian deities (goddesses) of towns and cities and forts and the like. But the *Devis-Amman* in Shaivaite temples and *Nachchiyars* in Vaishnavite temples are *saumya* or benevolent forms of Devi-like Uma, Lakshmi, Andal, Valli, Devasena, etc.

Likewise, we have the collection of icons of the sixty-three Shaiva-saints-the *Nayanmars*-in the Shiva temples, some of them having distinct shrines of their own.

Similarly, the Azhvans or Vaishnava saints and hymnists. Thus the Shaiva and Vaishnava hagiologies have added immensely to the sculptural and iconographic content of the Tamilian temples, in addition to the contribution of themes by the *Puranas* and Epics that are common to the whole sub-continent and it requires acquaintance with both the Tamil and Sanskrit religious lore to comprehend the entire spirit and iconographic content and significance in these temple complexes.

The related festivals and processions of the gods and goddesses are many and we may mention some of the most distinctively outstanding ones. The *Kalyana-utsava* in which the entire process of the wedding of the god and goddess is gone through, with due pomp and ceremony, is an

annual feature in most temples and the most celebrated ones are those of Meenakshi and Sundareshvara in Madurai and Andal and Vishnu in the place of her birth in Srivilliputtur. The other great festival that is unique is the so-called Float-festival or the *Teppotsavam* in which the god and goddess are placed in a *vimana* like float and ferried round in the large tank, adjoining the temple called the Teppakulam. This tank is often very large, occupying many acres as in the case of those of Madurai, Kalaiyarkoil (Ramanathapuram) and Tiruvaroor, where it is called the Kamalalaya. At the centre of the tank is a *vimana* structure built and called the



nirazhimandapam, though it is a storeyed *vimana* and all-round the parapet of the tank is laid a narrow platform on the inside for the men dragging the float or *teppam* round, called the *alodi*. These, besides the car-festivals (*Rathotsava*) and others are held on important and auspicious conjunctions of asterisms, days of local importance and the like. The procession annually of the 63 Shaiva Nayanmars along with the god and goddess (Kapaleeshvara and Karpagambal) is unique features of the Mylapore (Madras) temple.

Thus a broad outline, as given above of the most obvious and salient features and characteristics of the temples in Tamilnad, would indicate the special contribution of the south and Tamilnadu in particular, to the general Indian heritage and culture, with its long history, as every other region has done. For, was it not the South after imbibing and assimilating the various systems of religion and philosophy that flowed from the north in its own turn preserved, interpreted and crystallised them to be returned to the whole country through great philosopher saints such as Shankara, Ramanuja and Madhva and by way of the Bhakti cults of the *Nayanmars* and the *Azhvars*. In spite of the diversities, there has always been an undercurrent of pan-Indian thought, culture and way of life pervading the whole sub-continent. Tamilnadu forms but one of the many scintillating facets of the gem that is India and its hoary culture.



Paintings In Srirangam Temple

CHITRAVIJI

The Srirangam temple has a number of paintings in different locations. The paintings in the Tiruvunnazhi cover the *sthalapurana* legend of Srirangam. The main shrine, known as the Ranga Vimana, is located in the Rajamahendran Tiruveedi, around this shrine, there is a circumambulatory corridor commonly referred to as the Tiruvunnazhi. However, this is mentioned as the Dharmavarman Tiruveedi in the *Koil-Ozhugu*. (The *Koil-Ozhugu* is a kind of chronicle of the Srirangam temple). It is in this Tiruveedi that we find illustrated the *Sthala-mahatmya* otherwise known as *Sreeranga Mahatmya* in its mural form. As the *Moolabera* is south-facing, there are corridors on its western, northern and eastern sides and the paintings are on the ceilings of these corridors. Access to the corridor is restricted as it also gives access to the gold-plated Ranga Vimana. The Tiruvunnazhi structure may be dated on its architectural style to the Vijayanagara period.

A good proportion of the *Mahatmya* paintings were damaged when this corridor complex was gutted by fire a few years ago. A fine film of soot overlays most of these murals and this hides the true colour tones. The form and style of the artist suggests that it belongs to the later Vijayanagara or the Nayaka periods.

A considerable portion of the western corridor is so soot-laden that there is little artistic merit in the mural art. At the end

of this corridor we have a lovely panel on the theme of Brahma performing the *utsava* for the Ranga Vimana in Satyaloka. Painted in similar style and following a similar pattern in distribution is the Rama Pattabhisheka, where Rama is seen gifting the Ranga Vimana to Vibhishana. This scene is at the north-eastern area of the corridor. The *Mahatmya* portrayal ends with the illustration of the present temple complex.

Each incident is presented as a panel and each panel is further sub-divided into sequences which are supported by Telugu labels that seem to follow the Telugu literary text of the *Mahatmya* of Bhairava. With the co-ordination of the text and the painting we are able to reconstruct the sequence of the *Sthala purana* paintings. The *Sreeranga Mahatmya* is like any other temple legend and the theme of this text is to unravel the cause of the descent of Vishnu as Ranganatha to Srirangam on the Kaveri. The concept of the artist has been to break the literary work into small episodes to depict them in a narrative style that is easily recognised by the devotee. The system adopted is quite similar to that of illustrated books and manuscripts. This idea is obviously borrowed from the art school.

In the western corridor we have Brahma receiving the *Pranavakara* Vimana from Garuda. With his wings spread out, Garuda holds aloft the *Vimana* to Brahma who places it squarely on all his four heads. Brahma is portrayed in all these paintings with four heads represented in linear aspects. He is followed by heavenly deities, *brahmanas* and *rishis*. The musical ensemble is led by Tumburu who is accompanied by the asuras playing on such

instruments as the *ekkalam*, *kombu*, *tavil* and so on. Chaturmuka Brahma offers worship to the Vimana in the presence of Indra, the Navabrahmas, Swayambuvamanu, Daksha and various other minor deities. Brahma is painted in a golden ochre and in the company of Saraswati who is represented in white. She wears a delicate floral designed saree in green and yellow with jewellery very much in the Vijayanagara style. Her hair is braided with pearl strands. Brahma holds in his hands the *akshamala*, the *kamandalu* and a palm leaf bundle. In delineating the story of the Ranga Vimana from worship by Brahma to Rama the artist fragments the episodes and covers these as a series of panels.

In the sequence where the artist has to cover the concept of worshipping the Ranga Vimana, the knowledge of which was a part of the oral tradition, he employs the method of miniature portraits of the men involved. The artist therefore explains how the knowledge was passed on from Brahma through Soorya to Vaivasvattamanu and thence to Ikshuvaku by a set of iconic portraits with labels to explain this oral tradition of knowledge. On acquiring this knowledge, Ikshuvaku feels a great desire to possess the Ranga Vimana from Satyaloka. Following the literary text of the *Sreeranga Mahatmya*, the muralist goes back to an episode covering the meeting of Narada and Maheshvara. On Narada's enquiry, Maheshvara explains how the Ranga Vimana would pass to Ikshuvaku's hands and later how it would come to reside on the banks of the Kaveri. Narada therefore becomes instrumental in giving the viewers a quick synopsis of the

future of the Ranga Vimana. Narada is painted white, wearing a short deer-skin *antareeya* and carrying a *kinnari veena*. Maheshvara is also painted in a lustrous white and in conversation with Narada his hand is held in *oyakyasma mudra* with the other hands carrying the *parasu* and *mriga*. He is in *sukasana* in the company of Uma. Uma is painted in green, her ornaments are delicate and there is gentleness in her face; her forehead has a neatly applied *vibhoothi* mark. The story is conveyed by the Telugu labels or captions below each panel. While we are able to identify the central figures as Narada and Maheshvara, their connection to the *Sreeranga Mahatmya* tale is however furnished by the label and not from the pictorial composition.

Taking up the thread of the *Mahatmya*, the artist pays meticulous attention to Ikshuvaku's penance for the Ranga Vimana. Ikshuvaku informs Vasishta, his *kulaguru*, of his intention to perform *Hari-pooja* prior to the severe penance that he plans to undertake. The king in the presence of this *rajarshi* is portrayed in his royal regalia. Ikshuvaku is then shown as an ascetic, unshaven with matted hair and wearing a *darba antareeya*. We gather from the painting that *ekapada tapas*, i.e., penance, standing on one foot with hands raised above the head in *anjali*, was the way to conduct the penance during the *yaga*. Ikshuvaku is attended by his wife.

To break Ikshuvaku's concentration, Indra despatches Kama. Kama accompanied by the celestial nymphs and other *devas*, arrives on a green parrot firing five flower arrows on Ikshuvaku from a sugarcane bow. Kama is painted in green, wearing a *kireeta*,

other ornaments and a golden *pancakacha antareeya*. Kama's efforts are futile. He withdraws from the scene and stands dejected before Indra. His retinue who are also shown in the scene, stand with their hands in *vismaya*. In contrast, Indra is painted in *tarjani hasta*, i.e., an expression of anger. Indra mounts his white elephant, Airavata; an umbrella is held behind him. Indra flings his *vajrayudha* at Ikshuvaku. In the same sequence Ikshuvaku serenely continues his *ekapada-tapas* with a gentle smile on his face. Above his head is a glowing Vishnu *chakra* that crushes the *vajrayudha* of Indra. Indra is painted a golden colour and placed against a red background when mounted on the white Airavata.

Indra approaches Brahma who is in the company of Sarasvati. They are seated in *sukhasana* and within a *mandapa* and Sarasvati is playing on the veena. Brahma advises Indra to withdraw graciously in favour of Ikshuvaku, as in each *manvantara* the Ranga Vimana was destined to leave *Satyaloka* for the redemption of man.

In the next sequence, Brahma performs the *ashtanga namaskara* to the Vimana and gifting it to Ikshvaku, departs on a white *hamsa*. The Ranga Vimana, delineated like a small shrine i.e., like a *mandahasa*, is placed on the king's head. Carrying the Vimana, Ikshuvaku, departs for Ayodhya accompanied by Indra and others.

In each composition, the artist places emphasis on a central figure. In a composition of Brahma, Sarasvati and Indra, Brahma is painted as tall as the panel division, the *Devi*, two thirds of Brahma's size and Indra three-fourths of Brahma's height. It is by following a certain ratio

proportion that he is able to emphasise the degree of importance to be given to the character in each composition.

With the *pratishta* of the Ranga Vimana on the banks of the Ayodhya, the story shifts for a brief point of time to the time of Dasaratha. It is here that the important character of the *Mahatmya* is introduced and it is Dharmavarma Chola of Nicilapuri who is also mentioned in the *Koil-Ozhugu* in the same context. He forms the human element that is responsible for getting the Ranga Vimana to the banks of the Kaveri. Watching- Dasaratha performing the *Asvamedha yaga* in the *Tretayuga*, Dharmavarma is overcome by desire to emulate Ikshuvaku and obtain the Ranga Vimana. Retiring to the banks of the *Chandra-pushkarani-teertha* on the Kaveri, Dharmavarma commences his *yaga*.

At this point, the literary text makes a considerable digression from the main theme and covers a sub-plot woven round a certain Dalbya Rishi. The painter, following very closely the literary tradition, also digresses suitably to delineate this episode. Dalbyadu of the Telugu labels is disturbed in his penance by Vyagrasena. The *rishi* invokes Narayana to protect him. Vyagrasena, painted in deep yellow ochre with canine teeth and pock-marked face, throws a broad sword at the *rishi*. In the same area, applying the technique of continuous narration that is frequently followed by the Nayaka artists, the artist delineates the demon lying dead killed by Vishnu. Vishnu on Garuda is hailed by all the *rishis* and is dissuaded by them from returning to Vaikunta. At this juncture, he informs them that in the *Rama-avatara* that he would be taking shortly, they would

achieve their purpose of bringing him to the banks of the Kaveri. Vibhishana would be mainly instrumental in this move.

On hearing this, Dalbya tells Dharmavarma who is in penance on the Chandrapushkarani, to give up his *tapas*, as in the Kaliyuga, Ranganatha would reside at Srirangam. The story switches back to the battle between Rama and Ravana ending with the death of Ravana. The painter reserves a large mural space to portray Rama's *Pattabhisheka*.

The *Pattabhisekha*, attended by a large gathering, witnesses also the gifting of the Ranga Vimana by Rama to Vibheeshana. The minor figures around the Pattabhisheka



scene are portrayed sporting the peculiar Vijayanagar cap so popular in that period. Vibheeshana departs from the *Pattabhisheka* hoisting the Ranga Vimana on his head and strides to the banks of the Kaveri. He is received by Dharmavarma Chola, a large gathering of people, *rishis* and other heavenly beings who welcome the coming of the Vimana by bearing innumerable gifts. At that juncture, Dharmavarma suggests that Vibheeshana perform the *brahmot-sava* on the Kaveri. The label indicates that for eight days the festivities were performed with gaiety and the ninth day was reserved for the Rathotsavam that ended in *avabhritasnana*. The Vimana becomes immovable and throws Vibheeshana into a hapless state. He beseeches the Lord to help him in his plight. Ranganatha tells his devotees the story of the Kaveri.

The *Sreeranga Mahatmya* while delineating from the main story of the Ranga Vimana, has many subsidiary or sub-plots to bolster up a weak mythical story. One such is the story of the Kaveri. According to the *mahatmya*, in the age of the Sakyaparvata, Kaveri and Ganga quarreled about their might. Going to Brahma to resolve their differences, Kaveri returns embittered by Brahma's judgment that Ganga was the greater of the two, as she arose from the Vishnupada. Thoroughly upset with the judgment, Kaveri enters into a severe penance when Vishnu manifests before her and promises to reside by her shore. Revealing this story to Vibheeshana, Vishnu pleads his inability to proceed any further and asks that he be allowed to remain on the banks of the Kaveri. While the painting and the literary traditions do not make any

mention of the fact that Ranganatha was placed facing south to give perpetual *darsana* to Vibheeshana in Lanka, it has now become popular to add this story. This tale is given a greater sanctity by its presence in the *Koil-Ozhugu*. However, this legend might have its root in a verse of the Azhvars and later added on to the *Mahatmya*, giving to the *Mahatmya* itself an antiquity that it cannot claim. There is a Tamil verse in *Tirumalai* which says: "Ranganatha rests on a serpent couch with his head to the west, his feet to the east, his back to the north and his face turned to the south looking to Lanka".

This is from Tondaradipodi Azhvar's *Tirumalai* that particularly highlights the point that Ranganatha, the deity of Sreerangam, lies south facing. The painting ends with a large blue-print of the Srirangam temple complex. The *pushkaranees* mentioned in the labels are Chandrapushkaranee, Bilva Teertha and Asva, Kadamba and other *teerthas*. The existence of these ponds, according to the label is tied respectively to the redemption of Chandra for Chandrapushkaranee, with Indra and his absolution from the sin related to the Ahalya episode and with Vasishtha.

An important feature of the *Sreeranga Mahatmya* murals is a set of three names mentioned as patrons. Their names occur at the end of each section of the paintings i.e., at the end of each corridor. As the whole group forms a single unit, it leads us to infer that the financial commitment for the execution of the work was possibly shared by them. Their names are-

1. Ramanujamma - the mother of Venkattayya (*Ramanujamma nitya-sada-*

seva, Venkattayagari-thallee).

2. Perumal Nayana's son (*Perumal Nayani kumaru-kainkarya*).

3. Nallamma Nayana, the son of Golla Venkatadri Nayan (*Golla Venkatadri Nayani kumarudaina, Nallamma Nayani kainkaryamu, Sreeranga Sthalamu*).

We have not been able to locate the names of the donors inscribed in the *Sreeranga Mahatmya* murals, in the Srirangam inscriptions. Their names suggest that they belong to the Telugu Country. The interesting feature is that one of the donors is a lady Ramanujamma. Most probably, she might have been a woman of considerable means who had a special affection for Srirangam. We come across names such as Nayana, in a number of slabs on the floor in Srirangam both in the Tayar shrine and the Ranganatha shrine.

Many concepts inherent in the *Sreeranga Mahatmya* can be traced back to the songs of the Azhvars themselves. The *Sreeranga Mahatmya* which makes much of the quarrel between the rivers Ganga and Kaveri, has most probably drawn its inspiration from the words which describes one as purer than the other. This has been interwoven into a *sthala-purana* legend of not only Srirangam but also in the *Kaveri Mahatmya*.

In the post-azhvar period, the various concepts centering around Ranganatha were becoming crystallised into the nucleus for the *Sreeranga Mahatmya*. Certain iconographic details present in the songs of the *azhvars* are present in the paintings around the Tiruvannazhi.

The next reference is in the *Amuktamalyada* of Krishnadevaraya who gives a vivid description of not only the Ranga Vimana

at Srirangam temple, the *gopuras* and general surroundings around the temple, but touches upon the origin of the Vimana itself.

"In the beginning Lord Brahma worshipped Ranganatha as a Guha Devatha. Then Sri Hari orders Brahma to give it to Ikshuvaku. Rama belonging to the Ikshuvaku dynasty gifts it to Vibheeshana who then places this *vigraha* in the middle of the Kaveri where the river branches forming the island of Srirangam; there on the chandrapushkaranee, he places Ranganatha."

By the 16th century, the *sthala-purana* legend was fairly well-established and quite popular with the Telugu kings. In the same period, a number of *mahatmyas* covering other temples were also written. The *Sreeranga Mahatmya* itself was rendered in Telugu by a number of poets between the 16th and 18th centuries A.D. In the Nayaka period, no less a poet than Vijayaranga Chokkanatha Nayak wrote the *Sreeranga Mahatmya*.

Besides the *mahatmya* written by the Nayaka king, a number of other versions are available either in manuscript form or as published texts.

The most popular version of the *Mahatmya* is the work of one Gowranna Bhairava who wrote it around 1565. He was a great Vishnu bhakta and in the Colophon of his work, he states that the *Satadhyayi* version of the *Garuda purana* was the nucleus of his *mahatmya*. In the preface to Bhairava's *mahatmya* edition, the editor lists out other versions that were written in Telugu around that period. Srigiri is supposed to have written the earliest version of *Sreeranga Mahatmya*, but such a work no longer exists.

In the wake of Bhairava's work, a number of versions were written mostly in prose rather than in the *champu kavya* style of the other *mahatmyas*. A fairly popular version was written by Katta Varadaraja, a disciple of Ethirajacharya between 1600 and 1650 A.D. In the 17th and 18th centuries, a number of versions were written by Kastoori Rangiah, Pulipaka Ramanna, Vella Narasimhachari, Sarasvari Venkata Subbaraya Sastri, Sriranganathudu, Varamalla Narasarnatyudu.

The artist in painting the *Mahatmya* panels has adopted a rapid narrative pace. He has been able to pack in all the sub-plots and minor incidents without losing track, of the central theme-the peregrination of the Ranga Vimana. His object has been to communicate the legends in an easy manner. Using the label captions to explain the contents of the conversations, the artist utilises the mural space to delineate the main characters of a scene.

The portrayal is static in most panels. Occasionally, the artist infuses life to the mood of the story and draws an animated composition. He does so for example in portraying the arrival of Kama to distract Ikshuvaku in his penance and in depicting Rama's battle with Ravana. The *pattabhisheka* scene, though colourful, large and filled with portraits and affording an appreciation of the artist's repertory, is attempted more in the manner of a still-life composition.

The artist employs the technique of continuous narration effectively to maintain the story sequence and conveys the concept of movement. The artist has,

however, not used the techniques of shading or flexion to infuse vivacity into the individual characterisations in the composition.

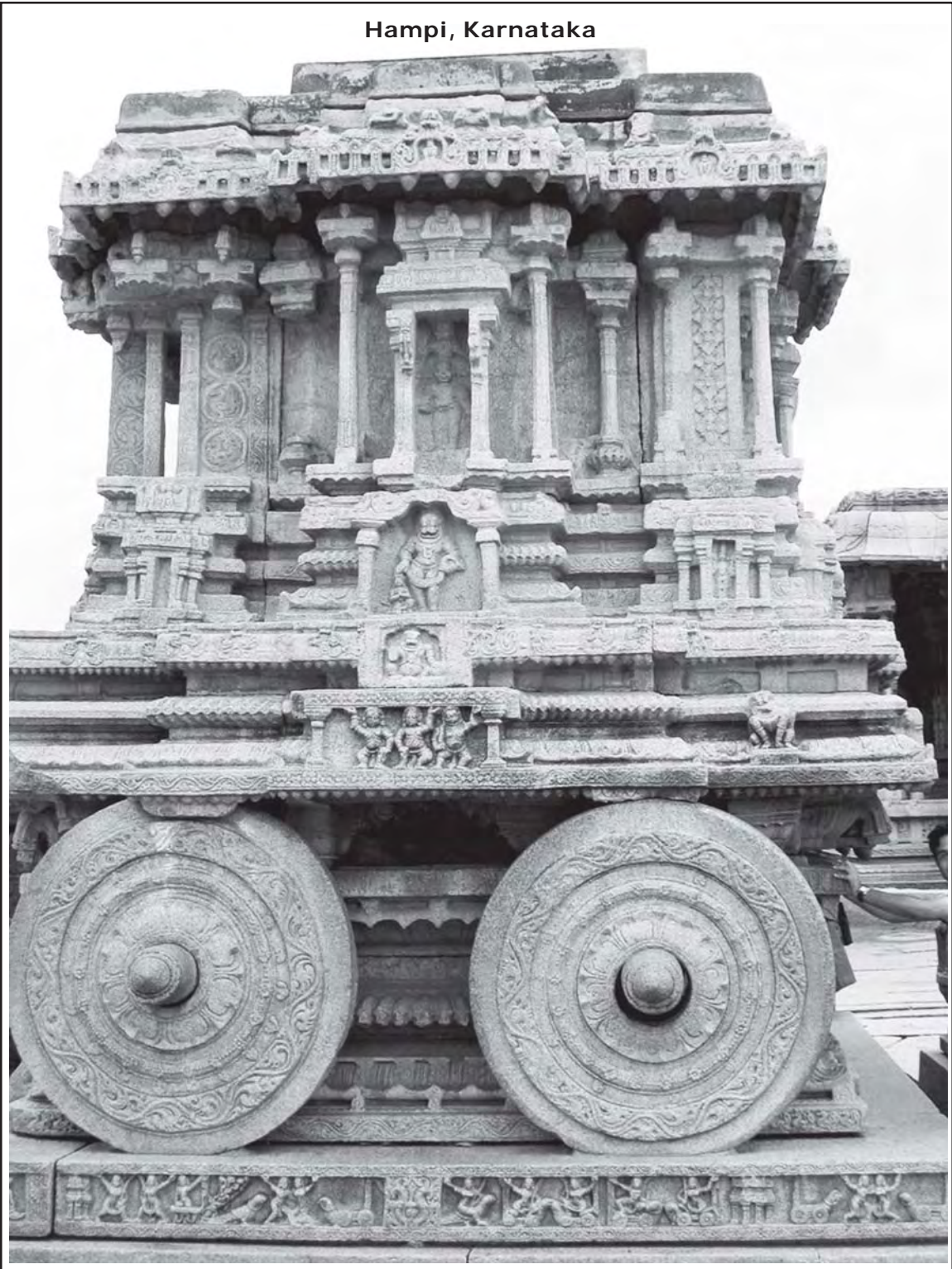
The Srirangam Mahatmya painted in the Tiruvunnazhi and covering *sthala* purana legends of this temple could well have been influenced by a special interest taken up by Vijayaranga Chokkanatha, who was himself the author of a Telugu version.

Writing of such Mahatmyas was particularly popular in the Nayaka period. Just as the Thiruvunnazhi was appropriately utilized in Srirangam to exhibit the *Sreeranga* Mahatmya on its ceiling, similarly mahatmyas of a number of other temples were painted in their respective temples close to the sanctum. In the late 18th century, four interesting *mahatmyas* were translated into paintings in a similar style of Srirangam and these are *Azhvar Tirunagari* (covering the story of Tiruppuli Azhvar), *Tirupadai-maradur* on Karur Devar's service to the temple; *Tirumangalakudi* in Tanjavur district and *Tirukkazhukundram*.

The purpose of painting such *mahatmyas* in temples was to popularise the temple legends and to reach a wider audience. Hence, we find that the Telugu labels in these murals do not exhibit the chaste Telugu literary tradition that we come across in the works of poets. The object of portraying the legends was to reach the common folk and keeping this object in view, the labels were expressed in colloquia idiom to convey the essence of the *sthala purana* legends.



Hampi, Karnataka





Temples The Treasure Houses of Sculptures

Prof. K. V. RAMAN

The temple and the deity are two inseparable entities like the body and the soul. There cannot be a temple without the *murti*. The presiding deity is the life-breath of the temple. Though He resides in the dark recesses of the *garbagriha*, His divine presence radiates all around the temple even as the omnipresent Lord pervades the universe. Yes, the Hindu temple is a miniature universe, the macrocosm and the Lord in the sanctuary is the microcosm. The universe holds within its fold all the worlds, the planets and all forms of life-the human, animal and vegetal. We see this conception well-articulated in the Hindu temple. Who can fail to see in our temples the unending carvings of (*patralatas*) creepers meandering and sprouting about everywhere; groups of hamsas or the swans strutting about; the elephants, the lions, the horses and the mythical animal *vyali* all playing about, as it were, in the temple precincts nonchalantly on the strength of the divine force. The Navagrahas, the nine planets are there deified, the Dwadasa-Adiyas or the Twelve suns; the Ekadasa-rudras or the Eleven Rudras; the ashtadikpalas, the Lords of the eight directions are all assembled there; the Panchabhutas (Five elements of nature) the Devas, the Yakshas, the Gandharvas, the Kinnaras, the apsaras and a host of demigods are all there at the beck and call of the Lord. The human life is portrayed in all its richness and diversity as kings and

queens, saints and devotees, the young and amorous couple, the court jester and the gypsy and the street dancer. What a variety of forms and faces to show the infinite nature of creation! The entire drama of life in this universe is presented in the sculptural forms in the temple revolving round the supreme *Sutradhari* who directs every movement in this pulsating drama. Centuries ago, the Tamil Vaishnava saint Tondaradippodi Alvar gave eloquent expression to this idea in his mellifluous poem *Tiruppalli-eluchi*. He gives a graphic description of all those who had assembled in the temple of Lord Ranganatha of Srirangam (Tiruchirapalli District of Tamilnadu) to receive His blessings. A galaxy of divine personages like the Adityas, Rudras, the nine *maruts*, the ashtavasus, the devas led by Indra mounted on the Iravatha, the yakshas, the Gandharvas, the Vidyadaras, the Saranas, the Siddhas, auspicious symbols like the Sankhanidhi and Padmanidhi, the divine cow Kamadhenu, the great Maharishis like Tumburu and Naradha, the celestial singers Kinnaras play on the different musical instruments like the flute and the lyre. What a fine assemblage of divinities in the temple! The beautiful Sanskrit poem *Venkatesvara Suprabhadam* gives a similar portrayal of the concourse of divinities in the temple precincts of Lord Venkateswara, Tirupati. Here is one of the verses mentioning the presence of the powerful Navagrahas waiting to seek the grace of the Lord.

Suryendu Bhauma Budha vakpati Kavy,
souri Svarbhonu Kethu Divishat Parishad
pradhana Tvat dhasa dhasa charamavati
dhasa dhasah Sri Venkatachelepatē
Tava Suprabhatam!

Natured in this tradition, is there any surprise to see the sculptors of our country reflecting this sentiment and concretising this idea in their noble creations? Only the uninitiated will look askance at the multitudinous forms of the sculptures in the temple. But one who has understood the underlying concept would perceive the meaningful pattern and deeper philosophy behind it. The sculptures with their distinct *hastas*, *mudras*, *asanas*, *abharanas*, *Vahanas*, *bhavas* and *bhangas* have each one of them a message for the onlooker. The symbols form the time-honoured language or the code. One who visits the temple of Sri Venkatesvara at Tirumalai or Govindaraja at Tirupati cannot fail to see the sculptures there in reflecting these ideas. Similarly, the Ranganatha temple at Srirangam which has been described as "Bhuloka Vaikundam" by the Vaishnava saints, has an impressive assemblage of divinities and Alvars and Acharyas.

The sculptures in our temples epitomise the rich heritage of iconography and mythology of our country. One has only to visit the famous Kailasanatha temple, Kanchi to realise the varied iconographic forms of Siva in all their splendour. In the sanctum is Siva as Somaskanda and in the devakoshtas on the sanctum walls are Bikshatana, Dakshinamurthi, Tripurantaka, Nataraja, Lingodhbhava and so forth. Along the cloister are a string of smaller shrines or open cells in which forms of Siva such as Gangadhara, Ravanannugrahamurthi are found. Besides these are the representations of Saptamatrikas, Gajalakshmi, Sarasvati, Brahma, Vishnu, Durga, Ekadasa Rudras, Dwadasa Adityas and the like. In fact, the Kailasanatha temple at

Kanchi built by the Pallava king Rajasimha in the beginning of the 8th century was one of the largest sculpture galleries. Similar sculptural wealth is to be found in the temples of Mamallapuram, Badami, Pattadakal, Ellora, Elephanta, Thanjavur, Gangaikondacholapuram, Deogarh, Belur, Halebed, etc. The sculptural and art traditions are the common inheritance of India sustained as they were by the religious ethos found enshrined in our Puranas, Ithihasas, Agamas and the Silpasastras of our country. Each region and each king vied with each other to give expression to this rich legacy.

Another outstanding example of sculptural assemblage in a temple is provided by the Vaikunta Perumal temple at Kanchi. Here we see the different forms of Vishnu, in the *Sthanaka*, *asana* and *Sayana* poses. Sculptures of Vishnu as Narasimha, Bhavaraha, Vamana-Trivikrama, Nara-Narayana, Kaliyamardhana krishna are exquisitely depicted.

The deities enshrined in our temples also provide a variety of concepts and themes enshrined in our religious rituals. This can be illustrated by taking up a case study of the temples of our ancient city of Kanchi. There are temples for Siva as Kailasanatha, Muktesvara, Matangesvara, Iravatanesvara, Piravatenesvara, Kampaharesvara, Ekambaresvara, Kachappesvara, Punyakotisvara, Airavatesvara etc. each having based on a particular concept and form. Similarly, the Vishnu temples of Kanchi are for Varadaraja (Gajendra varada) Vaikuntanatha, Trivikrama (Ulagalanda perumal) Ashtabhujaswami, Pandavathudar (Messenger of the Pandavas) Dipaprakasara.

Our itihisas like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* provided the perennial themes for copious illustration in our temple sculptures. The famous temple of Deogarh created during the times of the illustrious Gupta kings have remarkable sculptures of the epic scenes. Profuse illustrations from the epics are immortalised in the exquisite carvings found at Ellora. The penance of Arjuna on the banks of the Ganga to receive the Pasupatastra has been magnificently illustrated at Mamallapuram. In the same place the famous scene of Krishna lifting the Govardhana hill to afford protection to the shepherds has been graphically portrayed in keeping with description found in the *Bhagavata*.

The three architectural gems of the Hoysalas at Belur, Halebid and Somanathapur have delicate ivory like carvings of the epic stones. The *Mahabharata* war is picturesquely portrayed as also the skill of Arjuna's archery. Scenes from the *Ramayana* like Vali sugriva

fight, Rama shooting the seven *Sala* trees Hanuman's encounter with Ravana etc. are intricately shown. In Tamilnadu, we see the *Ramayana* sculptures even in the Chola temples like Koilur and Tribhuvanam. Almost all the temples built during the Vijayanagar times display scenes from the two epics besides these from the *Bhagavata*. It should also be remembered that the epic stories have travelled across the oceans to the countries of South East Asia and in the temples of Java and other islands of Indonesia. We find the epics adorning the temples walls in exquisite sculptural forms. Thus the sculptural art and the themes

provide a cultural link between India and other parts of Asia.

The sculptures found in our temples also throw welcome light on the dress and costumes and fashions of the bygone times. We are able to see an interesting variety of head-dress, *crowns, antanyas, haras, keyuras, Bhujangaulayas, nupuras, jalata-tilakas and mekhalas*. The richness of the jeweler's art as well as the sculptor's art are beautifully blended.

The temple sculptures serve as a commentary on the *Natya sastra*. The



temples served as great patrons of dance and music. Sculptures representing a variety of ancient musical instruments are legion. In the great temple of Thanjavur, we find beautiful portrayal of the dance sculptures illustrating the poses described in Bharata's *Natyasastra*. Similar sculptures are also found in other temples like Chidambaram and Sarangapani Temple, Kumbakonam.

The temple sculptures also stand as an eloquent testimony to the great Silpis (sculptors) and stapatias of our country, most of whom have chosen to remain anonymous. Art for art's sake or art for

money's sake was hardly their motto. Art, for them, was a humble dedication and act of piety. Neither the master craftsmen who designed the lay-out of the temple and the distribution of shrines and sculptures therein nor the humbler stone masons paraded their names a quality which can indeed be called the hall-mark of humility. Our ancient Silpa texts dearly state that the icons or sculptures found in our temples are not mere art pieces to provide feast for the eye; but they reflect the deeper yearning of the spirit and therefore the texts outline the qualifications of the Stapati very elaborately. The *Vastu- Vidya* states as follows: "The Stapati must be able to design. He must be proficient in all sciences... He must be pious and compassionate. He must be happy in mind and free from greed. He must be proficient in music and painting. He should have a good knowledge of geography. He must be free from seven vices, must be truthful and possess self-control. He must be deep in the ocean of the science of architecture." The whole discipline and training given to them and nurtured as a family tradition was aimed at this ideal viz. proficiency in arts and purity in mind and body: This was considered essential to create the images of gods. Hence the stapatias and Silpis were considered as divine. The great Tamil poet Kamban always refers to the stapatias as "Deiva- Tachchar" or divine architects. Our kings, temples and people extended their patronage to them and utilised their talents for the dissemination of arts and religion.



The Northern Style- Rekha Temple Prasada

K. V. SOUNDARA RAJAN

In the realm of religious art, India can claim to have established a close co-ordination between cannons and formulations, therefore, between concepts and visual concretisations, between symbolism and aesthetics. The Brahmanical temple form is a perfect synthesis of macrocosmic divinity and the microcosmic *at-man-the* inherent, eternal and inextricable spark of functional continun. Howsoever we look at the temple, as a rich panorama of the entire gamut of creation, human and divine, fauna and floral or the static structural scale of the earth, firmament and the ether; as the mystique of the causal sphere of the 'Subject' and 'object'; We find it a suave summation of Indian thought, philosophy and ritual aims. No wonder that the temple models grew to perfection by the early mediaeval times, consistent with the administration of the elite and the intelligentsia and were the formalised design of vocalised or even contemplated ideas. Two basically inter-related but formally dichotomised versions of temples prevailed, popularly called the 'Northern and the 'Southern' temple types- the *Rekha-Prasada* and the *Vimana* categories of the hieratic texts and the *Agamas*. Our purpose here is to show how the temple concepts and designs snow-balled from the 6th century A.D. onwards to about the 11th century A.D. when they attained their fullness of form and ancillary lay-outs.

The northern temple is a *trivarga* type- with three elevationally identifiable zones, respectively designated in early texts like *Vishnudhar-mottara*, etc., as the *jagati*, *kati* and *manjari*-the base, the body and the superstructure. The *jagati* is not merely the foundational terrace base but also the plinth proper of the temple structure, the *kati*, (also called *bhitti* or *jangha* is customarily divisible into two registers, the *tala jangha* and the *upari jangha*) the former coruscating with either cardinal koshtas or; niches or with an unfolding canvas of several carved images on the facets of the walls which minimally are *triratha* (triple faceted) or maximally *navaratha*. It is interesting to note that the ground spread of the temple matches the faceting of the *kati* and also the elaborations of the superstructure. The chaste *Nagara* temple of the *latina* type first gets formulated in the Gujarat region a part of what is to be called the Maha-Gurjara style notwithstanding ritual layout progressing already under the basic *panchayatana* formula for both Saivism and Vaishnavism and marginally for the Saura (of Surya) cults also. The *prasada* gradually thus moves from its *ekanda* of single superstructural *sikhara* and often of a *triratha* ground plan and wall facet, to the *panchanda* and *navanda* categories wherein subsidiary miniature *sikhara* forms get fixed on the *kamas* of the *bhoomis* of the tower, equal to the thickness of the wall and shell section of the structure.

By the 10th century, specific diversification of the *Rekha-prasada* format had been regionally evolved in the Main-Gurjara region of Rajasthan, in the Malwa plateau of Central India, in the Dathala territory

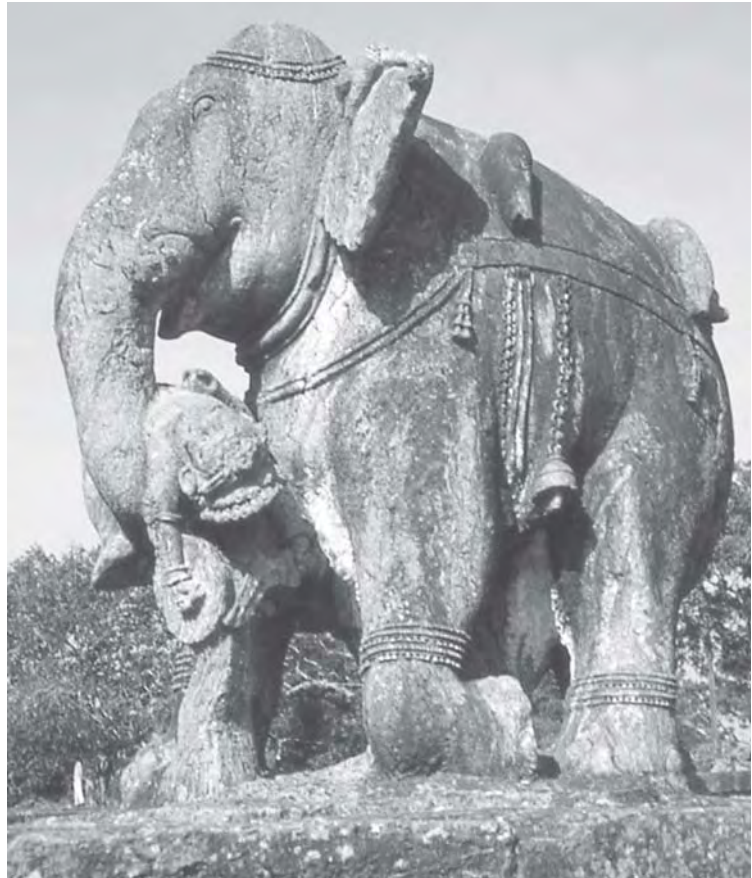
under the Chandelas of Jejabhukti and in the Kalinga region. These, then proliferate under the compulsions of both the evolving religious and cult manifestations and the structural complexities calling for several *mandapas* for the diurnal ritual and are garnered by regional canonical texts and form the chief terms of reference to us at present for the understanding and appreciation of the religious architecture of Northern India. By and large further, the curvature of the elevational profile- the *Rekha gets* delineated respectively by the *triguna*, *chaturguna* and *panchaguna sootras* of the Sthapatis and produce massive crystallisations in stone of the *ayama* (layout) and *ucchraya* (elevation) of the temple. The horizontal divisions of the 'northern' tower *sikhara* alike, gets variegated into the *ponchabhauma* to *navabhauma* with the *kati* elaborated into the *panchanga saptharanga* and *navaranga* lay-out of the *jagati*, Pretihara, Bhumija, Kalinga, etc.

From the point of view of the development of temple forms as such, the Imperial Guptas commenced the vogue from modest ones as temple No. 17 of Sanchi, those of Tigova, Udayagiri, those etc which had floor through a brick medium at Bhidargoan (Kanpur District), Nagari (Rajasthan) into the *pancyayatana* models at Nachna, Bhumara, Deogrh, etc. and later developed into interesting circular sectioned temples of the *Rekha* class also, as at *Chandrehi*, in the 9th-10th century A.D. They were followed by the Pratiharas of Kannauj, the Gurjara Pratiharas of Gujarat (as at Lakroda) and Rajasthan (as at asian, Buchkala, etc.) ruling from several regional capitals like Mandavyapuri (Mandore near

Jodhpur), Nandipuri, etc. and the activity was continued by the Maitrakas, (as at Gop Pindara, Sutrapada Kadyar, etc. forming also a folk-idiom of the *Phamsana* category), Saindhavas and Chapotkatas of Saurashtra at Wad wan, Tametar and then later the Solankis of Anhilvadpatah in countless temples. In Rajasthan, the trend was further taken up by the Guhilas, Chahamanas, again of various clans ruling from Nagda, Chitogarh, Sakambari, Nodal, Jalor, etc. In Central India, the Paramaras who succeeded the Pratiharas and illustrious kings including Bhoja (the author of *Samarangana Sutradhara*, *Sringara prakasa*, *Manasollasa*, etc.) created a new trend in the *Rekha* style, formulating the *Bhumija* school which spread as far with West as to Menal and Bijholia and whose type site is Udayasvara at Udayapur (M.P.) of the Bhumija Paramara school which spread as far West into Rajasthan under the Kalachuris of Dahal and South into Aparanta (Konkana) under the Silaharas and under Yadava Senas of Devagiri up to the 13th century A.D. This *Bhumija*

style decorated the *sikharas* with a *sringara* or garland-like string of miniature *sikharas* between each two cardinal *lata* (rib) of the *manjari* and elaborated the facets of the *bhitti* into two main categories, the orthogonal and the Stellate (*parivartana*) or wedged ones. One may note that the Hoysalas of Dvarasamudra (Halebid) in

Karnataka had effectively created this stellate plan with only the *koshthas* in *bhadra* face and these had their impact on the Chalukyas (Solankis) of Gujarat also as at Satnal on the Mahi River near Dakor. The Kalachuris of Dahala specialised in this order in innumerable temples in Raipur, Bilaspur and other regions and were



particularly excelling in slender and lofty *sikharas* over seven *bhoomis*, side by side- With the orthogonal type or pure *Nagara* forms, up to Amarkantak, the source of the Narmada. The Chandellas or Jajakabhukti further innovated the pure *Nagara* form into the *urati-sringa* mode by which the superstructural tower was had

several *applique* half-tower miniatures, progressively becoming smaller in size and clustering like petals, around the *moolamanjari* which is indeed seen only in the top-most part of these lofty temples rising from its easing like the pistil of a flower. Their centres were again well spread, apart from the classic Khajuraho nucleus, in Banda and Hamirpur districts of Uttar Pradesh as at Mahoba, Rahilya, etc. and as far south in Maharashtra as in the temples at Markandi on the, Wain ganga river.

The Kalinga class of *Rekhapsadas* again was starting from the elongated gable roof front *mandapa*, as at Parasuramesvor, through Vaital deul and Torana-decorated Mukkesvar, into the grand Lingaraja complex, climaxing into the magnificent sun-temple at Konarak. The hall-mark of the Kalinga temple was the astylar corbelled main tower, with horizontal digited courses, division of the *Bhitti* into *Rahapaga*, *pabhaga* and *konakapaga* and having mostly closed front *mandapas* and rising vertical profile, with festoones carved on the facets and mildly curving only towards the *gandi* and the *beki*. Its plinth was characterised by the bold *ghata-shaped* moulding and by a general absence of a separate and closely circumscribing *Jagati* terrace. Its ambit of influence was well into the northernmost parts of coastal Andhra Pradesh, as at Mukhalingam (Somesvara temple) and into the easternmost districts of Madhya Pradesh like Sambalpur and Bastar. The temples are mostly nirandhara.

The *Rekhapsada*, by and large, carries a *sandhara* circuit around the sanctum, with porched *bhavra valokana*, followed by

successive *mandapas* with ornate pillars and hemispherical ceilings of cusped, *kshipta* and *gajatal* decorative motifs and also of simpler *nabhicchanda* annular ringed courses, with all its *mandapas* invariably having cardinal porched openings and forming often a latin-cross lay-out, with the *mukhamandapa* porch, approached by a flight of steps and the entire temple set on a square spacious *jagati* terrace. The superstructural towers of the subsidiary shrines have *ghantasamvarana* type of roofing course and a lofty *sukanasa* opening on the *antarala* roof applied to the main *sikhara* face and with a *sardoola* in rampart posture located on the edges of the *sukanasa* and successive roofs at progressively lowered heights. The door-frame of the cella is of multiple *sakha* over-door form with jamb-base carrying Ganga and Yamuna on either side, besides Pratiharas (attendants). The beam of the cella door has a *lalata-bimba* (signature mascot) often either of Gajalakshmi or Ganesha or Lakuleesa (or Mahaveera in Jain temples). The *uttaranga* above this beam shows small miniature shrines with their appropriate towered tops. These zones are occasionally decorated by *navagraha* panels. The outer walls carry Dikpalas, in the respective cardinal and oblique angles in a fixed position, with Agni (south-east), Yama (south), Nairuti (south-west), Varuna (west), Vayu (north-west), Kubera (north), lisana (north-east) and Indra (east). They are sometimes provided with *Torana* entrances beyond the outermost mandapa and a *Sringara-chauri mandapa* further and also a tank sometimes, even where they are located on the banks of a stream or river. *Prakaras* and *gopura* entrances are

conspicuous by their absence, in 'Northern' temples, as also *parivara shrines* including even separate Devi temples. It was customary invariably to build separate temples for all divinities, as of *Svayam-pradhana* category, besides Siva and Vishnu, as for Karthikeya, Ganesha, Durga or Amba, the Saptamata's, Bhairava and Surya. This pantheism in substance, which was the hallmark of the approach to Hindu temple-building in the north is in somewhat striking comparability with the *generic* character of southern temple cults, which already in their earlier stages, lived through a pantheistic stage and went on from there to a dichotomised format wherein the cults nexus and polarisation had been developed amidst the divinities and two dominant divisions into Siva-based and Vishnu-based worship developed, with the consorts also classified for each though in the same stages, a Durga-Kali mass-based cult was also administrated as a part of socio-religious and part-ethnic foot-note to the nexus between Saivism and Vaishnavism on the one hand and between Puranic Hinduism and an underlying indigenous cult-matrix of a pan-Indian character, on the other. This, however, is a fit ground for the socio-cultural art historian to tread upon and has no structural or formally identifiable over-tones in architecture as such. It does, none the less, tend to predicate upon one of the basic distinctions between the aims and objective of the 'Northern' temple organism and its 'southern' counterpart.



The Origin and Use of Images In India

ANANDA K. COOMARASWAMY

Few of those who condemn idolatry, or make its suppression a purpose of missionary activity, have ever seriously envisaged the actual use of images, in historical or psychological perspective, or surmised a possible significance in the fact that the vast majority of men of all races and in all ages, including the present, Protestants, Hebrews and Musalmans being the chief exceptions, have made use of more or less anthropomorphic images as aids to devotion. For these reasons it may be not without value to offer an account of the use of images in India, as far as possible in terms of thought natural to those who actually-make use of such images. This may at least conduce to a realisation of the truth enunciated by an incarnate Indian deity, Krishna, that "the path men take from every side is Mine." In explaining the use of images in India, where the method is regarded as edifying, it should not be inferred that Hindus or Buddhists are to be represented *en masse* as less superstitious than other peoples. We meet with all kinds of stories about images that speak or bow or weep; images receive material offerings and service, which they are said to "enjoy"; we know that the real presence of the deity is invited in them for the purpose of receiving worship; on the completion of an image, its eyes are "opened" by a special and elaborate ceremony. Thus, it is clearly indicated that the image is to be regarded as if animated by the deity.

Obviously, however, there is nothing peculiarly Indian here. Similar miracles have been reported of Christian images; even the Christian church, like an Indian temple, is a house dwelt in by God in a special sense, yet it is neither regarded as his prison nor do its walls confine his omnipresence, whether in India or in Europe.

Further, superstition or realism, is inseparable from human nature and it would be easy to show that this is always and everywhere the case. The mere existence of science does not defend us from it; the majority will always conceive of atoms and electrons as real things, which would be tangible if they were not so small and will always believe that tangibility is a proof of existence and are fully convinced that a being, originating at a given moment of time, may yet, as that same being survive eternally in time. He who believes that phenomena of necessity stand for solid existing actualities or that there can exist an empirical consciousness or individuality without a material (substantial) basis or that anything that has come into being can endure as such forever *is* an idolater, a fetishist. Even if we should accept the popular Western view of Hinduism as a polytheistic system, it could not be maintained that the Indian icon is in any sense fetish. A good illustration of this to be found in the *Divyavadana*, Ch.XXVI, where Upagupta compels Mara, who as a *yaksa* has the power of assuming shapes at will, to exhibit himself in the shape of the Buddha, Upagupta bows down and Mara, shocked at this apparent worship of himself, protests. Upagupta explains, that he is not worshipping Mara, but the person

represented - "Just as people venerating earthen images of the undying angels, do not revere the clay as such, but the immortals represented therein".

Here we have the case of an individual who has passed beyond individuality, but is yet represented according to human needs by an image. The principle is even clearer in the case of the images of the angels; the image *parse* is neither God nor any angel, but merely an aspect of hypostasis (*avastha*) of God, who is in the last analysis without likeness (*amurla*), not determined by form (*arupa*), trans-form (*para-rupa*). His various forms or emanations are conceived by a process of symbolic filiation: To conceive of Hinduism as a polytheistic system is in itself a naivete of which only a Western student, inheriting Graeco-Roman concepts of "paganism" would be capable; the Muhammadan view of Christianity as polytheism could be better justified than this.

In fact, if we consider Indian religious philosophy as a whole and regard the extent to which its highest conceptions have passed as dogmas into the currency of daily life, we shall have to define Hindu civilisation as one of the least superstitious the world has known. *Maya* is not properly *delusion*, but strictly speaking creative power, *sakti*, the principle of manifestation; *delusion*, *moha*, is to conceive of appearances as things in themselves and to be attached to them as such without regard to their procession.

Again and again, from the Upanishads to the most devotional theistic hymns the Godhead, ultimate reality, is spoken of as unlimited by any form, not to be described as any predicate, unknowable. Thus, in the

Upanishads, "He is, by that alone is He to be apprehended (cf. "I am that I am"); in the words of the Saiva hymnist Manikka Vacagar, "He is passing the description of words, not comprehensible by the mind, not visible to the eye or other senses." Similarly in later Buddhism, in the Vajrayana (Sunyavada) system, we find it categorically stated that the divinities, that is, the personal God or premier angel in all His forms, "are manifestations of the essential nature of non-being", the doctrine of the only reality of the Void is pushed to the point of an explicit denial of the existence of any Buddha or any Buddhist doctrine.

Again, whereas we are apt to suppose that the religious significance of Christianity stands or falls with the actual historicity of Jesus, we find an Indian commentator (Nilakantha) saying of the Krishna Lila, believed historical by most Hindus, that the narration is not the real point, that this is not a historical event, but is based upon eternal truths, on the actual relation of the soul to God and that the events take place, not in the outer world, but in the heart of man. Here we are in a world inaccessible to higher criticism, neither of superstition on the one hand nor of cynicism on the other. It has been more than once pointed out that the position of Christianity could well be strengthened by a similar emancipation from the historical point of view, as was to a large extent actually the case with the Schoolmen.

As for India, it is precisely in a world dominated by an idealistic concept of reality and yet with the approval of the most profound thinkers, that there flourished what we are pleased to call

idolatry. Manikka Vacagar, quoted above, constantly speaks of the attributes of God, refers to the legendary accounts of His actions and takes for granted the use and service of images. In Vajrayana Buddhism, often though not quite correctly designated as nihilistic, the development of an elaborate pantheon, fully realised in material imagery, reaches its zenith. Sankaracharya himself, one of the most brilliant intellects the world has known, interpreter of the Upanishads and creator of the Vedanta system of pure monism accepted by a majority of all Hindus and analogous to the idealism of Kant was a devout worshipper of images, a visitor to shrines, a singer of devotional hymns.

True, in a famous prayer, he apologises for visualizing in contemplation. One who is not limited by any form, for praising in hymns. One who is beyond the reach of words and for visiting Him in sacred shrines, who is Omni-present. Actually, too, there exist some groups in Hinduism (the Sikhs, for example) who do not make use of images. But if even he who knew could not resist the impulse to love and love requires an object of adoration and an object must be conceived in word or form -how much greater must be the necessity' of that majority for whom it is so much easier to worship than to know. Thus the philosopher perceives the use of imagery, verbal and Visual and sanctions the service of images. God Himself makes like concession to our mortal nature, "taking the forms imagined by His worshippers, making Himself as we are that we may be as He is.

The Hindu Isvara (Supreme God) is not jealous. God, because all gods are aspects



of Him, imagined by HIS worshippers. In the words of Krishna: "When any devotee seeks to worship any aspect with faith, it is none other than Myself that bestows that steadfast faith and when by worshipping any aspect he wins what he desires, it is none other than Myself that grants his prayers. Howsoever men approach me, so do I welcome them, for the path men take from every side is Mine." In any case, his spiritual growth cannot be aided by a desecration of his ideals, he can be aided only by the fullest recognition of these ideals as retaining -their validity in any scheme, however profound. This was

the Hindu method; Indian religion adapts herself with infinite grace to every human need. The collective genius that made of Hinduism a continuity ranging from the contemplation of the Absolute to the physical service of an image made of clay did not shrink from an ultimate acceptance of every aspect of God conceived by man and of every ritual devised by his devotion.

We have already suggested that the multiplicity of the forms of Images, coinciding with the development of monotheistic Hinduism, arises from various causes, all ultimately referable to the diversity of need of individuals and groups.

In particular, this multiplicity is due historically to the inclusion of all pre-existing forms, all local forms, in a greater theological synthesis where they are interpreted as modes or emanations (*vyuha*) of the supreme Isvara and subsequently, to the further growth of theological speculation. In

the words of Yaksha, "We see actually that because of the greatness of God, the one principle of life is praised in various ways. Other angles are the individual members of a unique Self" (Nirukta, 7.4):

Iconolatry, however, was not left to be regarded as an ignorant or useless practice fit only for spiritual children; even the greatest as we have seen, visited temples and worshipped images and certainly these greatest thinkers did not do so blindly or unconsciously. A human necessity was recognised, the nature of the necessity was understood, its psychology systematically analysed, the various phases

of image worship, mental and material, were defined and the variety of forms explained by the doctrines of emanation and of gracious condescension.

In the first place, then, the forms of images are not arbitrary. Their ultimate elements may be of popular origin rather than priestly invention, but the method is adopted and further developed within the sphere of intellectual orthodoxy. Each conception is of human origin; notwithstanding that the natural tendency man to realism leads to a belief in actual existent heavens where the Angel appears as he is represented. In the words of Sukracharya, "the characteristics of images are determined by the relation that subsists between, the adorer and the adored"; in those cited by Gopalabhatta from an unknown source, the present spiritual activity of the worshipper and the actual existence of a traditional iconography, are reconciled as follows—Though it is the devotion (*bhakti*) of the devotee that causes the manifestation of the image of the Blessed One (Bhagavata), in this matter (iconography) the procedure of the ancient sages should be followed." The whole problem of symbolism (*pratika*, "symbol") is discussed by Sankaracharya, (Commentary on the Vedanta Sutras, I, 1.20). Endorsing the statement that "all who sing here to the harp, sing Him," he points out that this "Him" refers to the highest Lord only, who is the ultimate theme even of wordly songs. And as to anthropomorphic expressions in scripture, "we reply that the highest Lord may, when he pleases, assume a bodily shape formed of Maya, in order to gratify his devout worshippers"; but all this is merely analogical, as when we say that the

Brahman abides here or there which in reality abides only in its own glory (*if. ibid.*, I, 2.29) The representation of the invisible by the visible is also discussed by Deussen, *Philosophy of the Upanishads*, (pp.99-101.cf.) also the discussion of *paroksha* in Ch.V.

Parenthetically, we may remark that stylistic sequences (change of aesthetic form without change of basic shape) are a revealing record of changes in the nature of religious experience; in Europe, for example, the difference between a thirteenth-century and a modern Madonna betrays the passage from passionate conviction to facile sentimentality. Of this, however, the worshipper is altogether unaware; from the standpoint of edification, the value of an image does not depend on its aesthetic qualities. A recognition of the significance of stylistic changes, in successive periods, important as it may be for us as students of art, is actually apparent only in disinterested retrospect; the theologian, proposing means of edification, has been concerned only with the forms of images. Stylistic changes correspond to linguistic changes; we all speak the language of our own time without question or analysis.

Let us consider now the processes actually involved in the making of images. Long anterior to the oldest surviving images of the supreme deities we meet with descriptions of the gods as having limbs, garments, weapons or other attributes; such descriptions are to be found even in the Vedic lauds and myths. Now in theistic Hinduism, where the method of Yoga is employed, that is, focused attention leading to the realisation of identity of

consciousness with the object considered, whether or not this object be God, these descriptions, now called *dhyana mantrams* or trance formulae or alternatively, *sadhanas*, means, provide the germ from which the form of the deity is to be visualised. For example, "I worship our gentle lady Bhuvaneshvari, like the risen sun, lovely, victorious, destroying defects in prayer, with a shining crown on her head, three-eyed and with swinging earrings adorned with diverse gems, as a lotus-lady, abounding in treasure, making the gestures of charity and giving assurance. Such is the dhyanam of Bhuvaneshvari" (a form of Devi). To the form thus conceived imagined flowers and other offerings are to be made. Such interior worship of a



mantra-body or correspondingly imagined form is called subtle (*sukshma*), in contradistinction to the exterior worship of a material image, which is termed gross (*sthula*) though merely in a descriptive, not a deprecatory sense.

Further contrasted with both these modes of worship is that called *para-rupa*, "transform," in which the worship is paid directly to the deity as he is in himself. This last mode no doubt corresponds to the ambition of the iconoclast, but such gnosis is in fact only possible and therefore only

permissible, to the perfected Yogin and veritable *jivanmukta*, who is so far as he himself is concerned set free from all name and aspect, whatever may be the outward appearance he presents. Had the iconoclast in fact attained such perfection as this, he could not have been an iconoclast. In any case it must be realised, in connection with the gross or subtle modes

of worship, that the end is only to be attained by an identification of the worshipper's consciousness with the form under which the deity is conceived.

nadevo devam yajet, "only as the angel can one worship the angel?" and so *devo bhutva devan yajet*, "to worship the Angel become the Angel." Only when the *dhyanam* is thus realised in full *samadhi* (the consummation of Yoga, which commences with focussed attention) is the worship achieved. Thus, for example, with regard to the form of Nataraja, representing Siva's

cosmic dance, in the words of Tirumular,
 The dancing foot,
 the sound of the tinkling bells,
 The songs that are sung and
 the various steps,
 The forms assumed by our
 Master as He dances,
 Discover these in your own heart,
 so shall your bonds be broken.

When, on the other hand, a material image is to be produced for purposes of worship in a temple or elsewhere, this as a technical procedure must be undertaken by a professional craftsman, who may be variously designated *silpin*, "craftsman", *yogin*, "yogi", *sadhaka*, "adept," or simply *roopakara* or *pratimakara*, "imager". Such a craftsman goes through the whole process of self-purification and worship, mental visualisation and identification of consciousness with the form evoked and then only translates the form into stone or metal. Thus the trance formulae become the prescriptions by which the craftsman works and as such they are commonly included in the *Silpa Sastras*, the technical literature of craftsmanship. These books in turn provide invaluable data for the modern student of iconography.

Technical production is thus bound up with the psychological method known as *yoga*. In other words the artist does not resort to models but uses a mental construction and this condition sufficiently explains the cerebral character of the art, which everyone will have remarked for himself. In the words of the encyclopaedist Sukracharya, "One should set up in temples the images of angels who are the objects of his devotion, by mental vision of their attributes; it is for the full achievement of

this yoga-vision that the proper lineaments of images are prescribed; therefore the mortal imager should resort to trance-vision, thus and no otherwise and surely not by direct perception, is the end to be attained.

The proper characteristics of images are further elucidated in the *Silpa Sastras* by a series of canons known as *talamana* or *pramana*, in which are prescribed the ideal proportions proper to the various deities, whether conceived as Kings of the World or otherwise. These proportions are expressed in terms of a basic unit, just as we speak of a figure having so many "heads"; but the corresponding Indian measure is that of the "face", from the hair on the forehead to the chin and the different canons are therefore designated Ten-face, in-face and so on down to the Five-face canon suitable for minor deities of dwarfish character. These ideal proportions correspond to the character of the aspect of the angel to be represented and complete the exposition of this character otherwise set forth by means of facial expression, attributes, costume, or gesture. And as Sukracharya says further "Only an image made in accordance with the canon can be called beautiful; some may think that beautiful which corresponds to their own fancy, but that not in accordance with the canon is unlovely to the discerning eye. And again, "Even the misshapen image of an angel is to be preferred to that of a man, however attractive the latter may be"; because the representations of the angels are means to spiritual ends, not so those which are only likenesses of human individuals. "When the consciousness is brought to rest in the

form (*nama*, "name", "idea") and sees only the form, then in as much as it rests in the form, aspectual perception is dispensed with and only the reference remains; one reaches then the world without aspectual perception and with further practice attains liberation from all hindrances, becoming adept."

Here, in another language than our own are contrasted ideal and realistic art: the one means to the attainment of fuller consciousness, the other merely a means to pleasure. So too might the anatomical limitations of Giotto be defended as against the human charm of Raphael.

It should be further understood that images differ greatly in the degree of their anthropomorphism. Some are merely symbols, as when the Bodhi tree is used to represent the Buddha at the time of the Enlightenment or when only the feet of the Lord are represented as objects of worship. A very important iconographic type is that of *the yantra*, used especially in the Sakta systems; here we have to do with a purely geometrical form, often for instance composed of interlocking triangles, representing the male and female, static and kinetic aspects of the Two-in-One. Further, images in the round may be *avyakta*, non-manifest, like a *lingam* or *vyaktavakta*, partially manifest, as in the case of a *mukha-lingam* or *vyakta*, fully manifest in "anthromorphic" or partly theomorphic types. In the last analysis all these are equally ideal, symbolic forms.

In the actual use of a material image, it should always be remembered that it must be prepared for worship by a ceremony of invocation (*avahana*); and if intended only for temporary use, subsequently

desecrated by a formulae of dismissal (*visarjana*). When not in *puja*, that is before consecration or after desecration, the image has no more sacrosanct character than any other material object. It should not be supposed that the deity, by invocation and dismissal, is made to come or go, for omnipresence does not move; these ceremonies are really projections of the worshipper's own mental attitude towards the image. By invocation he announces to himself his intention of using the image as a means of communion with the angel; by dismissal he announces that his service has been completed and that he no longer regards the image as a link between himself and the deity.

It is only by a change of view-point, psychologically equivalent to such a formal desecration, that the worshipper, who naturally regards the icon as a devotional utility, comes to regard it as a mere work of art to be sensationally regarded as such. Conversely, the modern aesthician, fails to conceive of the work as the necessary, product of a given determination, that is, as having purpose and utility. Of these two, the worshipper, for whom the object was made, is nearer to the root of the matter than the aesthician who endeavours to isolate beauty from function.

Source: "The Transformation of Nature in Art". Page 155-169.



Temple Architecture of Tripura

RATNA DAS

Early Period

It is not known when building activity started in Tripura. But the discovery of some of the cult icons of the 7th-8th century, provided with temons, appears to testify the existence of temples in the same period for enshrining them. Not a single piece of lintel or a door-Jamb or even a fragment of a pillar, be it religious or secular throwing light on the genesis of ancient architecture has so far been discovered. The probable reasons for the non-availability of old monuments lie in the damp climate, perishable building materials, thick growth of vegetation and the iconoclastic zeal of Muslim invaders. Thousands of large-sized bricks with smooth surface and moulded plaques, similar to those of Mainamati, have been found scattered in the same area and they point to the existence of brick edifices which were contemporaneous with Mainamati culture-complex. Like Pilak, the other notable site, Unakoti, has also yielded a number of bricks and a plinth (little of which is exposed now). Presumably, many such architectural monuments are lying buried only to be revealed by the spade of archaeologists in the near future.

In regard to the architectural relics, the position of Tripura is worse than her neighbour, Bengal. While the materials in the shape of representations of temple-types depicted in sculptural art and manuscript paintings have enabled us to

reconstruct the history of architecture of ancient and Mediaeval Bengal, Tripura has not yielded any such remains except a single type of *stupa*, portrayed on the back-slabs of Buddhist sculptures as well as some terracotta sealings recovered from the Pilak Jolaibadi region. This stupa-type, carved on sculpture and terracotta sealings, is exactly similar in form to the 7th century bronze votive *stupa* found at Ashrafpur (Dacca, Bangladesh)! This type of *stupa* architecture was also prevalent at Mainamati in Comilla district, as evident from some sealings, three *stupas* exposed in its Kotilamuda section. The *stupas* at Ashrafpur, Mainamati and Pilak belong to one type: it consists of a square base, a circular drum, a hemispherical dome and a *harmika* with finials. The dome bulges a little towards the top in each case and this feature is pronounced in the Ashrafpur example. As a result, the *stupas* are endowed with a contour like that of the bell-shaped *stupas* of Burma of later days. We may venture to suggest that this stupa type went to Burma through the Pilak-Jolaibadi, sector of Tripura sometime in the 8th-9th century A.D.

Architecture of the Manikya Period (late-15th-16th century A.D.)

From the extant edifices, it is evident that the temple-building activity started in the early 16th century or towards the end of the 15th century under the Manikya patronage and practically came to a close in the last part of the 18th century due to decadence of the royal power. In other words, the majority of Tripura temples are assignable to the period between the 16th

and the 18th century. Most of them are concentrated at Udayapura, which had been the capital of Tripura till the first half of the 18th century and have disclosed 'a forgotten chapter of Indian architectural development.' A survey of Tripura monuments, now in various stages of preservation, amply bears out the fact that they architecturally form a compact group. The present study has been confined to temples which are better preserved.

The temples of Tripura during the period under review may be divided into two groups:

(a) *char-chela stupa-sirsha* temples and (b) three-storeyed tower-like edifices. Though both the groups appear to have stemmed from a common tradition of architecture, they are of different shapes.



(a) Char-chala Stupa-sirsha Temples

It may be borne in mind when judging from the architectonic viewpoint that all the members of the edifices are not present in the standing buildings and ruined vestiges. It is possible to do so, if we bring together every bit of evidence in order to reconstruct the forms and features of the temples of Tripura.

Built of bricks, the edifices of this group are constituted of two individual structural members, e.g. *torana* and the single-perched main sanctum. *Torana* is a *docyala*

construction. The inner roof is spanned by pointed barrel vault. The outer roof, as a rule, is placed directly on the vault and follows its outline in the exterior. The *Toranas* are without any crowning member though some have wrongly viewed that they share identical finial with the sanctum. The construction of *torana* has been made of two pointed key-stone-arched doors in opposite directions and also windows of the same type on the side walls.

In general, the main temple is built on a raised platform or courtyard, approached from the *torana* by ascending stair-cases.

The plinth is constructed more or less on the same level of the raised courtyard. The shrine is the combination of *charchala* sanctum and a low-height porch, the hind edge of the latter being interlocked with the facade of the sanctum. Between the porch and the pointed arched entrance to the sanctum is the *antarala* not exceeding an average length of a metre. The ground plan of the sanctum is round inside and square from outside. From the measurements of the outer surface and the inner space, it appears that the wall is sufficiently thick. The inner roof of the *char-chala* is not visible. The walls of the porch and the sanctum have been made so thick that the inner sides of the *chala*s became solid and the rounded sanctum wall rises gradually tapering to the inner vault of the crowning which is made by corbelling, supported by key-stone at the centre of the top. The inner walls are provided with small niches with pointed arch shape. No pillar or pilasters were used inside the construction.

The outer brick-wall rises perpendicularly forming a semi-circle with moulded or dentate edge towards the dropping cornice of the roof. The flatness of the plain wall is relieved by horizontal rows of slate stones. This method also helps to strengthen the structure. At the four corners of the sanctum are found tapering pilasters with *kalasa* finial from which sprouts the carved cornice. These buttresses are imitations of Muslim minarets which happily synchronised themselves in a Hindu monument and decidedly an innovation, since it is not met within Assam, Bengal or Orissa temples. The exterior walls in general bear a number of squares and

rectangles of irregular size which are created by a combination of horizontal and vertical mouldings. Such walls of the temples are not decorated with terracotta plaques, though instances of terracotta decoration was not altogether unknown as is evidenced by the findings of hoards of terracotta plaques at Phulkumari, apparently from the ruins of a temple. In rare instances in extant edifices the lotus motif is seen just below the cornice; it is moulded on brick and is occasionally carved on slate-stone.

Next comes the *mastaka* or the crowning which gives the temples of Tripura an uncommon character. On the humped surface of the *charchala* roof, stands the hemispherical *anda* of a *stupa*, having a moulded base and an *amalaka* disc over it and on this disc again is placed a solid cylindrical member, probably *harmika* with the crowning finial *hti*. Both the porch and the sanctum possess the same type of crowning, which in individual examples seemingly belongs to a common tradition, the distinction being merely in minor details. Perhaps a majority of the edifices had monolithic arched gateways which are, now however seen detached from the shrines. It is not possible to describe all the temples in such a limited space. Here we may examine only the representative temples of *stupa-sirsha chala-type*, namely, Harimandir where all the members of the structure are present and Jagannadha Dol, a lone example of stone-temple in Tripura. The Hari Temple gives a glimpse of the whole design of the temples of Tripura. All the members of the temple-complex are in a good state of preservation. The temple faces west. Stair-cases give access to and

from the *dochala torana* to the high platform. On the brick-paved walled courtyard stands the main edifice (porch, sanctum and the ambulatory path) which is completely damaged now. Unlike other examples, the sanctum is internally square which has been converted to a circle towards the top over which a spheroid dome is carried out by introducing a continuous series of three arches. The square ground is turned into a circle on the top. The arches occur in the centre of each side. The inner roof of the sanctum as well as of the porch and *antarala* are the same as mentioned before. The *torana* has a *dochala* roof, like those of Vishnupura with arched doors and windows on four sides. A rectangular recess intended to contain the inscription is present below the cornice of the *torana* which is unfortunately now missing. The crowning members are stylistically identical with its fellow edifices. Though we do not know the exact date of its construction, stylistically it is assignable to the 17th century when all such temples were erected.

The Jagannath Dolor temple is the most important of all the monuments in Tripura as it is the lone example of stone-temple in the region. Unfortunately, however, it is too damaged to allow a discussion of all its features in detail. Though typical of the brick-temples, it is entirely built of a kind of ash-coloured slate- stone-slabs so far as the vertical portion is concerned. The inner wall and outer roof are, however, made of brick, but the base of the outer dome like the rest of the structures is of stone. Internally, it is square at the base; the square has been converted into a circle to form the inner vault by means of a series

of eight arches. The arches occur in the centre of each side and one at each corner above the heads of the main arches. Barrel-vaulted *antarala* contains one niche on either side. There are no images on the building though eleven niches are found on the exterior walls. The main feature lies in the absence of ribs all around the building. The crowning is a massive hemispherical *anda* of a stupa, the other members being lost. Tapering pilasters with *kalasa* finial support four corners of the monument. The temple was built by Jagannadadeva, younger brother of Govindamanikya in 1661 A. D. and was originally dedicated to Vishnu.

The temples that we have studied in the preceding pages may be assigned to the 16th and 17th centuries on the basis of epigraphy and architectural style. They belong to what may be designated as *stupa-sirsha charchala* type of edifices and not to *the stupa-sirshabhadra* or tiered type of temples illustrated in the early mediaeval manuscript paintings of Eastern India. There are reasons to believe that the *chala* or the hut-type structures with sloping curvilinear roof derived from the thatch-and-bamboo prototype, the sloping roof being devised to cope with excessive rainfall and to off-set damage caused by luxuriant growth of vegetation. And in Eastern India where rainfall is more than abundant, the hut-type brick-temple has a natural preference from the local people from very early period. But while in course of time, architects of other parts of India evolved new forms with permanent building materials, Tripura failed to adopt them, mainly because of her climatic condition and of the non-availability of stone.

Moreover, the similar temple-architecture of Bengal exercised no mean influence on the monuments of Tripura.

But the importance of Tripura temples does not lie in the hut-shaped superstructure alone. It is the crowning which gives the monuments of Tripura a novel and unusual form in Indian architecture. As noted above, hut-type structures are frequent occurrence in India, especially in Eastern India architecture, but a *stupa* with component members is a very uncommon crowning in Indian monuments. No structural analogue of the type exists anywhere in India. Among few temples at Pagan in Burma—Abeyadana, Patothamaya, Nagayon, Paya-thonju and Nathlaung Kyang, each shows a complete *stupa* as the upper element, though tiered roof of the Pagan examples has been replaced by the *charchala* roof in our edifices. These Burmese monuments may hence be considered as the structural counterparts of the temples of Tripura. At the same time it shows extension of religious toleration on the part of a Hindu kingdom where an idiom, especially associated with Buddhism, is used in Brahmanical edifices.

Stupa-sirsha temples were not unknown in Eastern India as is evidenced from the illustrations of Cambridge University manuscript of the *Astahasrika Prajnaparamita* copied in the Newar Samvat 135/A.D. 1015, though in the absence of structural shrines, it is difficult to reconstruct the history of such type of monuments. Since the 11th century nothing has been heard about this type of shrines. How was it possible to revive the style in a remote corner of the Indian sub-continent, after a pretty long time? In the

following may be found an explanation.

The *stupa-sirsha* temples, as illustrated in the *Astahasrika Prajnaparamita*, were most probably associated with Buddhism of Tantrik affiliation in Bengal. From this territory the architectural form seems to have spread to Burma and Java, where its popularity is amply illustrated by numerous famous edifices of this type, notwithstanding their local elements. With the revival of Brahmanism in the Sena period, this *stupa-sirsha* type became obsolete in Eastern India, but was continued in Burma up to the 12th-13th century, as evidenced from magnificent edifices of the country mentioned later. After the disastrous fall of Burma in the 13th century, the country sank into chaos and disorder and ultimately all artistic activity with Indian affinity came to a stand-still and the Indian influence was superseded by the culture of savage tribes from the north. Moreover India, the source of all cultural activity in South-east Asia, was herself dominated by Muslims and all her artistic activities fell into stagnation. In this period of chaos and disorder in both countries, the Indo-Mongoloids of North-Eastern India came to power and gradually they came within the fold of Hinduism. It is presumable that artists and architects migrated to India from Upper and Lower Burma *via* Assam and Chittagong- Tripura respectively. The late mediaeval art of Tripura as well as other regions of North-Eastern India has a close affinity with that of Burma and it is assumed that the rulers of Tripura were somehow rather directly related with Burma. Perhaps along with sculptors, architects took shelter in Tripura and received active patronage from the court. Significantly enough, nowhere in

North-Eastern India *stupa-sirsha* temples have been encountered and the monuments of this forgotten architectural type though much linked with the current trend, appear to constitute the most important contribution of Tripura to the history of Indian architecture.

In Tripura, several styles got mixed up in the late mediaeval architecture. Tripura introduced Muslim *minar* type of tapering pilasters in the corners, a feature not met with in contemporary temples of Eastern India. It works as corner buttress, as if to support the dropping eaves of the sloping roof. The particular architectural member has been blended with the structure so harmoniously that nowhere is it felt as superfluous. The temples of Tripura exhibiting three distinct features, viz., Indian *chala* type of roof, Indo-Saracenic minarets and the Indo-Burmese type of stupa-crowning, in totality may be unimpressive, but certainly important from the architectural point of view. A congenial meeting place of the Burmese and indigenous elements and a restorer of a forgotten style, Tripura thus plays no mean role in the development of Indian architecture.

(b) Storeyed-type edifice

A unique tower-like brick-built monument is standing in the heart of the Amarpura town, once a temporary capital of Amaramanikya (1577-81). This three-storeyed (three storeys are now clearly visible and there might have been a few more) edifice is locally known as the palace of Amaramanikya. The monument is standing in a much dilapidated condition and it is hardly

possible to shed considerable light on its architectonic affiliation. The remains of the tower appear to have a height of about 40 metres. It forms a rectangle from the ground. The walls have a thickness of about 2.80 metres. The monument faces east with an arched opening to the corridor from which the hall is approached by another arch. The interior is extremely dark and infested by bats and snakes. Our on-the-spot study has revealed the floor to be paved by bricks. Eight niches rise from the ground on east and west walls and they are about 80 cms, high. The inner roof is a semi-pointed barrel vault which rises from the east and west wall and supported by corbelled pendentives on north and south. The arrangement of bricks of the vault is very irregular which creates a clumsy effect. Outwardly it has the appearance of a storeyed tapering structure, the upper storeys gradually diminishing in size. The top of each storey was originally demarcated by a set of mouldings serving as a cornice, a trace, of which still survives. Below these mouldings a series of terracotta plaques having *gajasimha* motifs have been fixed. These plaques are affiliated to the late mediaeval art of Tripura. The entrance was originally decorated with a carved stone-gateway, of which the pillars are housed in the Museum at Agartala and the architrave having carved images of Vaishnavi, Lakshmi and Saraswati attracts worshippers in a temple at Amarpura. The pillars are also carved with images of different deities. No trace of sculpture or inscription is visible inside the temple. But there is no doubt that it was originally a religious edifice as evidenced by the gateway. The first floor

has three arched openings on the north, south and east walls. The third-storey must have some opening, but it is difficult to trace out due to thick growth of vegetation. Due to the same reason it is hardly possible to have an idea about the top. It appears from the pile of ruins that not a single slab of stone has been used in it except in its gateway.

The specimen is the lone extent example of the type represented by it. The *stupa-sirsha* hut-type of temples were popular in Tripura and numerous examples of this type have been found in different states of preservation. Even in Amarapura, a number of such structures have been found. But nowhere outside Tripura, structures of this type have come to our view.

Externally it looks like an un-Indian edifice. Whether this has any relation with the south-east Asian tower temples, is difficult to ascertain at the moment in the absence of any intelligible evidence. Likewise, nothing definite can be said about the antiquity of this type due to the lack of similar edifices bearing dates. The stone-gateway, arched-openings similar to those of the 16th-17th Century A. D. and the moulded bricks with the Gajasimha motif make it clear, however, that this type was also in vogue in the same period, though seemingly it failed to gain much popularity among the royal patrons and common people and hence the style was abandoned in Tripura and became a sporadic example of the architectural style.

It is evident from the discussion in the preceding pages that only one type of temple became popular in the Hindu Kingdom of Tripura. Earlier examples prior to the 15th century A.D. are completely

non-existent, though the discovery of a number of cult images indicates the possibility of existence of shrines to house them. Numerous extent examples however suggest that from the late 15th century onwards temple-building activity began to receive a spurt and from the dated materials it may be observed that Tripura introduced during the 16th-17th century a novel architectural type in *stupa-sirsha* monuments, which in one sense is a sort of revival of a forgotten type of Indian architecture. They took the corner minarets from Muslims, the *stupas* from Buddhists and the *chalas* from the indigenous trend. All these happily synchronised themselves in a composite form to shape a unique type of edifices. The style introduced by the Indo-Mongoloid rulers of Tripura is a symbol of their religious toleration. They effected a symbiosis of Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim architectural elements in a single structure without any prejudice. This unrivalled variety of religious edifices is perhaps the greatest contribution of Tripura in the history of Indian architecture.

This temple-building tradition was active up to the middle of the 18th century. And from the end of the 18th century, it rapidly declined both qualitatively and quantitatively, owing to several socio-economic and political factors. With lack of adequate royal and popular patronage, this Tripura style, distinctive of the land, met a tragic end.



Nimaj, Rajasthan



Saraswati, Gangaikonda Cholapuram



A Profile on Ancient Indian Artists (Sootradharas and Silpis)

R. N. MISRA

A review of the corpus of studies related to ancient Indian sculptural tradition' tends to indicate that while both the 'form' and 'content' as well as the psyche of ancient sculpture have been deeply investigated, little has been said about artists whose creative elan brought about the efflorescence of art activity. This situation has led to certain distortions in art appreciation and notable among them is the universal belief that ancient Indian art tradition is 'anonymous'. This paper makes an attempt to spell out certain information regarding ancient artist-craftsmen and their institutional set-up in reference to a society which placed immense constraints on their creativity. Nevertheless, artists' creativity seem to have blossomed into remarkable monuments and sculptures regardless of their religious affiliation and character.

In the ancient Indian social set-up, artists belonged to the rank of *soodras*. Although varying status-high or low-has been accorded to artists and craftsmen in the different historical phases in ancient India, apparently by the early centuries of the Christian era, 'occupations' had come to be identified with castes and the *silpis* practising various occupations were relegated to the rank of *soodras*. The emergence of a distinct class of professional artists and craftsmen in ancient India, their status as *soodras*

notwithstanding, has to be necessarily related to two factors; (1) the development of an urban, mercantile class, full of affluence and (2) the will to build lasting monuments and sculptures to redound to the glory of this class on one hand and that of the monarchs on the other.

Various religious cults provided the necessary framework within which these monuments came up. Thus, the imperatives of the situation led on to a demand which brought about the emergence of a class of artisans expert in stone-carving. The *takshakas* (carvers) *vardhakis* (carpenters), *rathakaras*, (chariot-makers), *karmaras* (smiths) of yore simply changed over to the medium of stone and brought about a transformation in which stone-work became the prime factor of art activity. Certain terms e.g., *sailavardhaki*, (carpenter in stone), *sila-ghara*, (rock-cut cave) etc. occurring in the inscriptions from the second century B. C. onwards indicate the emphasis both on stone monuments and on craftsmen working on stone in contradistinction to wood. The conventional import of these terms in reference to 'wood' is unmistakable. Even as the transformation of medium from wood to stone took place, the artists continued to be qualified by older designations. The occurrence of such words as *varadhaki*, *sootra-kara*, etc. makes this position fairly clear. Obviously, in these denominations, the older designations were continuing, while the medium and the consequent techniques had changed.

From the second century onwards the class of artists-craftsmen had come to obtain a recognized position. Requirements of specialization helped in the crystallization

of various categories in the profession. The specialists in art activity have been variously designated in different inscriptions as: *sailalaka*, *roopakara*, *roopadaksha*, *karmika*, *navakarmika*, *sailavardhaki*, *uparakhita*, *kadhichaka*, *mahakataka*, *mithika*, *khadariki*, *auesanin* etc. The stone-work had come to be known as *roopakarma* and the practitioner-artists were designed as *roopadaksha* or *roopakara*. The aesthetic significance of these words is self-explanatory in reference to *roopa*, "form". The dynamics of art activity changed considerably with the passage of time. The theistic cults are diversified and, as a result of localisation of centres of power, artists also got scattered to several centres of activity. Ultimately, the institutional set-up of artists-craftsmen that emerged in the ninth-tenth century, consisted of *roopakara*, *silpi*, *vijnanika* and *sootra-dhara* indicating the hierarchy from *roopakara* upwards in that order. While inscriptions refer to these categories separately in reference to individual master-craftsman in any number, the possibility of a link in these categories is suggested by the case of Palhana, a master-artist of twelfth century. He first finds mention in an inscription of 1159 as working in the team of *sootradhara* Kamalasingha, along with other associates, namely, Some, Kokasa and Dalhana. No title has been accorded to Palhana in this inscription of 1159; but his association with the territory of the Kalachuri rulers is clearly indicated. However in a Chandella inscription of V. S. 1223/A.D. 1165, Palhana is described as *peetalakara*, 'brazier'. Since the Chandellas were ruling continuously to the Kalachuris,

it is likely that Palhana crossed over to the realm of the former and started functioning there. Five years later, in V. S. 1228, Palhana qualified as a *silpi* and two years hence he came to be designated as a *vijnanin*. This process of acquiring recognition by Palhana continued further and, in two more inscriptions of V. S. 1223 and V. S. 1236, he is mentioned as *vaidagdhi Visvakarma*, 'expert in the craft of the Visvakarma', i. e., in the *silpasastra* of the Visvakarma school.

These designations applied here to Palhana help in linking up the hierarchical order and in drawing out the necessary conclusion that professionally the rank of an artist changed with his experience and expertise. That Palhana belonged to an illustrious family of artists is indicated by an inscription of the Kalachuri era 918/1167 A.D. The epigraph refers to the *roopakara* Talhana of Kokasa family, who was the son of Palhana. References to Palhana in the Kalachuri and the Chandella territory and to his son in the Kalachuri territory define the wider geographical parameters within which the artists of the family operated. This family is mentioned again in an inscription of the fifteenth century discovered at Ratnapur (Bilaspur district of Madhyapradesh). The descendents of the Kokassa family, as mentioned in the epigraph, were: Manmatha, Chitaku, Mandana and Dityan. All of them were expert artists and they have been described as such.

Besides indicating the continuity of a single family from 1159 to the fifteenth century, the Ratnapur inscription offers valuable information about the professional accomplishment of *sootradhara* Chhitaku.

The inscription is being quoted here almost in full : "Among the *sootradharas*, Chhitaku, the light of the Kokassa family, is well-known for his proficiency in *Silpasastras* and he has virtue of compassion in his heart. By favour of the gods and preceptors, he is the ocean of five sciences, a veritable Narayana in respect of draftsmanship, meritorious and truthful. The *sootradhara* Chhitaku can work on wood and stone and also on gold with ease. He possesses knowledge of the great science-the science of *yantra*, (machinery). The *sootradhara* Chhitaku knows how to play on *vanka* and *trivanka* and to carve creepers and leaves. He knows also the *tritatala* and *saptatala* (measures). *Sootradhara* Chhitaku is a perfect master of sciences and has fixed his heart on Kesava. His younger brother is Mandana, a reader of scriptures. All merits together with knowledge of astronomy will be found in Mandana by the favour of Visvakarma.

The *inscriptions* quoted above are typical of their sort. By chronologically approximating the relevant information concerning artists with the monuments build during the reigns of different rulers in different regions, it should be possible to pair them and accordingly study the evolution of sculptures in reference to the artists so approximated. For instance, the inscriptions of Dahala region refer to the construction of 35 temples, besides at least five monasteries and a few other minor works. The monuments came up gradually in the course of more than five centuries from about the middle of the eighth to the first quarter of the thirteenth. For these temples and related activities, we have *with* us information about thirteen *Sootradharas*,

one *Vijnanika*, one *Roopakara* and twelve other classes of artisans. This adds up to a total of thirty-five craftsmen for about thirty-five temples and covers a period of about five centuries as indicated above. The total picture thus obtained from the epigraphs and matched with the existing remains, explains the tempo of activity from region to region and reign to reign of the rulers within the ancient Dahala region. This helps in concluding that the unity or stylistic similarity in the art tradition of the region arose out of experimentations of master-artists and craftsmen who were actively involved in such work. General variations in style may be similarly explained.

The foregoing analysis of inscriptions gives a gist of the institutional background within which ancient artists functioned. Epigraphic references indicate that the institution of the family played a very important role in the acculturation process of those artists. Skills were transmitted from father to son and in certain families all the members, including the womenfolk, participated *in* the creative process. Information, for instance, is available about the family of the *chitrakara* Sri Satana whose son Chhitanaka carved the famous Mahoba image of Bodhisattva; Chhitanaka's wife similarly carved an image of Tara. The inscription mentioning Chhitanaka describes him as: 'well versed in the science of fine arts' sometimes the crafts and skills got transmitted to the disciples also. An image of Surya from Bengal, now deposited in the British Museum, contains the information that it was carved by Amrita, the disciple of a *silpi* Indranila-mani. Artists were famous for their intense involvement

in their work, whatever be the job. In the case of the *silpi* Somesvara of Mahadha who worked in ancient Kamaroopa, such involvement has been interestingly described as follows: *Silpavin Magadhah kami tanmana vamabhaktibhih: Somesvaro alikhat iyam prasastim ivappriyayam*. 'Just as a lover paints with rapt attention, his own mistress by means of colour decoration, so did the Magadhan artist Somesvara incise (*alikhat*) this eulogy by means of division of letters (*varna-bhakti*), (*Epigraphia Indica*, XVII, p. 259). "There is a pun here in the words *alikhat* and *varna-bhakti*; *varna* is both a 'pigment' and a 'letter'; *bhakti* is 'variegated decoration' and *alikhat* is used for 'painting' as well as 'carving'."

Ancient artists seem to have functioned under some guild organisation. An inscription from Bengal refers to Ranaka Soolapani who was the chief of the *silpa-goshthi* of Varendra or North Bengal. In the *Baya Chakada*, a manuscript published by Alice Boner, reference is made to certain master artists described as *kulapata samanta* or *pathuriya paryanga nayaka*. A Chalukya inscription similarly refers to *sarva-siddha-acharyas* who were well-versed in the secret of *sri silemudde*, which was probably a guild of artists. A common code of professional behaviour bound them all to the guild, for in an inscription a reference is made to the modalities of banishment and re-admission into the folds of artisans in certain localities.

Individual artists rose to glory as a result of their skill, but at the same time, knowledge of the canons of *Silpasastra* was an important measure of their expertise. Inscriptions of Dahala and South Kosala as

also of the other regions of ancient India make a pointed reference to their knowledge of their canons. The *sootradhara* Madhava and Mahidhara have been described respectively as 'expert in the science of Visvakarma' and as 'one who understands the teaching and practical works of the science invented by Visvakarma'. Hasala, a *silpi*, finds mention



as 'repository of all mechanical arts' and Sampula who was a *roopakara* and a *sooiradhara*, is described as one who has seen the "further shores of the ocean of various mechanical arts". The *kayastha* Devagana who built the temple of Siva-Bilvapani at Samba was a *roopakara-siromani* who came to Tummana (Bilaspur district of Madhya Pradesh) from the ancient bhedi *mandala*. The temple has

been symbolically termed as *Purusha* and the decoration on its walls has been described in a similar strain figuratively: 'Being, as it were, pleased at first, with the close embrace of the hips of the earth and being desirous of clasping closely the bodies of women, this temple, putting on a smile of intense love, like a clever lover, kisses the face of beauty of the surrounding regions of the sky, in the presence of the heavenly damsels". The description seems to conform to the actual form of the temple as it then stood and to the canonical prescription of having the decorative images of *Apsaras* all around the main body of the *moolaprasada*. The description also draws a comparison between erotic experience and aesthetic experience.

Artists, however, seem to have functioned under difficult conditions. Competition was always stiff. Hence, perhaps, the claims by individual artists to the rank of a *siromani* ("foremost") in the profession. This phenomenon of intense competition is evidenced in the inscriptions on the temple-sculptures from Somanathapuram, Halebidu and Belur, etc. These inscriptions extol the virtue of artists who made the sculptures and run down their rivals. Cases are also recorded of particular architects who transgressed the limits imposed upon them by a social system which placed them under the category of *soodras*. The claim that Mandana, the younger brother of *sootradhara* Chitaku was a

'reader of scriptures' is a case in point. This may have become possible due to the nature of their work, so that 'disabilities' imposed upon them were relaxed as they received honours. In this respect of their social mobility, the class of artists in ancient India may be compared to the class of ancient physicians, whose profession was important for obvious reasons, yet whose social status was stigmatised like that of the professional artist-craftsmen.

A region-wise survey of sculptures tends to indicate a unity of styles native to certain well-defined geographical regions, despite the difference in sectarian contents of such sculptures. In the decorative pattern of the medieval temples also, same motifs are found at certain well-defined positions in the *devakulikas* in the different directions, in the recesses and in the projections on the body of the temples, regardless of the Vaishnavite, Saivite or Jain dedication of these temples. Assuming that artists were the central factor in art activity, it is perhaps reasonable to suggest



that this uniformity developed out of the professional factors related to the artist-craftsmen. In their professional capacity, artists had neutral outlook towards various sects and in making images or building temples they were guided by the patrons' requirements. The Jhalarapatan Varaha image inscription is of immense value in this connection. This epigraph contains information that the image was carved by *sootradhara* Sihata, a servant (*bhriya*) of a Lakulisa saint Isana-jamu. Despite the fact that Sihata was employed by a Saiva saint, he carved an image of a Vaishnava theme.

Artists were called upon to complete specific work and in that situation, their employers were mostly rulers, officers of State and other persons of affluence, including *sresthins*. In Central India, during the reign of the Kalachuris, inscriptions refer to an elaborate organisation of the Saivite church of the *Saidghan-tika* order. In the work accomplished under the aegis of this church, artisans and craftsmen constructed several temples and monasteries. The ascetics of this sect regarded the *pootta* 'construction' activities as an essential item of their faith. As such their organisation employed artists to carry out specific works. Epigraphic accounts refer to the sages, Prabodhasiva, Bhavabrahma, Vimalasiva, etc. whose construction-projects were carried out by the *sootradharas*, Soorak, (along with Nilakantha) Mahidhara and Namadeva. Namadeva was a son of Mahidhara. The Saiva ascetics established themselves in the *Mathas* (sometimes called Golaki *matha*) built specially for them. Their influence can be gauged from the fact that the

successive disciples of these Saiva saints are known to have continued as the *gurus* of the successive Kalachuri rulers for a period of about two centuries.

On the basis of the information provided by the Malkapuram inscription of Kakatiya Rudradeva, it has been surmised that the Golaki *matha* of Andhra Pradesh used to function on the line of the Golaki *mathas* of Central India, information about which is now lost. In this system the prerogative of running the *mathas* was placed in the hand of the *acharya* who financed the building activity also. The Kalachuri inscriptions are replete with references to such activity. The *mathas* employed artists and craftsmen consisting of several ranks and specialisation, such as: gold-smith, coppersmith, black-smith, carpenter, stone-mason, maker of stone-images and *sthapatis*, etc. In addition, they contained Virabhadras who acted as guardians of the *agraharas* and were assisted by the Vajramushthis. All the different categories of persons were assigned land whose yields they enjoyed with all rights of ownership. This point has been made to suggest that the 'creative' freedom of the ancient artists was limited by the system within which they worked and among such constraints may be included the donors and the canons. Despite constraints artists could and did take recourse, to artistic licence. This is proved by countless sculptures which do not conform to the prescribed details of iconography as available in numerous texts which have come to light so far.



SECTION THREE

Relevance of Temples In a Changing World

C. S. RAVI

For centuries, we have been a religion-dominated nation. We have always been captivated by superstitions, mythological beliefs and super-natural happenings. Although scientific advances have devastatingly shattered some of the views on religion, a human in all his "flesh and blood" is still highly susceptible to regurgitating his views on God and religion. If one considers the huge gross collections at our several temples, no one would believe that we are a financially backward nation. The rationality that prompts a human heart to deposit a 'fiver' in the safe-vaults of a temple *hundi* and yet ignore the pleas for a five paise coin from a beggar outside the same temple is a phenomenon beyond explanation. A peak our bus-catcher inadvertently stops in his track for a second at the sight of a temple *gopura* and unconsciously mumbles a few sacred *namas*. Probing for reasons for these actions born out of human habit would only develop into an endless discussion. But the essence of these acts emphatically depicts man's unshakable faith in God and His abode- TEMPLES.

But the world today is not the world it was, when man first thought of constructing temples. While at that time man had ample time and resources to build temples of magnificent stature, the present

modern-day man neither has the time nor the resource to visit these shrines of immortal glory. The relegation of temples to a much less important position in the human priority list has of recent times to be noticed glaringly. If such relegation, in itself speaks of the advancement in human range of thinking and development, then sadly our temples will merely remain excellent testimonies of a culture we may leave behind. The relevance of temples and idol worship in a changing world must to a large extent, depend on how urgently we are going to understand the basic tenets of our culture.

"Live not in a place without a temple" goes a popular Tamil saying. The celerity with which human innovations are taking forward mankind, may soon persuade man in a position to question the validity of such a statement. Science and technology, the two giant weapons of man, have thrown open to him new arenas of outlook. From an amazing collection of data, he has been able to widen his range of thinking. The new systems of enquiry developed by mankind may for some time appear to eclipse the glory of temples. After all, enquiries lead only to discoveries and mankind's most sensational discovery till date has irrefutably been the discovery of God. Although science may take the lead due to its power of inventions and discoveries, the mysteries of the universe cannot be totally unraveled by even the amplitudinous marvels of science.

To know significantly, how relevant our yesteryear temples are going to be in tomorrow's world, it would be advisable to grasp how significant are our temples in today's world. The frequency of visits by

devotees to temples is certainly decreasing when compared to fifty years ago. Does this retardation hold a direct relation to man's lesser faith in temples? The answer is an unfortunate 'No' (to an atheist). The power in temples is still very much an unshakable reality. The spiritually electrifying phenomenon of Supreme Energy healing mentally afflicted people at the famous shrine of the Divine Mother at Chottanikara in Kerala is a living example of the faith in temples. The power that motivates the healing will certainly remain as one thing that even our far-advanced technology cannot detect. The shrine of the Goddess Mookambika stands majestically to corroborate the above statement.

The present-day situation provokes interest in our ancient scriptures and temples. The state of dissatisfaction and disharmony prevailing in this mechanised world is due to man himself. To alienate himself from the destruction he himself has authorised, man has no alternative but to immerse himself in the spiritual realities of super-cosmic powers. The significance of such a realisation adds a positive sign to the growth- of our long-neglected cultural heritage.

Before proceeding further, let me analyse the stage at which human association with God comes into a bright focus. However much one may boast of human will-power and endurance capabilities, they all have their own limitation points. Domestic and financial pressures bring these points to a lower level. A man's first direct relation with a supernatural power begins when his endurance level touches its limitation points and menacingly runs over it. As all exits of

help close down one by one, as all possible sources of relief disappear altogether, the human brain for the first time begins to track down help from a hitherto unknown headquarters. The brain surprisingly begins to spell out *slokas* and *mantras* forgotten till then, the mouth begins to chant the names of deities which had so long been considered as time-consuming tongue-twisters and last but not the least, the leg carry him to temples and shrines advised by any Tom, Dick and Harry. Thus begins the realisation of an impersonal benefactor. Once the relief from the excruciating pains of daily life is got, he has satisfactorily established a harmonious link with God. Now that human dependence on God is better understood, the neglect of His abode is a bitter pill to swallow. The problem is not due to the fact that we have broken old conventions. It is because we miserably failed to create newer conventions to suitably replace the broken ones. The over-confidence created by the alarmingly increasing range of scientific knowledge distracted to a certain degree our absolute faith in the everlasting facets of our culture. The range and depth of technical innovations led to a false decision to denounce certain unexplained phenomena of supernatural implications. This led to a temporary segregation of temples from being vital sources of strength. They were reduced to mere archaeological beauties. But today's man has a more reasonable outlook on God and temples. It is being realised that the advancement in one arena of human interests, does not necessarily initiate degradation of certain basic ethics of life. The wisdom and foresight of our ancient *rishis* and ancestors are slowly

beginning to dawn on a mankind that is revolving more mechanically, than out of choice and thus giving- a new connection to science and religion. After all, hasn't Albert Einstein declared:

“Science without religion is lame;
Religion without science is blind”

Our temples offer to science excellent opportunities to investigate and excavate the hidden and long-lost glories of a culture that is imperishable. Entangled in the nest of mechanisation, man is bound sooner or later to organise a search for the meaning of his life. These spiritual thrusts for rational conviction will help in a better understanding of the significance of temples. Indian temples have for a greater part of the 20th century remained as mere architectural beauties, rather than as significant places of worship. But the construction of temples is so amazingly marvelous that it has preserved through these passing years the atmosphere of serenity and well-being. A regular temple-goer is bound to realise the calmness and peace flowing through *him* as he enters a temple and worships a *deity*. His vision is widened and *his abilities* of realisation are extended. He goes through an absolute transformation from an *individual* bound to society, to a devotee answerable only to a power that reverberates *inside* him. His sense of devotion raises him to higher spiritual altitudes. The ancient *Agama* books reveal *in* detail the care *with which* temples were constructed and how divine powers were stored *in* them. The power *in* temples *is* unquestionably felt by the devotee devoid of worldly thirsts and lusts. Among the Indian temples, Tirupathi *in* Andhra Pradesh boasts of a record revenue.

Is this not a sufficient indication *in* a mechanical 20th century of man's return to the earthly abodes of the heavenly lords? Though the return may be a slow and long process, *it* is bound to gain momentum in the coming years. The discoveries of the destructive powers of science is slowly making science an enemy of mankind. To a person who looks to science to provide him informative answers to questions of spiritual mysteries, this must be a sad and painful blow. Increasing disharmony and overall discontent all around the world are results of man seeking answers to his problems through his own creations rather than getting them solved by his Creator. In an era of nuclear upsurge, devotional disciplines were ignored. God became another phenomenon to be experimented and investigated and temples became a mere exhibition of sculptural talents-things to be admired and not used for worship. As mentioned earlier, lack of funds and resources to rehabilitate old temples resulted in their decaying into monuments of a past era. Even today many temples hold relevance with the modern world only by being considered as architectural splendours rather than as being places of devotional tranquility. For example the sun-temple at Konarak.

The fault for the above degradation may be partially due to the fact that the present-day man was neither able to rehabilitate the dilapidated structures of our ancestors, nor was he-willing to construct temples on such magnificent scales. Infighting among castes and sub-castes led to a mild stoppage of the devotional currents flowing in the human *mind*. But as the topic of the article

suggests, we are living in a "changing world". Every new discovery only unearths further new mysteries. The changes brought forth by every new *discovery* only draws us closer to the burning question of the meaning of our life. A true intellectual has realised (may be a little late!) that caste-rivalry, *famine*, poverty, etc., are problems to which the "all-conquering" science can offer only alternatives but never the ultimate solution.

It is on the basis of such rational realisations that human spiritual thoughts quench their thirsts. Neglect of our ancestral temples has been too big a price we have paid for an advancement that is ultimately leading us on to the path of destruction and disaster. The wrath of *Kaliyuga* is slowly engulfing our scientific prides. Mankind is becoming slaves of its own tools. Too much over-confidence punctuated with amazing brilliance was used to defame our -own culture-the oldest any country can boast of. The folly has come to light today and the power of temples coming to us after being so long in the dark, may be a bit glaring, but certainly it will be a power to reckon *with*. The wisdom of being able to understand the relevance of our temples *is itself* a fruitful beginning to a healthy spiritual goal of attaining *Mukti*. The beginning has been made; hence the end is not far off.



The Tradition of Dance in Our Temples

MRINALINI V. SARABHAI

The temple in ancient India was the centre of all cultural activities. Temple-building was in itself an act of devotion. The sage Markandeya tells us that 'to build a temple is *meritorious*, so is the making of an image or deity. Valuable indeed is the worship of a divine image and so is its adoration.'

The drama, *narya*, which included dance, was created by Brahma himself, to teach a way of life to the entire universe. 'There is no wisdom nor art nor craft, no device, no action that is not found in drama.' It was but natural that this art was presented from the earliest times in the sacred precincts of the temple, for it was not mere entertainment, but education. In fact, the temple became the home of all theatre and soon dance and drama were part of the ritual worship. Dance was to please the gods and it is said that the gods, were more pleased by dancing than by flowers and other offerings. Every temple had its own Rangamandapam, which was used on all auspicious occasions.

When the great temple of Puri was being built, the Raja, Indradyumna, sent a special invitation to Brahma to inaugurate the temple. With Brahma came many of the deities and the celestial dancers, Urvashi and Rambha.

With the installation of Sri Jagannatha, Balabhadra and Subhadra, who Were carried in three beautiful chariots, musicians sang, while the *apsara* women danced. Dancers

in the temple of Puri trace their heritage to these two heavenly dancers who brought the dance to earth. The dancers were called 'Maharishi' and the tradition was that when the food was offered to God, the dancer and her *pakhwaj* player were the only ones to be present with the Rajaguru who represented the Raja himself. The *Devadasi* system extended all over India. While in Puri they danced Jayadeva's Geetha Govinda, their sisters in the South danced to the Lord Shiva, Nataraja, the God of dance. The *devadasis* of South India, were the custodians of the rituals within the shrine and also when the deity was taken out in procession. The *dasis* or hand-maidens of god had different functions. In front of the *dwajasthamba* of the temple, danced the *Rajadasis*. Then, there were '*swadasis*' who performed on special religious days as, for instance, when

the *Kumbhabhisheka* was performed. Sacred duties of fanning or decorating god, lighting the *Kumbharati* etc., were done by *dasis* called '*adukala mahal*', '*Deva Kannigayar*' and '*nataka mahal*', while the *devadasis* performed regularly in the temple's dance sabha, for the people. Their dance told the stories of god and the mood was primarily that of devotion, worship through *bhakti*. All through the South, the *devadasis* danced and the earliest literature tells us of the patronage of kings to the art and their endowments to the families who belonged to the temple. The temple was the focus of all the performing arts and continued to be so for many centuries. In Kerala, the dance took another form, in the *Krishnanattam* and the *Kathakali*. Here the dancers are usually all males and the stories are enacted as dance-dramas.



Taken from India's sacred epics, the backdrop is still the eternal truth of God. From the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*, the *Puranas*, the triumph of good over evil is vividly depicted and the stories of Krishna are danced regularly in the temple of Guruvayur.

People taking vows to obtain grace from god, offer a *Kathakali* performance to god, in the temple court-yard. The ornamentation of the *Kathakali* dancer, the colours of the face with its division of *satvic*, *rajasic* and *tamasic* elements, makes him one with the character and transforms the spectator into a devotee who sees the play of the world before his eyes. Here are the great heroes, the Pandavas, the compassionate Krishna, the gentle Sita and the great Prince Rama. The audience sees a world of fantasy, but beneath this spectacular dance drama, they are taught the true wisdom of Hindu philosophy. Indeed, the dance is a ritual, essential to create a contact between man and divinity.

In Andhra, in the village of Kuchipudi, families of Brahmins studied and enacted dance-dramas. Each temple had a *balipitha*, which was a large, well-polished slab of stone placed behind the Nandi which faced the interior of the temple. Upon this, on festive occasions, the *devadasis* danced. The Kuchipudi Brahmins, the *Bhagavatars*, entertained audiences with 'total theatre', dance-dramas, with stories from the *Puranas*, in the temples and also outside in village squares.

The great wave of Vaishnavism swept the country from the twelfth century and dance-dramas composed from the *Bhagawata* became immensely popular. Religious fervour caught fire through

dance.

It was not strange therefore, that these plays were composed by great *rishis*. Siddhendra Yogi, wrote the most popular Kuchipudi drama, the *Bhama-Kalapam* (*Parijatapaharana*). It is said he requested all families in Kuchipudi to dedicate one of their sons to the art of the dance and especially to enact the part of Satyabhama, the *swadinapatika nayika*, whose love of Krishna, depicted all the varying moods of the *rasa* and *bhavas* of the classical tradition.

After the destruction of the great empire of Vijayanagar, many of the families of *Bhagavatars* sought refuge with the Naik Kings of Tanjore and it was at Melattur village that they settled to perpetuate the art. The patterns of worship in the beginning of the play are still followed in the dance-dramas of today. The *todaya mangalam* is the initial prayer and the *Ganesa vandana* destroys all obstructions. Enacted before the temple, the dancers dedicate their performance to god. Each article is also blessed. For instance, if the dance-drama is *Prahalada-charita*, the mask of Narasimha is placed near the image in the temple the whole day. The actor also fasts on the day of the performance to enable him to realise the role he is to play. Before Narasimha's entrance, the mask is brought out and certain rituals performed. When the actor actually dons the mask, so powerful has been his devotion and concentration that he becomes wild and frenzied while dancing and often goes into a trance which only leaves him when the mask is removed.

The *Yakshagana* of Karnataka, similar in content to the dance-dramas of Kerala and

Andhra Pradesh, has several groups attached to the temples. Here too, as in *Kathakali*, the actors wear enormous crowns, the facial make-up is intricate and suggestive of the characteristics of the role. Costumes too are intricate and particular colours are used for romantic or demoniac characters.

Every dance-form had its origin in the temple and dance performances were offered as vows to the deity by people in times of calamities. Kings also patronised the dance and it was taken to courts.

In *Malavikagnimitram* we read of a competition in the King's Court. So too, in the heavenly court of Indra, where Urvasi the celestial nymph, danced.

But it was not merely the temple precincts that were important. It was and is the spirit of the dance that is the dynamism of its form. And the spirit is that of dedication to the Supreme. The temple is wherever the dancer dances! As a prayer that sends its subtle essence into the cosmos through the invisible barriers of sound, so does the dance make sacred the ground upon which it is performed.

Through the centuries, our country has been invaded and ravaged and new cultures have poured in. But India has always absorbed change and made it her own. Yet throughout has been the eternal theme of man's search for the eternal and as the *Natya Sastra* says, 'One who performs well the art of dance created by Maheshwara will go liberated, to the abode of God.'



The Role of Temple in the Socio-Economic Life of the People

DR. K.V. RAMAN

India is a land of temples, big and small, spread over the nook and corner of the land. These temples have many historical facets. Primarily, they were centres of worship and religion. But they had also wider historical dimensions. They were centres of art and architecture. They have played a remarkable part in the social and economic life of the villages and towns. Inscriptions found on the walls of the temples afford eloquent proof of the many-sided activities of the temples in the ancient and mediaeval periods. It will not be an exaggeration to say that the temple was the hub of the village and, in a society which was predominantly religious, the day-to-day life of the people was, in one way or other intimately connected with the temple. From the inscriptions, we get a wide range of activities of the temple. In the economic field, it served as a large land-owner, an agent of poor-relief, a local bank lending money to the poor and the needy, a consumer of goods and services and, last but not the least, the largest employer having on its rolls a host of employees like the priests to look after the rituals, the *manradis* (shepherds) to look after the cattle donated to the temple, the cultivators to look after its lands, garland-makers, washermen, drummers, pipers, the pandal-erectors and a variety of artisans. On the social side, the temple was a centre which provided the forum for

fine arts. There was a constant demand for *Stapatis*, *Silpis* (architects and sculptors), icon-makers and painters, all of whom beautified the temple in their own way to make it an epitome of our artistic heritage. The temples were also educational centres. Schools (*pata-salas*), seminaries (*mathas*) for cultivation of Vedic studies and other branches of Knowledge (like grammar, medicine, logic, philosophy, etc.) were patronised by the temples. Similarly, Tamil studies in the form of *Divyaprabhandam* and *Tevaram* were cultivated. Instances where libraries (*Saraswatibhandaram*) and *Natakasalais* or *Kuthambalams*, being situated in the temple are available. *Devaradiyars*, dancers attached to the temples, were great exponents of the art of dance. Evidences of even hospitals having been patronised by the temples are available.

Let us see the role of the temple in the socioeconomic life of the community in some greater detail. Here the evidence is drawn from the temples of South India, since evidence here in the form of inscriptions is better preserved.

Temple as a Land-Owner

The temple as the biggest land-owner filled a large place in the agricultural economy of the locality. Both royal benefactions and public patronage took the form of land grants. The royal grants were of two kinds: *Sarvamanya* and *Devadana*. In the first type, the entire village was given to the temple and the second type specified that all taxes payable to the king were to be collected and enjoyed by the temple. Rajaraja the Great, set apart lands in

several villages throughout his dominions, including Ceylon, yielding an annual income of 11,600 *kalam*s of paddy for several categories of employees in the temple. The temples maintained many flower and fruit gardens also. How could the temple authorities manage the agricultural operations in the lands distributed in so many villages far and near? Obviously, they could not do all of them directly. Both direct cultivation by the agents of the temple and the system of leasing them to tenants prevailed. In the former case, the supervision was done by certain local agents appointed by the temple who took precautions during cultivation and harvest and saw to it that, after paying all the wages and dues to the farmers, the produce was brought to the precincts of the temple and measured in the prescribed temple measure. According to an inscription of the 13th century, the temple appointed supervisors, (*Kankan-ippar*) in each village to look after the cultivation. Another officer named *Araindunirppan* was appointed to supervise the work of the *Kankanippars*. In this type of direct cultivation, the labourers or peasants were paid wages in cash and kind.

The system of lease also prevailed side by side. In this, the temple was entitled for the *melvaram* or owner's share of the produce. The owner-cultivator ratio that prevailed in A.D. 1535 was 75 : 25. But the same record informs us that during a severe drought, the temples' share was reduced to two thirds. Many concessions and relief-measures that the temples offered to the ryots are recorded in inscriptions.



Intricacies in monolithic stone carving



Land Reclamation

One of the greatest services rendered by the temples was in the field of reclamation of waste lands by bringing them under cultivation. For private individuals, it would have been a formidable task, but a wealthy institution like the temple with its men and money could easily do this. In A. D. 1467, a temple purchased uncultivable high level lands as *Ulavukkani*. By this system of lease, the lessee was given a permanent lease and authorised to reclaim a waste land and grow crops, either wet or dry. The lessor could enjoy all the produce but only pay certain taxes in gold or grain. This gave the necessary incentive to the cultivator to work hard and reclaim the waste lands.

Temple as a Consumer

As an institution requiring a variety of commodities and services for its day-to-day conduct as well as on special festive occasions, the temple was the biggest consumer of the locality. In the early stages, the requirements of the temple were probably few, some rice for offerings, flowers, sandal, milk, ghee and oil for lamp were all that were required. The steady increase in the offerings, festivals and rituals resulted in the manifold increase of the articles required by the temple. The items constantly required by the temple were: rice, gram, pulses, turmeric, pepper, jaggery, salt, areca-nut, betel leaves, camphor, kumkum, coconut, fruits, milk, ghee, butter, curd, oil, honey, etc. Different items of vegetables are also mentioned in the records.

Not only food articles and perfumery, but other articles like cloth (*vastra*), jewels (*abharana*), gold, silver and brass, vessels, metal lamps, bells, incense, crackers and the like were needed for the temple. In short, the temple was and still continues to be, in certain villages, the biggest consumer in the locality. It stimulated and encouraged local trade and industry.

Temple as an agent of Poor Relief

Feeding the poor and deserving persons on the occasion of feasts and festivals was considered an act of piety. A portion of the *prasadam*s offered to the deity was distributed to the devotees in the temple without any class distinction, as it is being done every day even now in the Tirumalai temple. Royal grants as well as private endowments sustained this service. In certain Vaishnava temples, separate feeding houses like the *Ramanuja-Kutams* were attached to the temple with specific endowment for feeding the pilgrims and *desantris*.

Temple as Employer

The position of the temple as an institution providing work for a large number of people was a striking feature of the mediaeval times. It afforded ample opportunities to the different sections of the people of the locality to serve in various capacities involving religious, administrative and many other non-religious auxiliary functions. We know that the Great Temple of Thanjavur had nearly 600 employees on its rolls in A.D. 1011. The *Koil Olugu*, the chronicle of

the Ranganatha (Vishnu) Temple at Srirangam, gives graphic details of various classes of temple servants and their duties. The temple employees are referred to by many general terms such as *Koil parivarangal*, *Koil paniseivargal* or *Ulivakkavargal*. A record of Kulottunga Chola II (A.D. 1213) informs us that there were 200 women (*Padiyilar*) serving in Sri Varadarajaswami Temple, Kanchi and that they were provided with lands and houses. Perhaps this was the general pattern followed by way of remunerating the temple servants. An analysis of the inscriptions of the South Indian Temples gives the following list: *Archakas* are the officiating priests who conduct worship in the various shrines of the temples. They are called *Bhattacharyas* in Vaishnava and *Sivacharyas* in the Siva temples. In smaller temples, there were one or two such priests, but in bigger temples there, were ten and more. They were also known by other names like *Nambis* and *Dikshitaras*. They were provided with houses besides a regular share in the daily food offerings. Sometimes they were given lands (*manyas*) for their sustenance. But on the whole, their income was poor. There were other employees like the *Paricharakas* who rendered assistance to the priests and performed duties like the supply of water, camphor and other sundry items; *Svayampakis* or cooks to prepare the food offerings to the deity in the temple-kitchen (*madapalli*). They were also given a share of the food, besides remuneration in kind or cash. There were also suppliers of fuel (*singan-murai*) and *kodikarar*, the labourers who carried the processional deities mounted on the big *vahanas* in the streets.

Mostly, the labourers did this strenuous work. They were paid daily wages in cash besides food. Also there were banner and umbrella bearers; car-pullers and repairers, who were experts in moving the big temple cars (*themi- minda-al*) and they were paid wages; torch-bearers (*tiruvidi-pandam-pidittavar*) did their work inside the temple and during processions outside; (*tiruvilakkukaran*) man was in charge of the lighting arrangements. The person in charge of crackers and fireworks during festivals was *vanam-sudikkum-al*. *Silpis* were well-trained artisans steeped in architecture and *Silpasastras*. Usually, they were a hereditary class patronised by the temples to attend to alterations and repairs to the existing structures, besides adding new mandapas, shrines and gopuras. Carpenters attend to various duties like the making or repairing of the *vahanas* and temple car pedestals, wooden poles and furniture. They were given permanent land grants (*itcha-manyas*). The services of the black-smith (*karumars*) were also needed for purposes like supply of iron materials like nails, knives, handles, locks, etc. The goldsmith's services were needed for the preparation of costly jewels (*abharanas*) worn by the deities. We get frequent references to the donations of costly jewels of gold set with precious stones like the *kirita*, *yajnopavita*, *sankha*, *chakra*, *haras* (necklaces), *hastas* and armlets. To make such jewels as well as to renew and burnish the old ones, the services of goldsmiths were required by the temple and for this they were given special lands (*tattaramanyam*). Bronze and bell-metal workers were indispensable for a temple to make idols, lamps, bells, metal-sheet

coverings for *sikharas*, doors, etc. There were potters to supply regularly the necessary cooking vessels and pots of the temple-kitchen and storage bins of grains. Food in the temple-kitchen had to be prepared only in mud-pots, a practice that has survived even today. Washermen cleaned the garments besides supplying waste-cotton for the torches in the temple; Pandal-erectors were experts in putting up shamianas of the dried coconut leaves, an essential item for all festivals. An inscription mentions the payment to them as *pandal-sinkarikka-al-kooli*. Garland-keepers and garland makers were also needed. The maintenance of gardens and supply of garlands and flowers to the temple was considered a pious duty. Saints like Peria-Alvar and Tondaradipodi Alvar spent their life-time in this sacred duty. There were a class of people named 'Tirumalai Sattam Desa-nambis' who did such service in the Vishnu temples of Srirangam and Kanchi. Another important section of society whose services were essential for the temple is represented by the *manradis* or *konars*, the cowherd class. They had a long tradition of cattle-rearing and supply of milk, ghee and butter to the temple and the villages. Temple inscriptions contain numerous references to the gifts of cows, sheep, buffalos, etc. to the temples. They were entrusted to the *manradis* who maintained them on behalf of the temple and agreed to supply a specified amount of curd, ghee, etc. to the temple. This went a long way to encourage cattle-rearing which was essential for the rural economy.

Inscriptions in the temples give us the interesting information that the woman took

an active part in the various services of the temple duties like chorus-singing in front of the deity, cleaning the premises, drawing *kolam* (*Rangoli* in white rice-powder), husking the paddy, cutting the vegetables and other sundry works, some of them voluntarily.

Several women figure in the inscription as donors of lands, money and jewels to the temple clearly indicating their religious attachment to the temples. Cases of women renouncing their properties in favour of the temple and doing service to the temples as ascetics are recorded. In the 13th century, a lady by name Perarulalan Korri made a will that 100 *kulis* of land purchased by selling her jewels should go to the temple after her demise.

Courtesans

Leading temples of South India had a unique class of women called *devaradiyal* or *devadasis* (servants of the Lord) dedicated to the service of the temples. Their main duties were to sing and dance in front of the deity at specified times daily and accompany the deity in processions. From epigraphs of the Chola times, we know that they had a respectable place in society and even rich people dedicated their daughters to the service of god.

Temple as a Patron of Music and Arts

"*Devaradiyals* were good exponents of dance and music who did much to preserve the traditional dance forms for generations. The temple was the greatest single agent which extended patronage to them and utilised their services during festive

occasions. Dance masters called *nattuvars* served in temples. Different types of dances like *agakoothu* and *vinodakoothu* are mentioned in temple inscriptions. The dance modes of the former variety were performed in front of the deity and the latter for the common people.

Instances of dance-dramas performed in the temples come from the Pandyan country. At Athur, near Tirunelveli, sacred drama (*tirunarakam*) was performed during the festival in the month of Avani. It took place in a hall called *Alagia Pandian Kudam*. Obviously, they should have performed scenes from the *itihisas* (epics) like the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas*. Land-grants given to the dancers and dramatists were called *kuthukani*. Dance sculptures found in our temples also bear witness to the development of the art. In leading temples like the Great Temple at Thanjavur, the Sarangapani temple at Kumbakonam and the Chidambaram temple, we find a graphic depiction of various dance poses with explanatory labels from Bharata's *Natyasastra*. There are also exquisite paintings of apsaras (women) dancing before the deity.

There were also musicians, pipers, drummers and other vidwans who rendered service to the temple. Even in small temples today, *nadaswaram* is played during the morning and evening service as it is considered as auspicious. Artists considered it privilege and honour to sing in front of the deity. An inscription at Meenakshi Amman Temple, Madurai, mentions the land-grant given to a musician as *jivita*. He was honoured with a title "Pandya Vadayamarayar" Another record gives a list of eleven musicians who were

honoured. They were experts in playing various instruments like *Vira-maddalam*, *maddalam*, *timilai*, *Semamakkalam*, *Tirchinnam*, etc. A look at the sculptures on the temples would show the wide variety of musical instruments used in those times. Similarly, architecture, sculpture, painting, bronze-casting and other arts received encouragement in our temples. The presence of numerous shrines, mandapas, and magnificent gopuras should have given to *Stapatis* and *Silpis* ample scope to display artistic talents and skill. Today, the temple stands as an eloquent monument to the labour and the skill of countless artisans and artists who have worked there for generations to enlarge and embellish their house of god.

Temple as a Centre of Learning

The temples were also centres of learning. Schools (*pata-salas*) and seminaries (*mathas*) for the cultivation of Vedic studies and other branches of learning were patronised by the temples. The existence of Vedic college at Bahur near Pondicherry and the various subjects taught therein are mentioned in the inscriptions of the Vishnu temple there. Similarly, in the Adipurisvara Temple, Tiruvottiyur (near Madras), there was a *Vyakarana* school where the *sutras* of Panini were expounded. A special *mandapa* called *Vyakarana-Vyakhyana-mandapa* was in this temple. Around 1000 A.D. at Anur in Chingleput District, there was a *Salai* for which *bhatta-urtti* was provided for teaching of *Veda* and Grammar (*Ashtadhyayi*), *Alankara*, *Mimamsa*, etc. Ennayiram and Tribhuvanam were flourishing centres of Sanskrit and

Tamil learning. Inscriptions of the temples of these places give us graphic details of the number of teachers and pupils studying there. At Ennayiram, there were 270 junior and 70 senior students and 14 teachers. We also get good information about the various subjects taught and the allowances the teachers and students received.

In the Ranganatha Temple, Srirangam, there was a library (*Saraswati-bhandar*) wherein the images of Hayagriva, Sarasvati and Veda Vyasa were kept for worship. At Sri Varadarajar Temple at Kanchi, there was provision to teach *Ubhaya-vedanta* (Sanskrit and Tamil scriptures). As Tirumukkudal, there was a college and hospital attached to the local Vishnu temple in A. D. 1067. Provision was made for one teacher and ten pupils for studying the *Rig* and *Yajur Vedas* and one teacher and twenty pupils to study *Vyakarana*. In 1121, twelve *velis* of land was set apart for ten *Bhattas* versed in *Vedas* and *Sastras* and one *Vaidya* at Peruvelur. They were all provided with houses to the north and the west of the temple.

Similarly, Tamil studies were also fostered by the temples. There are numerous epigraphs recording donations and charities for the recitation of *Tevaram* in Siva temples and *Divyaprabhandam* in the Vishnu temples. A record of the 16th century at Tadikkombu near Madurai mentions eight services in the temple, one of which was the recitation or study of the sacred texts, the *Ramayana*, *Sri Bhagavata* and *Tiruvaymoli*.



Cave-Temples of India

R. C. AGRAWAL

The temple is the most significant monument in Indian heritage and represents the subtle values of Indian culture. It is a synthesis of various symbols and always conceived in terms of organism. The names of the various parts of the human body from foot to head are applied in its architectural text for different parts of the temple. The enshrined deity is considered the supreme soul or monarch and regal honour is offered.

With this concept, the vast number of temples scattered all over the country were conceived from time to time under royal patronage and popular charity. But the excavations or making of cave-temples in various parts of India had altogether a different beginning. Gautama Buddha, founder of Buddha Dharma Sangh and an order of ascetic living, introduced a new culture and subsequently earned the royal patronage of King Ashoka who took Buddhism beyond its geographical limits and laid the foundations of viharas (monasteries) and stupas for venerating the Lord.

With the propagation of Buddhism, Buddhist Bhikshus increased to a considerable number and started living in viharas in which they spent rainy seasons studying sacred books and practising asceticism.

Buddhist tradition also reveals that emperor Ashoka constructed several stupas and monasteries for Buddhist seers. The earliest specimen of cave-temples available in India comes from Barabar Hills in Bihar State. The Barabar caves are situated in an

isolated range of granite hills on the left bank of Phalgu river about sixteen miles north of Gaya. There are seven caves. All differ in plan but evidently appear to belong to the same age. Amongst all, the largest is called Nagarjuni cave. The other two are known as Sudama and Lomash Rishi caves. Six out of the seven caves have inscriptions upon them. The only cave which has no epigraph is the Lomash Rishi cave but imbibes all architectural magnificence externally. All the caves have their entrances placed on one side so as to act as windows to light their interiors as well as for entrances.

The next group of caves is the Son Bhandar caves. There are two caves and they are very simple in plan. Their walls are plain and there is a pointed arch in the centre. Here, an advancement is noticed in the cave architecture in the form of a verandah which is eight feet deep. Both the caves are situated at a distance of thirty feet to each other. There is nothing specific in these caves except their architecture by which the date of these caves can be fixed.

There is one more cave known as Sita-Mari cave. It is cut in an isolated granite boulder and it is rectangular in plan. The striking feature of this cave is a pointed arch rising from the floor-level without any perpendicular sides.

Next to Bihar are the caves of Orissa. This group of caves situated on the Udayagiri and Khandagiri hills is more interesting than those of Bihar. There are seventeen caves of importance and numerous rock-cut hermitage cells. The cave in Khandagiri hill is popularly known as 'Hathigupha' or the elephant cave. This seems to be the oldest

natural cavern of considerable extent which might have been slightly enlarged by art-activity. There is no architectural moulding or form except a long inscription in seventeen lines. Next to it is the Tiger and Serpent cave. The Tiger cave, in fact, is fashioned in the form of the head of a tiger. The expanded jaws armed with a row of most formidable teeth form the verandah, while the entrance to the cell is placed in the gullet. There is a short inscription which records the name of the excavator.

Next to Orissa are the caves of Andhra Desha. This group of caves is not of any great importance, but their situation is one of great significance. It was in fact the only place in South-India where Buddhists had any important establishments. Not only this, it is also probable that it is from the mouth of Krishna-Godavari that Java and Cambodia were colonised by Buddhists. We know from classical literature that it was through this area that communication was kept between India and Thautan and Martaban. The existence of Amaravati tope within a few miles of Vijayawada is quite sufficient to prove how wealthy the Buddhist community might have been in the fourth and fifth centuries. The principal cave that is situated in this area is on a small hill about a mile from Vijayawada town and is four-storeyed. It is dedicated to Vaishnava faith. In appearance it is like a Buddhist Vihara but there is no direct evidence to associate it with Buddhists.

It is in its arrangements, Brahmanical and very similar to the caves of Karnataka. It is attributed to the Chalukyas of Vengi.

For a considerable amount of beauty and interest, the caves at Mahabalipuram are no less important in the history of Indian

architecture. Although they have no grandeur which is characteristic of Western Indian caves nor the artistic decoration of Badami or Elephanta caves, the most striking feature of these caves are the pillars and their details. Most of the caves are in Mandapa form and depict puranic scenes.

Badami or Vatapi in Karnataka, the capital town of the Imperial Chalukyas, is also famous for its caves. There are six caves and all are located in Badami Taluka of Bijapur district. From the architectural point of view, the four caves excavated in the southern hill are merit worthy to discuss. The access to cave No. 1 can be obtained by a flight of steps. In the front of the cave, on either side of the rock-cut stairway, dwarfs are carved. These are singing and dancing and playing with musical instruments. Besides, there are panels containing figures of Shiva and Parvati, Nataraja representing Shiva dancing Tandava Nritya. In the verandah are four pillars. The side-walls of this verandah are carved with base reliefs of Harihara with Uma and Lakshmi on both the sides.

Cave No. I is a Vaishnava cave. At the entrance of the cave, there are panels of dwarf figures in different poses carved in a raised platform cut into the rock. Above this, there is a plain low-carved-roof which shows an imitation of beams and framework. The verandah in front of the cave is supported by four pillars and two pilasters. To the left of this is a natural cavern with base-relief in it representing Bodhi sattva Padma Pani with several figures on both sides.

The cave No. IV is the largest and most

elaborately ornamented of the entire group. As in the other caves, the platform of this cave bears a long dado with figures of dwarfs. The verandah of this cave is most elaborate and there are bracket-figures.

Maharashtra

If there had not been other examples of cave-temple-architecture in India other than those found in Bihar, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh, etc. the cave-temples of India would not have created a class of its own. The caves in Bihar are too small and insignificant to claim any special notice.

Orissa

Those of Orissa too are elaborately carved and isolated and those of Mahabalipuram are interesting for the general growth of Dravidian architecture. As a whole, these are valuable as they throw light on the general history of cave-architecture in India. The caves in western India numbering more than one thousand are of various dimensions and are richly elaborate. It is not easy to trace the rapid growth of cave-architecture in western India as compared to those of eastern India. Bihar was the cradle of Buddhist religion which first adopted cave-architecture before any other part of the country adopted it. It can be admitted that Buddhists were the first to introduce this cave-architecture on both sides of the country. Missionaries were also sent by Ashoka in the seventeenth year of his reign to propagate Buddha Dharma all over the country. As a result, Buddhist monks spread far and wide. How and where the Buddhist monks passed

their rainy seasons in the Western Ghats before the commencement of cave-dwellings is difficult to ascertain. But it is an established fact that the inhabitants of Western Ghats were not cave dwellers and neither did they use the rock for any religious purposes. What could have influenced these Westerners, can be explained. That probably the trap-rock which overlay the country in the West was exceptionally suited for the purpose of caves, must have helped them. Characteristically the trap-rock lies horizontally and has an alternative strata of harder and softer rocks impervious to moisture. With such a quality of material, the idea of erecting permanent temples for the practice of rites under unfavourable climatic conditions began. Once begun, work continued in full swing. It is also possible that it would have been less expensive to chip and throw out the waste than to carry it to the temple site. The amount of carving and ornamentation being the same in both cases, excavating in the rock was cheaper than building on the plain.

There are several groups of rock excavations belonging to the three sects of Buddhists, Hindus and Jains in Maharashtra and a few in Gujarat. The earliest examples belong to Buddhists and date from the middle of 3rd century B.C. to 10th century A.D. Hindu caves range from 4th to 10th century A. D. and those of Jain, are available up to 15th century A. D. All these caves were for religious use-some for worship and others for monasteries consisting of halls and cells.

Kathiawar

The Buddhist caves in this area are the most ancient. It appears from the surface remains, that in the hills of Junagarh and Girnar, there were several caves of different phases. But the quarrying activities in the past had swallowed many of the caves and nobody knows how many had existed. Whatever has survived, gives the idea as excavated in three lines-the first and third nearly parallel and face south. The second is on the eastern side of the other two. Most of the caves are plain and simple in plan. The only peculiarity which can be attached to these caves is the largest space.

About thirty miles from Junagarh in a ravine area of Dhank, an ancient city, five plain caves have been cut in calcareous rock. These caves are also simple in plan. Further at Talaja, a series of Buddhist caves numbering thirtysix are also hewn out on the hill of Sana. In character they resemble the simplicity of Junagarh and Dhank caves. The Konkan area of Maharashtra is very famous for cave temples. The most prominent caves of Konkan are located at Kuda, Mhar, Kol and Karadha. Kuda is a small village on the shores of Rajapuri creek. It contains a group of twenty-five caves, large and small in different dimensions. They are very plain except one cave which has some sculptural decoration. Next to Kuda is Mhar on Savitri river in Kolaba district. Here, a group of twenty-eight excavations exist. The first twenty are in the upper scarp and the rest about thirty feet down. Across the Savitri river is a small village of Kol which has two small groups of caves with a few inscriptions.

Next to it in the Ghats, south of Poona, at Sirwal, a group of caves are found and next near Wai at the ascent of Mahabaleshwar hill some caves of very simple nature are carved out. Nearly thirty miles of Satara at Karadha is an extensive series of sixty caves. Here the caves have been divided into three groups-(1) the southern group near the village of Jakhanwadi, (2) In the south-east of the town and (3) in the valley of Koina.

Next to Konkan is Bor Ghat. Here the Buddhist caves are hewn in such a manner that no particular name can be given. They are neither situated like the caves of Ajanta or Ellora nor scattered like those of Kanehri or Junnar. The main characteristics in these caves is Chaitya. Amongst such monuments, the Chaitya cave at Bhaja is the oldest. The Bhaja caves are also unique in the history of rock-cut architecture of western India as they form the earliest excavated group in the whole series of Buddhist excavations.

The archaic feature of the Chaitya-cave—such as the pronounced take of its pillars, the presence of timber work, the shape of the stupa, the archaic character of the figure-sculpture decorating the facade, all tend to confirm its early date. The sculptures from the famous vihara cave, the existence of stone-beds and pillows in the vihara cells, the shape of the pillars of the vihara and the slanting door-jambes of the cells also point to the high antiquity of the entire group. The nearest parallel Chaitya cave of Bhaja is the Kondane Chaitya near Karjat (Kolaba District). Further, it may be pointed out that these two early Buddhist caves lie almost at the two ends of the 'Bor Ghat' which must have

been an ancient trade route connecting Kaliyann (Kaliyan) and Surparaka (Sopara) in the north and the Mamala country in the south.

The caves at Bhaja, facing west, are twenty-one in number and consist of Chaityas and Viharas.

Among the caves of Bhaja and Chaitya, Cave XI is one of the most interesting. It is similar to Kondane cave ascribable to second century B. C. or still earlier. But as this cave has been excavated in a better rock material, the typical architectural peculiarities are easily discernible. It is evident from the existing evidence that the very decorative feature is directly copied from a wooden work. But the whole of the front, the ribs of the roof and all the different parts of the construction were originally of wood aided by the mortices cut in the floor and sides, showing how the timbers were originally attached to the rock. A good deal of wood-work remains in the cave even now. The general plan of the Chaitya is with a semi-circular apse at the back and having an aisle separated from the nave by twenty-seven octagonal pillars.

The stupa consists of a cylinder supporting a high dome or garbha on which stands a square neck representing a box to contain the relics. The capital or torana forms the lid of this box over which once hung an umbrella. On top of the pillars of this Chaitya are carved in low relief seven ornaments of Buddhist symbols.

Cave XII to XVI are viharas with small cells, some of them with rock-beds. The stupas in one of the caves bear names of Theras or Buddhist teachers engraved on them. The character of the inscriptions recently

found on the wooden beams in the famous Chaitya cave closely resemble those of the Ashokan Brahmi script.

The famous Vihara (Cave XIX) at Bhaja preserves the earliest sculptural record from the western Indian caves. Among the sculptures in the verandah the most interesting are two reliefs. These were originally identified as representations of Surya destroying the demons of the night and of Indra riding his Airavata over the landscape of the earth. The human sculptures are heavily bejewelled. The whole form of the sculptures at Bhaja resembles those at Bharhut. About four miles from Karjat station in the hill of Rajmachi, Kondane excavations though thickly surrounded by forest seems to be the counterpart of Bhaja caves. Here, Chaitya is of considerable dimensions, with thirty pillars.

The caves at Bedsa also known as Karunj-Bedsa form one of the smallest group of caves consisting of a chaitya-cave and a vihara with some cells and cisterns.

Karle caves named after the village of Karlen are situated on Bombay-Poona Road. The Chaitya at Karle is the largest and finest and represents the purity of style as compared to the other caves excavated earlier than Karle. The pillars on each side of the hall separate the cave. Each pillar is octagonal in shape and richly ornamented on which kneel two elephants each bearing two figures generally a man and a woman but sometimes two females are characteristic of Karle. In and about the caves there are many inscriptions.

The Pithalkhora group of caves about a mile from the village Patan, in Khandesh district is a site of much interest. There is

a chaitya-cave and a few viharas in a very ruined condition due to the bad character of the rock. The capital of the pillars in the viharas are unique and apparently show a foreign impact or look as if copied from some Persian examples. The whole front of the chaitya is thirty-four and a half feet wide, fifty feet long and thirty and a half feet high. The cave is twenty feet eight inches wide and separated from the side aisles by plain octagonal shafts fourteen feet high. The vault has wooden ribs as mortices to show that they once existed. The Shivneri hill fort, the birth-place of Shivaji Maharaj at Junnar is also famous for its caves. It has the largest concentration of rock-cut caves in India. Junnar lay on an ancient trade route which runs through the narrow pass of Naneghat (possibly named after the Satavahana Queen Naganika). The caves number over one hundred and forty excluding cisterns which is a feature of these caves. As a rule, monasteries are small with a few cells and devoid of any ornamentation. Only a few of them have a regular quadrangular plan with cells arranged in the back wall of the verandah. The smallest group of caves at Junnar consists of eleven caves. It is popularly known as Tulja-lena after a local deity housed in Cave No. IV. Cave No.2 is noted for its characteristics and simplicity as a chaitya griha of second century B. C. Circular in plan, it has twelve pillars arranged in a ring round a central stupa. Above the pillars is a circular architrave above which rises the vertical portion of the superstructure ending in a ledge from the back of which springs the carved portion of the demical ceiling. The pillars bear traces of paintings. Cave No.7, though

a single cell is famous for its ornamental facade with semicircular bands, decorated chaitya arches, devotees, kinnars and railings. In the series of caves, cave No. 67 is a gift of a Yavana. It has a spacious hall with a bench on three sides. Near the cave is a chaitya-griha with a flat ceiling and spacious doors. The verandah has pillars and octagonal shafts.

The Buddhist caves, locally known as Pandulena in Nasik district are located in an isolated hill called in the inscriptions as Trirasmi. Situated about three-hundred feet above ground-level there are twenty-four caves. Caves No. II and VI are the only caves which display a richness of decoration. The cave No. VI is a large vihara which contains six inscriptions of the family of Nahapana. The pillars have elegant bell-shaped Persian capital and their bases are in the style of those in the Karle chaitya. The great and most essential change which occurred between Hinayana and Mahayana form of worship was characteristic of them. The stupa which was so revered in Hinayan phase disappeared from the viharas in Mahayana phase and is found in chaitya caves with an image of Buddha attached to it. The architecture of Mahayana phase also exhibits a great change. The grandiose and the simple design of the caves turn into facades and the interiors crowded with pillars, are carved or painted with most minute ornaments. The animal figures disappear from the capitals and are replaced by brackets decorated with mythological designs. It is very difficult to ascertain at what stage this change occurred but with very little possibility it seems that Caves No. VI and VII at Ajanta are characteristic of this change.

Ajanta Caves

The caves of Ajanta fall into two distinct phases with a break of nearly four centuries between them. All the caves of the earlier phase are pre-Christian in date, the earliest to be excavated being Cave X, dating from the 2nd century B.C.

The caves of the second phase were excavated during the supremacy of the Vakatakas and Guptas. Thus, the inscription of Varahadeva, the minister of the Vakataka King, Harishena (circa A.D. 475-500), dedicated Cave XVI to the Buddhist Sagha, while Cave XVI was the gift of a prince, a feudatory to the same King. Another inscription datable to the first half of the 6th century A.D., on the pedestal of a Buddha image in the sanctum of Cave IV states that the image was the religious gift of a person named Mathura who was the son of Abhayanandin, the owner of the monastery (Viharasvami). The most vigorous period of architectural and artistic activity seems to have coincided with the second half of the 5th century and the first half of the 6th. There was a considerable decline in the creative impulse from the 7th century, though Hiuen Tsang, the Chinese pilgrim, who visited India in the first half of the 7th century, has left a graphic description of the flourishing establishment here.

A fragmentary Rashtrakuta record of uncertain purpose inscribed on the right wall of the landing to the left of the court of Cave XXVI, proves the use of the caves even during the 8th-9th centuries.

The general arrangement of the caves at Ajanta, cut of out the amygdaloidal trap-rock, was not pre-planned, as they sprang

sporadically in different periods. A terraced path of modern construction connects most of the caves, but in ancient *times*, individual stairways linked the stream Waghora, flowing at the foot of the valley, with each cave.

The caves including the unfinished ones, are thirty in number, of which five (9, 10, 19, 26 and 29) are *chaitya-grihas* (sanctuary) and the rest *sangharamas* or viharas (Monastery). They resolve themselves into two distinct phases of Buddhist rock-cut architecture, separated from each other by an interval of about four centuries. The earlier group, comprising six excavations, is an off-shoot of the same Buddhist movement which produced at several other places in Deccan, like Bhaja, Kondane, Pitalkhora, Nasik, etc. Of the six early caves at Ajanta, 2, 9 and 10 are *chaityagriha* and 4, 8, 12, 13, 15-A are monasteries. The *chaitya-grihas* are characterised by a vaulted ceiling, the exterior facade being dominated by a huge horse-shoe-shaped window, known as *chaitya-window* over the doorway. Internally, they are divided by colonnades into a central nave, an apse and side-aisles, the latter continuing behind the apse and, thus, providing for circumambulation. At the centre of the apse stands the object of worship in the form of a *chaitya* or *stupa*, also hewn out of the live rock; figures of Buddha are absent, as Buddhists were still labouring under the convention of not representing the Master in his bodily form. The most striking feature about the *chaitya-grihas* is the servile imitations of wooden constructions, including the general contour and essential details. The rock-cutter went to the extent



of using wooden beams and rafters even though they were non-functional. The plan of the monasteries consists of an astylar hall, meant for congregation, with a range of cells on three sides, serving as the dwelling apartments for monks.

After a quiescence of about four centuries, excavation was revived on a much more ambitious scale. During this second phase of excavation, after the initial stage of experiment *in* Cave XI, the general lay-out of the monasteries was standardised though each one of them presents some interesting and individual features. Of the three *chaitya-grihas* of this period Cave XXIX is unfinished. The other two, XIX and XXVI, are designed on the plan of the earlier *chaitya-grihas* with the significant difference that the interior is treated with luxuriant carvings

and the figure of Buddha appears on the central *stupa-aniconism* having by now given way to iconism. A profusion of the figures of Buddha can be seen both on the facade and in the interior. The plan of the monasteries, however, shows greater innovations, the most important of which is the introduction of a shrine-chamber, containing a colossal image of Buddha in the back-wall opposite the door-way-the monasteries, thus, serving the dual purpose of a monastic dwelling and a sanctuary. Sometimes subsidiary shrines are scooped out not only on the back side of the hall but also on the other side.

The unfinished caves furnish a very good idea of the method of excavation. After the outline had been chalked out, excavation started from the ceiling which was finished first. The work then continued downwards by the cutting of deep alleys with sharp and heavy instruments like the pick-axe, followed by the breaking of the intervening ridges, bearing solid blocks, for pillars where necessary, till the floor was reached which was the last to receive attention. The preliminary work of excavation alone was done by pick-axe and the rest, including the finishing and carving, was entirely executed by hammer and chisel. The work of quarrying, dressing and finishing presumably went hand in hand as is evident from the unfinished caves bearing traces of paintings. After finishing the facade and the verandah, the excavator went deep into the interior, attending first to the hall and next taking up the anti-chamber, shrine or cells as the case might be, the procedure of the excavators being the same. The complete operation speaks great delicacy, precision and carefulness

on the part of the rock-cutter.

Sculptures

The sculptural activity in Buddhist caves in Deccan is broadly divisible into two main periods. Ajanta does not, however, contain any sculpture of the earlier period covering about four centuries, from the 2nd century B.C. to the 2nd century A.D., when Hinayana Caves at Ajanta were excavated. Under the new impact of iconic Buddhism, figures of Buddha and the Bodhisattva came to be carved as the chief objects of worship in the caves. Vakataka inscriptions in the Ajanta caves indicate that this second phase was ushered in the last quarter of the 5th century A.D. The colossal images of Buddha carved in the *garbhagriha* located at the rear end of the pillared viharas thus form a class by themselves. In this class, Buddha is generally shown in *vajrasana* with his hands in the *dharmachakra - pravartanamudra* (preaching pose), flanked by a Bodhisattva acting as the whisk-bearer. The figures of Buddha have a sublime spiritual expression and are the very embodiment of *karuna* or benevolence.

Painting

The paintings fall into two distinct periods separated from each other by a fairly long interval. The earlier paintings, scanty specimens of which have survived on the walls of cave IX and X, go back to the 2nd-1st century B.C. The costumes of figures, especially the head-gear and ornaments, resemble those in the bas-reliefs at Sanchi and Bharhut. Even these

paintings demonstrate an appreciable maturity, indicating considerable practice behind them and surpass in excellence the contemporary plastic art.

The second period of the paintings started in about the 4th-5th century A.D. and continued for the next two centuries or so. The earlier phase of this period synchronised with the rule of the Vakatakas, when the high water mark of the painter's brush was reached. Substantial remains of this phase have survived in Caves I, I, XVI and XVI, though originally all the finished caves and even most of the unfinished ones, were painted all over. In spite of the inequality in the standards of workmanship due to varied authorship, the paintings of this period throughout maintain an exalted height and enthrall the spectator by their rich beauty, superb expressiveness, colour-schemes, balanced and effective composition, fine shading and highlight bringing into relief a plasticity, suppleness and sensitive modeling of the figures, bold but faultless outline, delicate, artistic and idealised, but never unnatural, bodily features and women ever beautiful in all conceivable poses and moods. In fact, the paintings have stood the test of the highest art-standard of mural paintings.

A steady decline in the painters' art is evidenced in later additions or palimpsests, till it became effete without any pretension to artistic excellence as seen in the rigid, mechanical and lifeless figures of Buddha in later paintings.

The theme of the paintings on the walls is intensely religious in tone and centres round Buddha, Bodhisattvas, incidents from the life of Buddha and the Jatakas. These

topics, besides offering visual representations of didactic themes to supplement the teachings of the elder monks to their pupils, also afforded the painter an unlimited scope for depicting the whole garment of human life from birth to death—men, women and children of all stations of life, from the king to the slave, from the rich to the beggar, from the saint to the sinner in the crowded drama of sublimity and coarseness, love and hatred, joy and sorrow, triumph and tribulation, compassion and in gratitude, pageantry and poverty, longing and death all pervaded by an intense religiosity. They are the mirrors of contemporary life in palace, court, town, village and hermitage.

On the other hand, paintings on the ceiling are essentially decorative in character depicting patterns of flowers, plants, fruits, beasts and human and semi-divine beings. The paintings are executed on a ground of mud-plaster in the tempera technique by using glue as a binding medium. The pigments used for paintings were yellow and red ochre lime, kaolin, gypsum, terra verte, lamp-black and lapis lazuli.

Kanehri

The island of Salsette at the head of Bombay harbour is peculiarly rich in rock-temples. The caves of Kanehri a few miles from Thana are more than hundred in number.

Beginning with 1st century B.C., the genesis and growth of the group of Buddhist caves excavated in the mass of volcanic tuffa, in the hill of Kanehri or *Krishnagiri* covered a period of more than a thousand years. The Buddhist monks of Hinayana faith were

the first to commence the excavations of these caves and the famous *chaitya-griha* (Cave No. II), bearing an inscription of the time of King Yajna-Sri Satakarni Gautamiputra, (2nd century A.D.) is a production 'of this school. The figures of Buddha in various postures (Mudras) carved in relief on the facade of this cave and elsewhere do not, however, form a part of the original scheme and are carved later, *circa* 5th century A.D. at the instance of monks of Mahayana *faith*. The Cave No. XI, popularly known as *Darbar Cave* and excavated in *circa* 5th century A.D. represents a huge vihara for the corporate residence and instruction of monks.

The entire group consisting of more than one hundred caves is one of the biggest monastic settlements in India. They lie scattered on different tiers of the hill in small groups of three to five or more. Neatly cut steps leading from one group to another and provision of fine-rock-cut benches by the side of the caves, provision of cisterns for water-supply are some of the noteworthy interesting features. These caves contain numerous inscribed record of considerable interest.

A majority of these rock-cut cells follow more or less a standardised form of a single or double room (*Bhikshu-griha*) invariably fitted with a rock-cut bench and provided in front *with* a narrow verandah having a pair of plain shafts of square or octagonal design. Cave No. 81 represents a typical example of this style.

A number of others *in* the same plain style may range from 2nd to 4th century AD. Among others some are covered on the inside *with* sculptures of a later Mahayana type and some have inscriptions of as late

as the middle of the 9th century AD.

The most important one in the whole series is the great chaitya cave, Cave No. II. On the jamb of the entrance to the verandah is an inscription of Yajna-Sri-Satakarni Gautamiputra I (2nd century AD.).

This chaitya is 26.36 m. long and 12.12 m. *wide* from wall to wall and has 34 pillars and the *stupa*. The bases and capitals of the pillars are like those in the Karle Chaitya Cave. The *stupa* is very plain and nearly 4.88 metres in diameter. The aisle across the front is covered by a gallery under an arched window. At the end of the verandah are two colossal figures of Buddha. The sculptures in front of the screen appear like those at Karla but are rather better executed. They are the best carved figures in these caves. The style of the dress of these figures is of the Satavahana period.

The verandah has two pillars in front and the screen above them is carried up with five openings above. On each side of the court is an attached pillar. On the top of that on the west side are four lions.

The cave bearing the name of *Maharaja* or *Darbar cave*, which is the largest of the class in the group, after the chaitya cave described above, is the most interesting.

It *is* not a vihara in the ordinary sense of the term. There are two inscriptions in the cave. The pillars of the verandah are plain octagons. In the centre of the hall are two long rock-cut benches in the east-west direction. In the centre of the back wall is a chapel with a figure of Buddha.

The caves Numbers 88 to 92 excavated in the uppermost tier of the hill are remarkable for the profusion of sculptures of Buddha and his attendants and Avalokiteshwaras saving the people from ship-wreck, snake-

bite, disease, fire, etc.

Ellora Caves

The largest and more varied groups of cave temples in India are those of Ellora. Here, the caves are excavated in the face of the hill and run nearly a mile in north-south direction. It is here that all the three major sects of Indian-religion-Hindus, Buddhists and Jains as a whole exercised their zeal in great harmony. With this, Ellora caves have attracted considerable attention. Beginning with the extreme south, a group of Buddhist caves, twelve in number exist. But amongst all the caves at Ellora, Cave No. XVI or the great Kailash dominate the whole panorama. Dedicated to Brahmanical faith, Kailash is not enshrined in the rock, but stands detached in the rock-pit. Begun by cutting down three mighty trenches in the solid rock at right angles more than ninety yards in length and one hundred and seven feet deep it has brought in the middle a great monolithic shrine with numerous adjuncts. In front of the court in which it stands, a mass of rock has been left to represent the gopura or great gate-way which is an indispensable feature of Dravidian temples. This gopura is pierced in the centre by an entrance passage with rooms on either side. Here, one enters left and right. In the front part of the court stands a mandapa for

a Nandi twenty-six feet square and two storeys high. The lower portion is solid and the upper one connected with the gopura and with the temple itself by bridges is cut in the rock. On each side of this porch stands a dhawjastambha forty-five feet in height. A little further in the courtyard stands the temple to a height of ninety-six feet with a base of 164 feet X 109 square feet. The basement is solid but very irregular in plan. This irregularity is hardly perceived in the elevation which is a characteristic feature of this temple. Between the Jagati and mouldings it is decorated with friezes of huge elephants, griffins and other mythological animals. These are in different attitudes of feeding, fighting and tearing each other into pieces. The interior and exterior of the temple have been plastered over and painted by which it is generally named as Ranga Mahal or painted palace. On the roof of the porch



still some traces of mural paintings are visible in three successive coatings of colour decorations.

It is difficult to imagine how such a massive Kailash with its ancillary rooms could have been completed with limited mechanical means available at that time. Permitting all that was necessary the Rashtrakuta king, Dantidurga placed all the resources at the disposal of the Brahmanas to impose the triumph over the Buddhists. Such royal patronage not only favoured the Hindus but the Jains were also equally benefitted. The cave-temples of the Jains are not so many nor so early an age as those of Buddhists. The Jaina caves at Ellora are of much significance and they are divided into two groups-Indra Sabha and Jagannatha Sabha. Both the caves are very famous for their elaborations and decorations. A few caves of the later period (14th-15th century A.D.) are also excavated in the rocks of Gwalior and some unfinished monolithic temples in Tirunelveli.

The general characteristics of the Jain caves are much like those of the Brahmanical caves. The Ellora caves with their large halls are the biggest caves of Jain faith in India.

The so-called Indra-Sabha is a group of Jaina caves. It is entered through a screen wall facing south. On the right side is a large elephant and on the left is a Dhvajastambha twenty-seven feet four inches high with a chamukha image on the top. In the middle of the court is a pavilion. The character of the pavilion and of the gate-way is Dravidian in appearance. Stylistically, it belongs to the 8th century A.D. To the left of it (Indra-Sabha) is another cave known as Jagannatha-Sabha

which is also contemporary to Indra-Sabha. Practically both the caves are connected by a passage cut into the rock. There are some inscriptions belonging to the middle of the 9th century A.D.

At Ankai, there is a group of seven caves, small but rich in sculptural decoration. All the caves face south, looking down the village of Ankai. The Cave No. I is two storeyed. The lower storey is supported by two pillars with a figure at the base of each facing each other. The door leading from the verandah into the hall is very richly carved. The upper storey also has two pillars in the front, but not so richly carved. The hall is square in plan and supported by four columns. Among the other caves at Ankai, cave No. II is similar to cave No. I. Here the upper storey is reached by a flight of steps through a plain door, which is partly lighted by square holes in geometric designs. The remaining caves are simple and have sculptural decoration. It would be difficult to constitute any comparison between Jains and Buddhists or Brahmanas in excavating the caves. The Jains were never cave excavators and it was only at the stage when Buddhists were tottering and Brahmanas were strengthening, that the Jains caught the idea of embellishing the soul of rock for Sangh (Sect) and assemblies.

In recent times, the caves of Amarnath and Vaishno Devi have also attracted the attention of Indologists. Though these caves do not form, the part of cave-architecture of India as such they personify the religious heritage of the country.



ABODE OF GODS

R.K.MURTHI

The Himalayas is distinctively Indian, woven into its tradition, spun into its history, knitted into its culture, knotted into its beliefs, fused into its religion. For ages, the Himalayas, with the snow-capped peaks and glittering icy slopes, acted as a sentinel and rebuffed aliens who wanted to cross the mountains and to launch attacks on India. Indians looked on the Himalayas as their protective deity. This is not the only appeal which the Himalayas holds to Indians. There is something in the Himalayas ranges, a glimpse of which can be seen in the set of paintings of Roerich, which speaks of divinity.

The air here is pure and pristine, unaffected by pollution, free from killer gases. The valleys and the hills, with the rippling cascades, playing hide and seek with the bosom of the mountains, create a panorama of nature that takes every tourist unto itself, makes him forget his mundane passions, lifts him above the bonds of human existence and lends a touch of the supreme bliss which is there for the asking. Pilgrims who come to the hills, trek along winding bridle paths, chanting the names of the gods, taking dips in the icy-cold streams, worshipping at the temples which dot the mountains, feel intoxicated by the abiding presence of the Supreme Being everywhere.

To be in the Himalayas is to be in the abode of the gods. At every village, which dot the scenerio, there is a small temple, built *with* granite stones, fringed by a

meandering stream. Occasionally, there is a hot-water spring. The setting of a sulphur spring in the icy terrain reminds us of God's hand-work. The spring challenges the blistering cold to stifle its heat. The spring fumes and frets, but provides the warmth which the weary trekker wants. It is God's hospitality, extended with such consideration, to the people from the plains who come in large numbers to worship.

Every temple has a hoary tradition, a history of its own, a *Sthalapurana* which finds the gods and goddesses of the Hindus at their best. The local people ... simple folk, untouched by the polluting influence of the materialism which marks the age find delight in regaling every tourist or pilgrim with the traditional tale of their temple. They are convinced that the god or goddess who presides over their temple is a very powerful deity. "Ask any boon and it will be granted", so says the villager. To talk about all the temples in the Himalayas would require volumes. Each temple, big or small, has its individuality, its distinctive features, and its irresistible appeal. For each temple is truly an abode of God.

To pick up three temples, out of the thousands of temples which dot the Himalayas, is to limit myself to the restraints of space. The three temples stand out as the most famous among the temples of the hills. They draw large crowds from all parts of the country. Those who travel through the difficult terrain, walking along bridle paths, taking rides on ponies, getting carried in dandies by the hill people who have all the stamina needed to carry people and luggage up the hills without getting easily worn out realise the unity of India.

They find themselves liberated from narrow prejudices of caste and region and languages. Here in the hill, there is only one group, devotees of God, pilgrims, eager to have *darshan* of the God. The God in man comes out in in His effulgent form. For the short duration during which the people have only one goal of having *darshan* of God ... they find peace and sublimation and the resultant liberation from entrenched prejudices which have erected walls between man and man, compartmentalised humanity and stirred up all the troubles of the modern world.

All the three temples the temple of Lord Amarnath in Southern Kashmir and the temples of Lord Badrinarayan and Lord Kedarnath in the Tehri Garhwal of Uttar Pradesh ... are set in majestic surroundings. The route to the temple of Amarnath, situated at a height of about 12,750 feet above sea-level, runs through one of the most difficult terrains. The temples of Badrinath and Kedarnath, situated at heights of 10,500 feet and 11,500 feet above sea-level, to challenge the best in man and bring out the best in him when he stakes his all to have *darshan* of gods. A pilgrimage to these temples demands of man the courage to face the vagaries of Nature, the strength to withstand the whims of the weather, the capacity to forget the self-imposed limits of the mortal frame and to get a touch of immortality. To those who accept the challenge, the Himalaya holds out its grace and beauty and power and range.

The Amarnath cave is formed of fissures. The cave remains unapproachable for the greater part of the year. It is on *Sravan Poornima* day of August that pilgrims throng

here to have *darshan* of the Ice *Lingam* of Lord Shiva. The cave lies in a long glacial forge, standing close to the rumbling, tumbling Amaravati river. The river provides the music. The long spiky pines rustle in the wind lending rhythm to the music of the river.

The pilgrims gather at Pahalgam and wait for the *charri*, with a pair of silver maces and a six-foot silver trident, the emblems of Lord Shiva, to reach Pahalgam from the Dakshina Akhara of Srinagar in procession. The arrival of the symbols of God at Pahalgam marks the start of the excitement. The pilgrims move to Chandanwari, on foot or by mountain ponies or by dandies. The first halt is at Chandanwari. After a halt for the night, the pilgrims resume their journey. They get a gorgeous view of Sheshnag lake. The water of the lake looks emerald green, catching in its touch of green a reflections of the glaciers which tower by its side. The pilgrims take dips in the lake, move on over the ice-bridge and camp at wayujan (height, 12,230 feet).

The next day's trek is the most strenuous. The trek takes the pilgrims to Mahagunas at a height of 14,500 feet above sea-level. The rarefied atmosphere here makes many people pant for breath. The climb is hard. The young laugh, cut jokes, pride themselves on their physical strength. The old puff and huff rest often, seek medical aid when necessary, move on and determined to reach their goal.

The highest point has been reached. Now begins a move down, to Panchatharani at a height of 11,500 feet, which gets its name from the confluence of five streams. Amarnath cave is only five miles away.



Next day, the pilgrims get up early. They have a dip in the icy river. They trudge up the narrow path between Kailash and Bhairav Mountains. Suddenly they come to the temple. The cave, 50 yards long, 50 yards wide and 30 yards high at its mouth presents an imposing spectacle. In the south-east corner of the cave stands the majestic Ice *Lingam* of Lord Shiva. The Ice *Lingam* grows and shrinks with the waxing and waning of the moon. The *Lingam* gets its maximum size on *Shravana Purnima*. Besides the main *Lingam* are two other ice formations, worshipped as Goddess Parvati and Lord Ganesh. The trip to Badrinath is not so arduous.

There is a regular bus service to the town now. The bus-route twists and winds its way through the Himalayan ranges. At places, there are sheer rocky drops below which meanders the Ganga. The adeptness of the drivers who manage the buses through hairpin bends and sharp turns is something that baffles us. One slip would send the bus hurtling through space, make it roll and tumble into the river below.

The temple of Badrinarayan remains open from May to October every year. It was Adi Sankara who came on foot, all the way to Badrinath and renovated the temple. Even today, the *pooja* in the temple is done by a Namboodiri.

The pilgrims take a dip in the hot springs at Badrinath and feel fresh. The temple is only at a height of 10,500 feet. But to the people from the plains, it creates, at times, a dizzy feeling. Some pilgrims run into snowy conditions. Children play with the snow-flakes, make balls, hurl them around and shout in excitement.

The temple, built of granite, has a small *akara*. The main *murti* of the temple Badrinarayan stands prominently. Worshippers bow before the Deity, sing *bhajans*, chant *mantras*, recite *slokas* and make the temple reverberate with the praise of God.

If one moves to Badrinath in September-October, he gets a glimpse of the Valley of Flowers. It is a rare thing, a bed of flowers stretching unto the edge of the very horizon. or so it seems.

The trip to Kedarnath is more difficult. There is a motorable road right up to the temple. The road ends at about seven miles short of the temple. The last stretch from Gourikund runs through a narrow path,

covered with ice, slippery and dangerous. On the right, down below, runs the river Alakananda which rushes down to meet Mandakini at Rudraprayag. The trek goes on. The blazing sun, on sunny days, glistens in the snow and breaks into millions of rainbows. The people maintain their delicate balance by leaning on long staffs which they carry with them.

The temple is set in the midst of a small hamlet. The temple is not very big, but it stands on the fringe of the Kedarnath Peak. Far ahead, one sees the Himalayas folding into peaks and dips, nurturing the rivulets which join to give the Ganga or the Jamuna or the Brahmaputra.

The temple has a low entrance. One steps in, gets taken in by the scent of *chandan* and *sindoor* and *agarbathi*. The smell of holy ash dominates the temple. The muttering of prayers mix with the notes of Sanskrit *slokas*. The pilgrims prostrate before the Lord, perform *poojas* and then return with a sense of satisfaction.

The trek to one or other of these temples is soul-stirring, elevating, exciting. For it gives the pilgrim a chance to' soar beyond the limits of existence and to get in touch with nature and its glory. The insignificance of man is brought home during a visit to one or other of these temples. The Master who created the Himalayas is truly God. Having created it, He stays there, inviting His devotees to dare the rigours and to feel the opulence and richness of Nature and of divinity.

Himalayas are truly the abode of Gods.



Sun Temples in India

B. RADHAKRISHNA RAO

Down through the ages, the Sun has exercised a strange fascination over the Indian mind. The radiant light and the energy-packed brightness of the Sun fired the imagination of the Vedic Aryans to glorify the "orb of the day" as *Hyranya-garbha*, the storehouse of inexhaustible power and radiance. He is known by numerous fascinating synonyms like Surya, Aditya and Savitar and he came to occupy a prominent position in the pantheon of Vedic deities.

Hailed and glorified variously as "the radiant eye of heaven" and "the brilliant face of God", the Sun was regarded by the Vedic seers as the embodiment of the divine triumvirate-Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. He captivated the ancient Aryans. They burst into copious praise of the sun-god's power and prowess through countless hymns and invocations.

The *Vedas* are aglow with scintillating hymns in adoration of the sun-the source and sustainer of all living and non-living forms in the universe. Embodying the spirit of universal harmony, the Sun is known to possess the power of curing such dreaded ailments as leprosy and blindness. His resplendent golden rays are considered to be the harbinger of joy, enlightenment and prosperity.

In the *Sata-rudriya* of *yajurveda*, Shiva is identified with the visible disc of the Sun in the sky. *Gayatri*, most sacred and supreme among the Vedic *mantras*, extols surya as the annihilator of darkness and

ignorance and the bestower of knowledge, light and purity. *Gayatri* further describes him as the root cause of the universe, the soul and spirit of all living and non-living entities of nature. *Gayatri* which ranks Surya with Vishnu is to be repeated in the morning, noon and evening.

About the origin and evolution of the Sun, there are many revealing hymns in *Rig-Veda*, the foundation of the three other *Vedas*. He was said to have been traced from the depths of the ocean by the ceaseless endeavours of the divine beings who subsequently made him iridescent and marked out his trajectory.

Similarly, the hymns in the *Vishwakarma Shilpa* provide a composite picture of Surya. According to these splendid hymns, the Sun-god should have a lotus in each hand and his chariot should be drawn by seven horses. *Bavishya Purana* speaks of Surya as being flanked by Agni and Skanda. It is said that the gods, in order to protest Surya from the onslaughts of demons, placed Skanda to his right and Agni to his left.

In ancient India, Sun worship was considered as one of the most efficacious means of having one's wishes fulfilled. The hoary sage, Agastya, is said to have initiated Sri Rama into the secrets of the great *Aditya-Hridaya-Mantra* the invincible hymn of victory on the eve of Rama's final battle with Ravana.

The *Vishnu Purana* describes the Sun as of "dwarfish stature with a body like burnished copper and with slightly red eyes." He is often described as seated in a divinely effulgent chariot drawn by seven spirited steeds and driven by the legless charioteer Aruna, who symbolises the phenomenon of

dawn and dusk.

Sri Adi Sankara, the celebrated champion of *Advaita*, has accorded a place of importance, to Surya in the *Shanmata* school of idolatrous worship instituted by him. Apart from the general worship of the Sun since Vedic times, there were also classes of "Sauras"-people worshipping the Sun-god exclusively. These solar votaries never used to eat until they had seen the sun.

In his works the outstanding astronomer and astrologer Varahamihira, makes repeated references to the intricacies of ceremonies connected with the installation of Surya idol. It is significant that Iran, which in ancient times was known by the name of Sakadvipa, was a staunch seat of solar worship with an exclusive group of solar votaries called "Maghas" enjoying royal patronage. Sambha, the son of Lord Krishna, is said to have brought some Magha priests from Iran to carry out worship at the sun temple erected by him. Thus the Vedic concept of the sun in India comes to acquire new colour and hue as a result of Maghas introducing certain features peculiar to them.

History and tradition both go to show that Kashmir was the first and foremost seat of the solar cult in India. And from Kashmir, it is said to have spread through Punjab into Gujarat, until it reached its most glorious achievement in the Konarak Sun temple on the eastern coast of India. According to the celebrated Kashmiri chronicle, *Rajatarangini* penned by Kalhana, Emperor Lalitaditya was responsible for erecting the magnificent Sun-temple at Martanda, which is at a distance of forty miles from Srinagar. The awe-inspiring remains of this temple

provide ample testimony to the fact that Kashmir was once a powerful centre of sun worship. The Martanda Sun-temple conjectured to be built around the first century after Christ is striking as much for its size and situations as for its artistic splendour. Probably, the temple was erected to commemorate either the victory of Lalitaditya over his neighbouring kingdom or to ensure victory on the eve of the new expedition. A quick browse through *Rajatarangini* reveals that Sikandar Bakht was responsible for pulling down the shrine. The site of the second oldest Sun temple in India is at Multan, now part of Pakistan. Believed to have been established by Maghas, the remnants of this temple, left after Muhammad's desecration were finally demolished by Aurangzeb. The renowned Chinese traveller Hieun Tsang, who visited the shrine in 641 A. D. has recorded his impression thus: "Thousands of men from all countries came here to offer their prayers."

The relics of the Sun-temple at Madhera which is twenty-eight miles from Prabhas in Gujarat, bear strong imprints of Magha influence. The officiating priests at the Multan shrine perhaps came over to Gujarat consequent on the Islamic invasion in the region and strove to establish the Sun-cult in the eastern coast of India. The crumbling walls of the temple which are situated in the midst of sand-dunes have representations of the Sun-god wearing a peculiar West Asian belt and boots. King Bhima who was ruling Gujarat during the earlier parts of the eleventh century, is said to have patronised the construction of the temple.

However, the greatest and grandest of sun

shrines in India is the Black Pagoda at Konarak in Orissa. This thirteenth century monument which now wears a worn-out look with its crumbling side-walls, is the brightest gem of Orissan architecture. Situated at a distance of twenty miles from the holy town of Puri, the place came to be called "Konarak" (Kona Arka) meaning "corner sun", owing to the fact that it is situated to the north-east of Puri, the term "*kona*" indicates its position in relation to Puri.

There is a fascinating legend connected with the origin of this shrine. The name of Sambha is inextricably linked with the ethos of Konarak. It is said that once Sambha heaped ridicule on the celestial sage Narada which resulted in a fracas between the two. The clever Narada, bent on teaching a lesson to Sarabha, led him to the place where Krishna's wives were bathing. Needless to mention, Sambha, noted as he was for his personal charm could easily excite the bathing ladies. Krishna who came to know of Sambha's misdemeanours cursed him to become a leper.

When Sambha pleaded innocence and begged for redemption, Krishna directed him to go to Konarak and worship the Sun-god for the cure of leprosy. Accordingly, Sarabha meditated on the Sun-God at Konarak by repeating the twelve names of the sun. On doing so, he found in the water of Chandrabhagha river, a fine image of the Sun-god seated on the lotus.

When he consecrated this image of divine splendour, he was freed of his leprosy. For many centuries, the image is said to have remained in splendid isolation without a shrine in its honour.

Indeed, Konarak marks the grand

culmination the artistic splendour and devotional fervour associated with Sun-worship. The magnificent Konarak temple is in the form of the sun's chariot drawn by seven steeds. Built by the Ganga ruler, Narasimha Deva, in the thirteenth century, it is a glowing tribute to a daring artistic vision coupled with an attempt at a unique engineering feat that did not quite succeed. With marvellous originality, Narasimhadeva conceived of this gigantic monolith as the Sun-God's chariot. The twelve superbly decorated wheels carved on either side of this edifice are breathtaking for their size as well as details of artistic carvings.

The seven splendidly carved steeds straining in front seem to portray the image of a swift pilot trying to carry the Sun-god's chariot over the ceaseless waters of the ocean and thence to the blue heavens. The seven horses of the chariot represent the seven days of the week and the twenty-four wheels symbolise the twenty four fortnights of the Hindu calendar.

Though more than 1,200 sculptors worked with immense zeal under the dexterous supervision of Sibal Sinatra, the Minister of Narasimha Deva, for a period of sixteen years, they were not able to complete the structure according to the plans since the foundation was not strong enough to withstand the weight of the gigantic domes. And hence the temple remained an incomplete monument to the ingenuity of Kalinga art.

The main idol of the Sun-god on which the rays of the morning sun used to fall is said to have been removed by some Portuguese navigators.

The incessant vicissitudes of time and

ceaseless invasions by miscreants resulted in the slow decay of this half-finished colossus. Even extensive renovation could not give even the dimmest picture of its once glorious past. Shorn of its royal splendour, this temple comprises of an audience hall and a dancing hall, the main temple having crumbled down centuries ago.

Profusely sculptured images of the Sun-god depicting his various moods and manifestations are found in the niches to the south, north and west of the temple.

Arasavilli

Arasavilli in Andhra Pradesh is perhaps one of the very few sacred places in India, where one can see a sun temple in a fine state of preservation in sharp contrast to the dilapidated sun shrines in other parts of the country. Historical evidence traces, the origin of the Arasavilli shrine to the seventh century. Inscriptions found on the outer walls of the Surya-Narayanawami temple at Arasavilli reveal that Devendra Varma, a Kalinga ruler, constructed this temple as a mark of his respect to the Sun.

The presiding deity of the temple depicts a five-foot tall black granite image holding lotus buds in both the hands. The hood of the divine serpent Adishesha, is spread over the figure. On either side of the Lord are His consorts Usha and Chaya. At the base of the figure are Pingala and Danda, gate-keepers of the solar world. A great spiritual significance is attached to this particular image of the Sun-god called Padmapani; Padma, the lotus, stands for wisdom and Usha and Chaya signify endless and timeless

space.

Regarding the *origin* of the shrine, there is a Puranic episode. Once, Indra, the chief of the gods, tried to force *his* entry into the sacred shrine at Koteswara, where Shiva was enjoying the company of Parvathi. On learning of the audacious act of Indra, Shiva's gate-keeper, Nandi, kicked the intruder. Humiliated and crest-fallen, Indra fell down unconscious at a place about two miles from Arasavilli. While he was in a state of unconsciousness, he had a vision that he would be relieved of his agony if he puts up a shrine to Surya and offer him worship. Accordingly, Indra built a temple to Suryanarayanawami which, with the passage of age, acquired great spiritual power.

Other Centres

In the caves of Mahabalipuram, there are numerous representations of the Sun-god depicted by Pallavas. The Nagheswara temple at Kumbakonam has a separate shrine for Surya. The sun-temple at Suryanarayana Koil near Tanjore is one of the reputed centres of sun-worship in South India.

The innumerable temples dedicated to the sun-most in ruins and some in various states of preservation scattered across the country are vibrant testimony to the continuing influence of sun-worship on the Indian spiritual matrix. Indeed, he "who leads one from darkness to light and from ignorance to enlightenment" deserves eternal veneration'.



Jain Temples In India

Dr. B. S. JAIN

To call the Mughal period as an age of innovation and renaissance in the arts of architecture and sculpture, is a mistake, because, in fact, it was a continuation of the techniques and processes of the Sultanate period during which the existing Indian and Islamic types of architecture blended together. There is no doubt that the Mughals developed the art to a very high degree of proficiency and erected monuments of exquisite beauty and skill. Taj Mahal is one such monument in marble which attracts visitors from all corners of the world. But India has many other monuments dating to earlier periods, which, if equally publicised, will be found embodiments of fine technique and skill. Two Jain Dilwara temples at Mount Abu, built at a height of more than 3000 feet above sea-level, in pure marble with idols, pillars and ceilings full of beautiful and remarkable carvings, engravings and inlayings, speak silently of the labour, money and exquisite workmanship of those who spent precious years of their lives in building these edifices of beauty, grandeur and sublimity.

Jain temples are found all over India and are being built even at present by the votaries of this faith, but the ones that were built in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and South India when Jainism was supported by the royalty, are a sight to see. By the end of the third century, Jainism had taken firm roots throughout India. It had started from Magadha and slowly spread to Kalinga, now Orissa, in the east,

Mathura in the north, Mahura in the west and Deccan and Tamil Nadu in the south. Royal patronage was one contributing factor to its rapid growth. It, however, soon lost grip on the royalty in the north. But the middle classes, composed of merchants, bankers and big businessmen, continued to be its strong supporters. In the South, Jainism gained popularity and the ruling families became its votaries up to the eighth century. It continued to have its strongholds south of the Vindhya where famous Jain Temples were built in the caves as well as on the ground. These shrines hold their own against other notable structures of that kind. The Gupta period, when there was a revival of Hinduism, saw a decline of Jainism. In Bengal and ironically in Bihar, where *it* had originated, it lost its hold. The Ganga Kings of Mysore were intimately associated with Jainism.

It is not possible to say exactly when temples started getting built in India. Moreover, the temples of the various faiths do not have substantial differences from the architectural angle. The difference mainly lies in the deities and subsidiary data and sculpture inspired by respective branches of mythology.

The Jains, however, unlike others, selected picturesque sites for their temples, paying attention to the effect of environments on architecture.

Comments from a foreigner that the ideology and spirit of the Jain religion and its culture are reflected in the Jaina art and architecture, are quite appreciative of the Jaina art. The atmosphere in a Jain temple situated on natural sites *with* idols representing the Tirthankaras who achieved salvation, radiates stillness and

peace and pervades the votaries to emulate the Lord and endeavour to attain eternal bliss rather than hanker after material gains. The Jaina art displayed in these shrines, while reflecting the fine taste for beauty to the extent it can elevate that taste, also inculcates a spirit of co-existence in man to become a noble member of the human society, having respect for the personality of others. Jain temples have sculpture of very high order which depicts themes that besides being monumental, have a religious appeal and ethical import. Jaina philosophy does not believe in god being the creator, sustainer or destroyer and as such idol-worship is not catered for by this faith. But idol-worship got introduced, because the common man wanted something to concentrate upon. It is presumed that idol worship among the Jains was allowed in the belief that it was ideal-worship and not idol-worship and that the image of the Lord would arouse a longing in the minds of the devotees to emulate the lord who had lived as a human being and whose soul had reached perfection. While this might be the justification to allow the building of temples, there is no doubt that in giving this sanction, weight would have also been given to the possibility of Jains going astray and worshipping elements of a non-Jaina character. The aesthetic side of the temple was given attention gradually during its evolution. It is, however, true that the real purpose of ideal-worship in the Jain temple, is not being achieved at present, as these have become places more for social gatherings rather than for peaceful meditation. A Jain temple is neither a funeral relic nor a memorial to some Tirthankara,

nor a sanctified place because a certain Tirthankara went to *moksha* from that particular place. According to Professor Gopi Lal Amar, a renowned scholar on Jainism, it is most probably a representation of the *Somavasaran*-the fascinating auditorium of the Tirthankaras who delivered sermons there. A Jain temple, therefore, had to have the main deity and cater to the requirements of an auditorium. In this small article, it is not possible to deal with all the Jain temples in India, but it should suffice to describe the structural and other norms which must be adhered to. It is intended to give a detailed view of certain temples which have stood as landmarks in the annals of the Jain community in India. It is not intended to undermine the importance of other temples as they have their own importance, but the ones dealt with here are outstanding with respect to art, beauty and rare workmanship exhibited by the artists of this country.

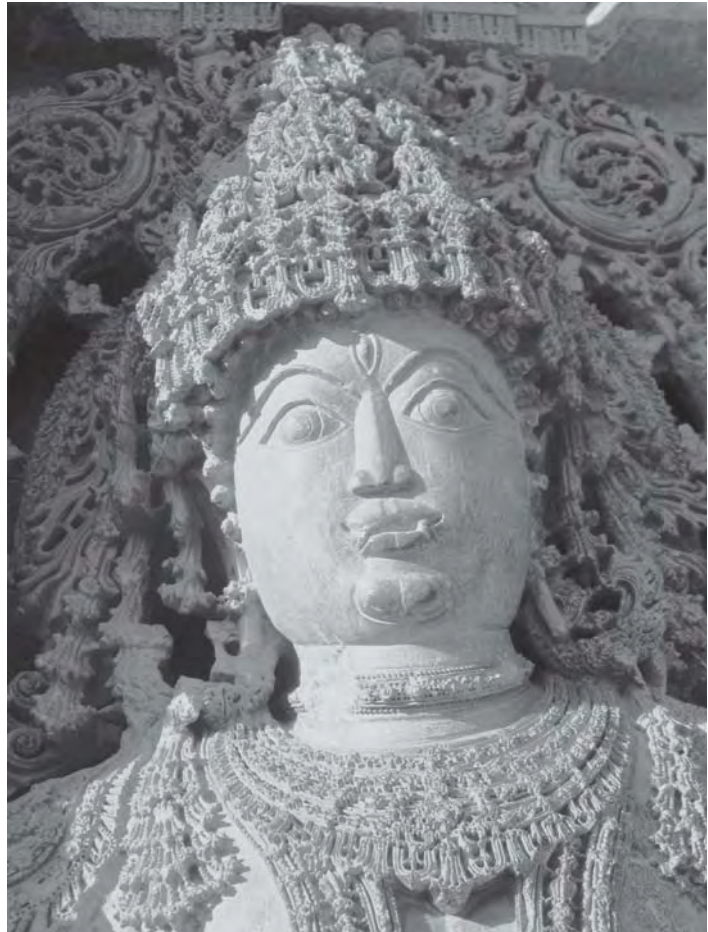
Jain Temples in Rajasthan

The Jain faith gained ascendancy in Rajasthan and from 8th to 10th century A. D. It had its hold on the royalty as well as the people in general, especially in the regions of Shirmal, Jalore, Osia, Chittoor and Mount Abu.

Dilwara Temples: Situated at Mount Abu, two out of the five Dilwara temples built in pure marble at a height of more than twelve hundred metres above sea-

level, are superb in architectural and sculptural efficiency and leave the visitors amazed at the achievements of those who took huge blocks of marble to that height and then handled them like any other easily maneuverable material. Mount Abu caters to the pleasures of a hilly resort but at the same has calm and quiet natural surroundings consisting of a valley covered with luxuriant vegetation. The whole region provides a beautiful background for these temples.

The two Dilwara temples are known as Vimal Vasaihi and Loon Vasaihi. They were built in 1031 A. D. and 1032 A. D. by Vimal Shah, the Minister and Commander-in-Chief



of a Chalukian ruler, Bhim Dev and his two brothers, Tejpal and Vastupal, Ministers of Vir Dhawal, the King of Dhadha respectively. The latter was built in the memory of Loon Singh, the son of Tejpal.

The Vimal Vasaihi temple is dedicated to Adinath, the first Jain Tirthankara, whose image is installed in the main shrine. The second temple is dedicated to Neminath, the 21st Tirthankara whose big basalt image adorns the sanctum. Both these temples are built alike. The intricate and delicate carvings on the ceilings and walls illustrate incidents from Jain literature. These carvings and the exuberance of detail and effective repetition of motifs win appreciation even from the masters of art. The architectural efficiency and competence of those days in chiselling such remarkable carvings in stone, remains unrivalled till today.

The Achalgarh Temple

At Achalgarh, is another beautifully built temple called Achaleshwar. Its beauty lies in its rising on the hill-side of Mount Abu and creating a beautiful *sight* for the people to see. It is said to have images of gold.

The Ranakpur Temple

One of the most famous temples of Rajasthan, was built in 1436 A. D., at Ranakpur in Jodhpur on an area of 40,000 square feet. This three-storeyed massive structure, is four-faced (*Chaturmukhi*) and has 26 *mandapas* and 420 pillars. The carvings on the pillars and columns relate to various aspects of Jainism. The one beauty of art displayed in this temple is that the carvings on the pillars are different. The temple is dedicated to

Adinath, whose quadruple image graces the main shrine.

Nasiana Temple

A three-storeyed temple of Ajmer, known as the Nasiana Temple, is imposing in structure. It is one of the few temples with coloured pictures and glass engravings on the walls. It has been the seat of *Bhattaraks*, some of whom were very learned and famous masters. It has a big collection of hand-written Jain scriptures of the 15th century A. D. The auditorium in this temple is quite spacious and well laid out.

Jain Temples in South India

The Jain temple of Meguti at Aihole in Bijapur, Deccan, was built in 634 A. D. by one Ravikirti during the reign of the Chalukian King Pulakesin I. It was built in the Dravidian style, following the model of the well-recognised group of temples which were flat-roofed and square, having a covered ambulatory around the sanctum and preceded by a porch in front. They were sometimes provided with a second storey. The quality of masonry and technique of this temple is commendable - while its ornamental work speaks of noticeable delicacy and refinement. The temple is a long rectangular building consisting of two parts-the shrine with its surrounding gallery and the front hall on pillars. These two parts are joined by a vestibule. This ingenuity in the designing of the temple had immense influence on future architecture.

Sravana Belagole and Gomateswara

Sravana Belagole in Mysore is situated on the slopes of Vindhyagiri and Chandragiri hills on the bank of a huge tank. It is a holy place of Jains and abounds in temples which speak of the sway that Jainism had in 'South India till the 12th century A. D. when the Hoysala King Vishnu-varadhana was converted to Vaishnavism by Ramanuja. There are about five hundred stone inscriptions giving valuable historical and other information about the place and the temples.

The most striking work of art and beauty is seen in the colossal statue of Gomateswara, on the top of the Vindhyagiri hills. According to Jain tradition, Bhadrabahu, the great Jain saint, led about 12,000 Northern Jainas to the South in the end of the 3rd century B. C. in the times of the Mauryas. Chandra Gupta Maurya is said to have migrated with Bhadrabahu, his preceptor. Bhadrabahu died at Chandragiri hill before he completed his migration and Chandragupta served him till his death. Chandragupta followed the Jain vows for twelve years at the same place and died there itself. This migration was followed by others and Jainism gained prominence practically over the whole of South India under great acharyas like Kalakacharya, Visakhacharya and Kundakunda who was a Dravidian. They won even the royalty to the side of Jainism. The Ganga Kings of Mysore were great patrons of this faith.

Chamunda Raja, Minister and General of a Ganga ruler, built the Gomateswara near about 983 A. D. Gomateswara represents the statue of Bahubali, the son of

Rishabhadeva, the first Jain Tirthankara. Bahubali had renounced everything and attained salvation. The 57-feet tall statue, cut out of a rock in symmetrical proportions and aesthetic disposition, radiates a peaceful and calm atmosphere all around and emphasises his ideas of the immortality of the soul. It also speaks of what he stood for-renunciation, devotion, non-violence and supreme bliss. Silhouetted against a background of vastness, achievement, mystic ecstasy and devotion, this statue gives a silent message to the world. Though it is a Jain statue, it belongs to the whole world as a rare asset in art.

There are many temples on the Vindhyagiri and Chandragiri hills which speak of the





Jaina art and philosophy. Chandragiri hill has many temples, all built in the Dravidian style and enclosed in a boundary. There are valuable inscriptions on this hill which are of great historical importance.

Jain Temples at Halebid

Sixty four miles away from Shravanbelagola, we come across three famous Jain temples at Halebid. The Parashvanath temple, the largest and the most important of the three, was built in 1133 A. D. at Halebid. It has a standing statue of Parashvanath, the 23rd Jain Tirthankara. It has 14 pillars. The temple does not have much ornamentation outside, but the carving and the workmanship on the inside are superb and can be appreciated better by seeing

than by reading a description of it. The other two important temples are dedicated to Rishabhadeva and Lord Shantinath. The Shantinath temple like the statue of Parshvanath has a 14-foot tall image of Shantinath.

Jain Temples in Khajuraho

Khajuraho in Madhya Pradesh is known for its temples. Exquisite specimens of Hindu architecture and sculpture are to be found there. The sculpture there pivots round "Woman" and is sensuous, but sublime. These temples were built between 950 and 1050 A.D. There are Jain temples too in Khajuraho, Parashvanath temple is the largest and the finest of the Jain temples found here. Its sanctum contains an ornamental throne and it has on its outside walls beautiful sculpture in not amorous but playful moods—a woman fondling a child, another writing a letter, a petite one, extracting a thorn from her foot and a woman at her toilet. The carvings on the ceilings are full of intricate workmanship.

The Jain Cave Temples

The structural method of erecting temples with its immense scope in the hands of the builders, had started replacing in the 8th century A. D. the archaic rock-cut mode, in spite of its long use and peculiar advantages.

The rock-cut mode necessitated driving axially the shrines and the halls into the interior of the hill-side while the structural method left the builder free to design and build. On account of their characteristic fondness for heights, the Jains excavated

hills to have caves to house their shrines and also their sages and saints, before the structural method of building temples came to be adopted. The chiselling of stones in these caves to serve as halls and rooms is unrivalled. Statues in these caves also speak of rare artistic skill. Jain caves of uncommon beauty are found in Bihar, Orissa and Southern India, because Jainism thrived there and small hills were available in abundance in these regions.

The two Sonbhandar caves in Rajgir (Bihar) were excavated at the instance of the sage Vairadeva in 3rd or 4th century A. D. The caves got dilapidated but have been renovated to a certain extent. Inside the eastern cave, on the southern wall, there are six small figures of the Jain Tirthankaras carved in relief.

Khandagiri and Udayagiri are twin hills in Orissa which are honey-combed with Jain caves. They reveal the sculptural art of the second century. The most famous of these caves, known as *Rani Gufa* or *Hathi Gufa*, is the largest of all. It is two-storeyed and has 16 rooms and one 20-foot long verandah supported by pillars. Carvings on the doors, walls and the pillars depict incidents from Jain literature. The paintings in this cave are of a very high quality. Valuable inscriptions have also been found here.

The Jain caves at Ellora in Hyderabad, six in number, were excavated from the 8th century to the 13th century A. D. An interesting inscription dated 1234-35 A. D. was found on the cushion of the seat of the Parashvanath statue. The Badami caves excavated during the Chalukian period are very spacious and have tall statues of Parshvanath and Bahubali.

Sitannavasal and Narttamalai hills, in the Pudukkottai State in Tamil Nadu, contain rock-beds which the Jain monks occupied and Jain cave temples. The temple of Arhat is reported to have been built on the first hill by the Pallava King, Mahendravarman I, in 7th century A. D. The picturesque paintings in this temple are unique and are found on the ceilings, beams and upper parts of the pillars. These paintings, depict scenes which present a variety of Jaina religious art. The Nartta malai hills have rock-cut Jain sculptures depicting the Tirthankaras and monasteries for the Jain monks.

The steep Kalugumalai hill, situated in the Koilpatti taluk of Tirunelveli district in Tamil Nadu contains hard rock Jain images and temples of superb workmanship in honour of the Tirthankaras. The Jain sculptures lie at an altitude higher than that of others and are carved in relief on the smooth surfaces of the overhanging rocks. The description of the work, given by P. B. Desai, Assistant Super-intendent for Epigraphy, Department of Archeology, Ooty, in 1957, in his book *Jainism in South India*, is very apt and is reproduced below: "The rock-cut sculpture in Kalugumalai Hill presents a glowing picture of the religious ardour and artistic excellence attained by the adherents of Jainism in Tamilnadu. The richness of imagery, the wealth of details and refinement of execution exhibited in them are really admirable. This imperishable gallery of art created by the superior intellect of man on the strength of Nature's bounty, will ever stand as a unique monument of Jaina culture in South India."



Fire Temples of the Parsis

PILOONANAVUITY

Consecration of Fire Temples and the Sacred Fire

The most spectacular and elaborate of the Zoroastrian ceremonies is the consecration of the Fire Temple and the sacred fire, *Atar* or *Atash*.

As there are three grades of Fire Temples, the collection, purification and consecration of the fires and their number, also differ. The three grades are: the *Atash Behram*, the Fire of Victory, which is installed in the Fire Temple named after it; the *Atash Adaran* or *Agiary* or *Dar-e-Meher*, the Gate of Mercy; and the *Atash Dadgah*, the household fire in a Zoroastrian home. Wherever there are more than ten Zoroastrian families, an *Atash Adaran* should be established. The household fire requires no special consecration. It is usually taken from the kitchen fire and after prayers, returned to the kitchen fire.

An *Atash Behram*, however, requires sixteen different fires to be collected, consecrated and installed. The first fire to be collected is from a burning corpse. It has to be purified ninety-one times. Other fires which have to be collected include those from a potter, brick maker, goldsmith, tinker, baker, brewer, soldier, traveller or shepherd, as well as from the chief citizen of the town and fire from lightning and lastly, from the home of a Zoroastrian, priest and layman. The most difficult to obtain is the fire from lightning which has

struck a tree or house. It may, therefore, take years before a Fire Temple is consecrated.

Formerly, ninety-one pits were dug in an open ground, each pit a foot apart and the fire from a burning corpse placed in the first pit. Prayers were recited and powdered sandalwood and incense placed in the second pit. The breeze would ignite these from the heat of the fire in the first pit, which was then allowed to extinguish itself.

In this manner and after reciting the prescribed prayers, the fire in the ninety-first pit would be considered pure.

The remaining fifteen fires had to go through the same process, except that the number of times a fire was purified differed, depending on the home from which it was collected.

Today, the purification of the different fires takes place in a room attached to a Fire Temple. The fires to be purified are placed in a limited number of *Afarghans*, but the number of times the different fires have to be purified is strictly adhered to.

When each of the sixteen fires has been purified and consecrated, the final union of all the fires takes place on the day when the first *Gather*, the *Ahunavaiti*, is recited during the *Muktad* ceremonies in honour of the *Fraoashis* of the righteous dead. A large *Afarghan* is made ready. The fire which was ignited from a burning corpse is lifted with a ladle and placed in the *Afarghan*. The remaining fifteen fires are then lifted in turn and joined to the first fire.

Two priests perform this act while reciting the prescribed prayers. The united fire is then carried to the consecrated ground near the Fire Temple.

The consecration of the new Fire Temple now takes place. For three consecutive days, two priests recite three *rasnas* and three *Vendidads*, with their prescribed ritual, as well as the prayer in honour of *Sraosha*, Divine Intuition. Then, for the next thirty days, thirty *yasnas* and thirty *vendidads* are recited in honour of each of the Divine Powers presiding on that particular day, one *yasna* and one *vendidad* for each day. This completes the final consecration of the Fire Temple.

The hallowed fire is now removed, with all dignity and solemnity, to the consecrated chamber in the Fire Temple. A procession is formed, with the chief priest at the head and others in order of rank. The priests are clothed in their white robes, while the *Dasturs* or chief priests, wear the insignia of their rank, gorgeous shawls. Some bear swords and some maces (*gurz*). The path to the consecrated chamber is divided into *pavis* or sections, which have already been ritually purified. Two priests carrying the large *Afarghan* in which the sacred fire is placed, walk in unison, from *pavi* to *paoi*, till the consecrated chamber is reached.

The fire is now transferred to a large *Afarghan* in the centre of the room. The *Afarghan* stands on a stone slab known as the *takhta*, the throne. The fire is fed with sandalwood and incense and an *Atash Nyaesh* recited in its honour.

A *Jashan* ceremony is now performed in the front hall attached to the Fire Temple. After certain prayers and benedictions are recited, the enthronement or *takhtnashini* of the fire is complete.

The sacred fire in a Fire Temple must never be allowed to go out. Five times a day, in harmony with the five *Gahs* in which the

twenty-four hours are divided, the priest recites special prayers before the fire and feeds it with sandal-wood and incense. On these occasions, a deep-toned bell is also rung, to keep all evil spirits away. This ceremony is called the *Bui* ceremony.

The *Atash Beltram* fire is spoken of as the *Padshah*, the king. The roof of the consecrated chamber is shaped like a dome to signify the dome of heaven. From the centre of the dome hangs, high above the fire, the *Taj*, a large metal tray, which is the crown for the fire. A couple of swords and a few maces are displayed on the inner walls of the room. Just as the warrior fights with actual weapons, so must the soldier in the service of Ahura Mazda fight with spiritual weapons.

Visit to a Fire Temple

When a Zoroastrian visits a Fire Temple, he first washes his hands and face with the consecrated well water kept in a special vessel. He then faces east and performs the Kusti ritual. Both men and women cover their heads when praying. All remove their shoes before entering the outer hall of the Fire Temple. On the walls usually hang large pictures of the Prophet and of the donors to that particular Fire Temple.

The worshipper now enters the inner room built round the consecrated chamber where the sacred fire is housed. Only the priest may enter the consecrated chamber. The worshipper's first action is to bow down before the fire and place his head on the marble lintel which separates the consecrated chamber from the rest of the room. Having recited a brief *Ashem vohu* or *ahuna vairyra* or both, he rises from his

knees. At this point, a priest offers him some cold ash from the sacred fire. The worshipper takes a pinch and places it between his eye-brows and at the base of his throat. This is symbolic in two ways: firstly, it is a reminder that the individual will one day be reduced to dust; secondly,



it is a gesture of humility before God, for both king and beggar are equal in His eyes. The worshipper now seeks a quiet corner of the room in which to pray. Before he starts praying, he usually gives the priest

a piece of sandalwood that he has brought outside the gates of the temple. This may be left on the marble lintel and the priest will place it on the fire as a thanks-offering from the worshipper. Having completed his prayers silently, the worshipper again goes to the marble lintel and puts his forehead to it while reciting a short prayer. He then leaves.

In Zoroastrian homes, there is usually a small portable *Afarghan*, together with pincers and a spoon-shaped like the ones in the Fire Temples. Every evening, formerly, the sacred fire was lit and fed with sandalwood and incense. Both young and old paid homage to the fire and recited a brief *ashem vohu* or *ahuna vairya*. The *afarghan* was then taken into every room in the home. Today, the custom is dying out as sandalwood and incense are prohibitively expensive. In many pious homes, a wick-light, placed in a glass container and fed with oil, is kept burning day and night to remind the inmates of their Creator. The wick is changed morning and evening and the container filled with oil to make sure the light does not go out.

It will be seen how closely knit a Zoroastrian's life was with the Fire Temple and the ceremonies and customs associated with it. A Zoroastrian home, without its family priest, was unthinkable in the past. It was this heritage which the early settlers in India brought with them from Iran.



Sree Krishna Temple, Guruvayur

A. BALAKRISHNAN NAIR

The famous Sree Krishna Temple at Guruvayur is situated in Chavakkad taluk, Trichur district in Kerala State. It is 29 kms. from the nearest railway station Trichur, on the Madras-Cochin Harbour line of the Southern Railways. There are bus services connecting Guruvayur with all important towns in Kerala and a few important towns in neighbouring Karnataka and Tamilnadu.

The Guruvayur temple is a simple structure with *gopuras* on either side and protected by a great wall around. The *Srikool*, the roof of which is gold-covered, is a two-chambered structure built of granite walls. There are three rooms inside the *Srikool*, the *garbhagriha* where the deity is installed being the innermost. Around, on the walls of the *Srikool* can be seen mural paintings depicting the *Lilas* of Krishna. The steps in front of the *Srikool* are called *Sopanam*. Standing by, the *Marar* sings the *Ashtapati* and hence the name *Sopana Sangeetam*.

In front of the *Srikool* is the *Namaskara mandapai* to the south of the *mandapa* is the *Tidapill* the temple kitchen. To the west of the *Tidapill*, is situated the *Saraswathi Kettu* where palm leaf records are kept to be worshipped on the *Navarathri* day. Just in front of the *Kettu* is the Ganapathi shrine, (in the southwest corner of the main shrine). On the western side is erected the beautiful 'Anantha Sayanam' sculpture. In the northern side there exists a small open hall where the

temple servants keep the cooked rice. Near it is to be seen the *Nrittam* (dancing hall) where Vilwamangala is believed to have had the *darshan* of the dancing Krishna. In front of the *Nrittam* and north of the *mandapa*, there is the *Rudrakupa*, a well. Its water is reputed to possess digestive and curative properties. As Siva is said to have worshipped the Lord using the holy water, the well came to be called by His name. Coming to the eastern side, there is the *Vatlnadam*, the halls on either side of the eastern entrance to the temple. Feasts for priests and guests are held here. Then there is the *Nalambalam*, the enclosure around the main shrine. An important structure is the eastern *gopura*, a two-storeyed building. Here in its spacious hall are conducted *Annaprasam* and *Tulabharam*. The *Dhvajasthambha* (flag-staff) rises up piercing through it. It is 110 feet high and is covered with gold. The *Balikallu* and *Dipasthambha* are also situated here. The big bell is placed in the south-east corner of the outer courtyard. Here, in the south-east, is also located the *Kuthambalam* with its three *Talikkutams* noted for its architectural pattern and structural beauty. To its west is the Shastha shrine and beyond in the extreme south-west there is the *Pathayapura* followed by quarters for the temple priests. In the north-west corner are the *Uttupura* with a side-entrance to the *Krishnanattamsala*. The pathways in the northern courtyard with concrete roofing have beautifully carved pillars with lovely sculptures of saints and sages associated with the temple. The passage through the northern wall of the temple leads to the temple-tank (*Rudratirtha*), as

also to the Devi shrine on the north-eastern corner. The sanctity of the temple-tank is worth noting. It is here that the *utsavavighraha* is bathed on the last day of the annual *utsavam*. Recently the roofs of the *Srikovil* and *mandapa* have been covered with gold [1980].

The origin and early history of the temple is lost in obscurity. Tradition has it that the temple was founded and the deity installed by Guru, the preceptor of the gods and Vayu, the god of the winds. The word 'Guruvayur' is derived from Guruvayupuram. The *vighraha* is made out of a particular kind of stone called *Pathala Anjanam* which is rarely seen. Legend has it that Vasudeva, father of Sree Krishna, was worshipping this idol at Dwaraka. Lord Krishna just before He returned to His home in heaven told His foremost disciple and devotee, Uddhava, that the sole purpose of His *avatar* was over and though He was casting off His body, He would manifest Himself in this idol and shower His blessings on His devotees and ward off the evil effects of Kaliyuga. He advised Uddhava to inform Guru and Vayu that it was His desire to safeguard this idol before Dwaraka was submerged by the ocean and that it was to be installed at an appropriate place for the benefit of mankind during Kaliyuga.

After Lord Krishna's ascension, Uddhava approached Guru and apprised him of the Lord's wish. Accordingly Guru and Vayu proceeded in search of this idol and discovered it tossing in the waves of the sea. They took charge of it and set out to find out a sacred place for its installation. After a long search, they chose Guruvayur on the bank of *Rudratirtha* as the most appropriate place and installed the idol in

the presence of Parasurama and with the blessings of Siva.

The deity is endearingly called Guruvayurappan, the Lord of Guruvayur. The eye-filling figure of Lord Guruvayurappan in the *sanctum sanctorum* is the full manifestation of the Lord (Mahavishnu) as was revealed to Vasudeva and Devaki at the time of Krishnavatara. It is that attractive, world-enchanting form of Sree Krishna endowed with the four lustrous arms carrying the conch, the discus, the mace and the lotus, that is seen in the image at Guruvayur.

The Sree Krishna Temple of Guruvayur is a heaven on earth. It is known as *Bhooloka Vaikundam*. The very atmosphere of the temple elevates one's soul. In divinity and cleanliness it has hardly any equal. Devotees are ever on the increase generally and particularly on festival days from every nook and corner of the country to have a glimpse of the deity. They do not enter the *gopuram* before bath. Males do not wear any upper garment or shirt and banyan. Similarly, females do not wear pyjamas. Neither do they enter the temple with their foot-wear. They invariably leave them behind at the entrance. They do not chew, spit or smoke within the outer walls. They do not come drunk and inebriate. They are neither loud nor flippant in their language or talk. They will be either repeating the holy name or reciting some *sloka* in praise of the Lord. Those who come here in search of peace and prosperity derive some sort of an inexplicable ecstasy and profound peace of mind, forgetting themselves of the troubles and turmoils of the world. At the very first *darshan* or sight itself of the Lord, the devotees get a new

ayus or life, a new *arogya* or health and a new *saukhya* or happiness. In the general atmosphere of joy and happiness there is no place for sorrow. Those who come here sobbing go back always smiling.

No temple in Kerala can claim such a long line of saints and devotees reflecting and adding to its glory by their life and works. It was by sitting in front of the deity that Melpathur Narayana Bhattathiripad, under the Lord's inspiration and guidance, wrote the *Narayanayam*, which is acclaimed to be one of the gems in the realm of Sanskrit poetry for its purity, style and propagation of the *bhakthi* cult. It brings the Lord of Guruvayur into the hearts of everyone who reads or hears it read. Poonthanam Nambudiripad, a contemporary of Bhattathri, is another great devotee and *bhaktha* who has sung in praise of Guruvayurappan. He wrote the famous Malayalam lyric, *Gnanappana*, in a lucid and

simple style, depicting the instability of human glory, pomp and splendour and emphasising the efficacy of singing the Lord's name to attain salvation. Preaching the importance of *Namajapa* or repetition of the holy name, Poonthanam testifies in his *Gnanappan* or 'Songs of Wisdom' and other works to the Lord of Guruvayur dancing in his heart as Unnikrishna. (Child Krishna).

The childless Kururamma adopted Unnikrishna (child Krishna) as her son and like a mother fondled Him, played with Him, scolded Him when naughty and cried whenever He disappeared and hid Himself as boys do in their sulks. It is to Poonthanam and Kururamma that the devotees owe the conception of the Lord of Guruvayur as Unnikrishna, (child Krishna), though all formal worship is offered to Him as the all-pervading Mahavishnu. Nowhere in India are *Bhagavatham* discourses given



Stone Arch
Bhubaneswar

Mention may be made here about the great Sanskrit scholars and devotees like the late Bhaktha Shiromani Kunhikkavu Nambudiripad, Vazhakunnam Vasudevan Nambudiripad and Mekkat Neelakandan Nambudiripad, all great exponents of the *Bhagavatham* who, by their discourses, used to make the atmosphere of Guruvayur surcharged with *bhakthi*. At present, Sri Anjam Madhavan Nambudiri has become a torch-bearer of those blessed souls. Under his auspices, mass *Narayana Japa* is conducted in the temple every day and a large number of devotees take part in it with great enthusiasm. *Hare-Rama Hare-Krishna sankurhana* and *Vishnu Sahasranama* recitation are also conducted in the temple every day morning and evening respectively.

The temple follows an elaborate system rites which, according to tradition, is traced to Sri Adi Sankaracharya. By the mystic rite of *Avhana* or induction, the deity becomes a focus of divine energy and a conduit of divine grace to all those who seek it. The worship is done behind closed doors and absolute silence is maintained in the temple except for the *Ashtapadi* and other instruments. With the sudden opening of the closed doors, the devotees will be swept off their feet and lifted to a high region of indescribable bliss. Such services, five in number, form the daily routine. Apart from the daily worship, there are special forms of worships like the *Udayasthamana Puja*, etc. during 10-15 days in a month. The *Udayasthamana Puja* consists of 21 special *pujas* costing about Rs. 6,500/-. The day begins here at 3 a.m. with the *Pallinmarthal* or ceremony of waking the *Tailabhisheka*, gently pouring

gingelly oil on the *vigraha*. The gingelly oil used is considered efficacious in the treatment of rheumatism. After the oil is all sponged up, the *vigraha* is dusted all over with the powder of *nenmeniaka*. This is the famous *vakachathu* and though without any jewels, the deity looks superb. Thereafter, various *abhishekas* are conducted with water poured from a *sankha* and from a golden pot. After the *abhishekas*, the deity is adorned with garlands, jewels and ornaments. Then, *malar* (puffed rice) *naivedyam* is offered. The *Melsanthi* then performs *Ganapathi Homa* in the *Tidappilli*. He propitiates the Lord of Obstacles by offerings placed on the fire. Then he proceeds to the *Srikovil* for conducting the first worship of the day called *Usha Puja* (worship at dawn). This is followed by the second worship of the day called *Etrittu Puja*.

It is so called, because at that time the rays of the sun would fall at the feet of the Lord from the opposite side. After that, the *utsava vigraha* (miniature idol in gold) is taken out for *Seeveli* (in procession). The *utsava vigraha* is mounted on an elephant and taken around the temple three times. The morning *Seeveli* is over by 7.15 a.m. The *Pantheerati Puja* or the third worship begins at about 8 a.m. This is very elaborate. It begins with *abhishekas* with milk, tender coconut water and rose-water. After this, there is *Navakabhishekam* which is conducted with water filled in nine silver pots and sanctified after a course of *pujas*. After the *abhishekas*, the deity is attired and bedecked like Unnikrishna, (child Krishna). The next ceremony is the *Uchcha Puja* or *Saparivara Puja* which is the most important

for the day. A peculiar feature of this is the worship of the Lord through a Brahmin. The Brahmin selected for the purpose is seated in the *vathilmatham* with a plantain-leaf in front of him. After the *naivedyam* is laid out before the Lord in the *Srikovil*, the *Melsanthi* closes its doors, comes to the *mandapa* and performs a *namaskara* towards the deity. By this time, *naivedyam* similar to those spread over before the Lord would have been served to the Brahmin. The *Melsanthi* formally invites the Brahmin to start the feast. After the Brahmin leaves the temple, the *Melsanthi* opens the doors of the *Srikovil* which he had closed in order to perform the worship through *Brahmanamukha*. The *naivedyams* of the *Uchcha Puja* are more varied and sumptuous than the *Pantheerati Puja*. The deity is specially bedecked with *kalabham*, garlands, etc.

The temple is re-opened at about 4.30 p.m. The Lord starts on the second *Seeveli* of the day as in the morning. Then, as dusk falls, to the blowing of conch-shells, is performed the *diparadhana (arati)* with various kinds of lighted lamps followed by lighted camphor waved one after another before the deity. The *Athazha Puja* (last *Puja*) begins at about 8 p.m. After this the *utsava vighraha* is taken in procession again for the third time around the temple and is brought back to the *Srikovil* by 9.30 p.m. The *Pathukar Variar* then reads the *Nrithola* containing the total income and expenditure of the day. The day's rituals are concluded with the *Trippuka* or the fumigation of the *Srikovil* and temple with *ashtagantham* (incense) in a silver tray. The temple is closed around 10 p.m.

Devotees flock to Guruvayur seeking

favours from the Lord and as a token of their gratitude they offer various *vazhipadus* to the temple. These offerings range from a few mustard seeds to an elephant, from the simple *archana* of flowers to the costly *Udayasasthamana Puja*. Among the offerings of a religious nature, the most important is the *bhajan*. The material offerings to the Lord consist of *archana* with flowers accompanied by *mantras*; *abhisheka* of the deity with milk, tender coconut-water, rose-water, *kalabhom* and *panchagavyam*; *alankara* with garlands, sandal and ornaments. These three types of offerings are performed by the *Melsanthi* on behalf of the devotees. In addition to offerings of *naivedyams* like simple cooked-rice, beaten-rice, parched-rice, *appam*, *ada*, *payasam*, *palpayasam*, etc. some of the other common offerings are briefly described below.

(i) Tulabharam: It is a favourite form of vow taken at the temple. Devotees pray for favours from the Lord and in return vow to gift to the temple articles in weight equal to their body weights. The articles may be water, milk, coconut, butter, sugar, fruits, silver, gold, etc.

(ii) Annaprasam: The child is fed for the first time with the rice and *payasam* offered to the Lord to protect it against starvation at any time in its life.

(iii) Marriage: The couple exchange garlands and ring from the *Kalyana Mandapam* in front of the temple for a happy married life.

The *vazhipadus* which are significant from the cultural point of view are the *Krishnanattam* (the story of Lord Krishna in Sanskrit depicted in a series of eight

separate dance-dramas meant to be performed on eight successive nights, i.e., *Avatharam*, *Kaliyamardhanam*, *Rasa-kreeda*, *Kamsavatham*, *Swayamvaram*, *Banayuddham*, *Vividavadha* and *Swargarohanam* and *Purana* recitations (*Narayaneeyam*, *Baghavatham*, *Bhagavad Gita*).

Guruvayur is a temple of festivals and festivities par excellence. Every day is a festival day for the temple. As a temple of *Nityostava*, Guruvayur celebrates annual festivals like Ekadasi, seasonal festivals like the *Mandala* and *Vaishaka* and daily festivals like the *Ashtami*, *Rohini*, *Onam* and *Medavishu*. The *Dhvaja Pratishta* day, the Kuchela day, *Narayaneeyam* and *Gita* days are all auspicious at Guruvayur. *Nira* and *Puthari*, the initial yields of the harvest season and the use of new rice respectively are important at Guruvayur. Besides, all thursdays and monthly *Sankramams* are days of importance. Of the seasonal festivals, the *Mandala* (41 days beginning from 1st *Vrichchika* and ending on 11th *Dhanus-November-December*) is celebrated. Throughout this period, there is the *Panchagavyam Abhishekha* and on the last day *Kalabha Abhishekha*. Further, there will be five rounds of *Seeveli* instead of the usual three. *Vaishakam* (from the new-moon day of *Meda* to the next new Moon-day-April-May) is the most auspicious season to worship the Lord. Legends associated with Guruvayur-Vaishaka are innumerable and the festival attracts devotees in great numbers. The *Vaishaka vrata* or observance of austerities during this month is considered specially sacred to the Lord. During *Navarathri* days, special worship is offered to the goddess

Saraswathi.

Among the various festivals at Guruvayur, the one which has attracted popular attention most is the Guruvayur Ekadasi. Tradition has it that Lord Krishna made his *Gitopadesa* and that He performed the *Govardhana raga* on this day. The *Ekadasi* celebrations begin 30 days in advance. There is *vilakku* (a festival of lights) on all these days. In memory of late Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavathar who used to have his musical concert on this Ekadasi day, 'Chembai Sangeethotsvam' is conducted during the last four days of the festival. Prominent artists offer their performance free of cost during these days. Another important festival is the annual festival celebrated in the month of Kumbha (February-March) which lasts for ten days. The most remarkable features of the festival are *Anayottam* (elephant-race) in the inaugural day, the grand *Utsavabali* on the eighth, the *Pallivetta* on the ninth and the *Arattu* on the final day. The Devaswom owns 36 elephants, all received by way of donations. The 36 elephants are made to run from the *East Nada* and the one which touches the flagstaff inside the temple first, is declared triumphant. It alone has the privilege to carry the *utsava vighraha*. The festival culminates in the *Aratta* when the deity is bathed in the temple-tank amidst the chanting of *mantras*. Devotees also have a holy dip along with the deity, which is considered to be highly auspicious.

The first in the hierarchy of priests is the *Tantri* who is well-versed in the *Tantras* or science and art of temple worship. The present [1981] *Tantri* is Sri Chennas Parameswaran Nambudripad. His is a hereditary office. In addition to the *Tantri*,

there are four *othikkans* holding hereditary office. The *othikkan* is both a teacher and reciter of *Vedas*. Their functions are akin to those of the *Tantri*. The *Melsanthi* (chief priest) is appointed only for six months at a time. He has to observe strict celibacy and therefore resides within the temple walls. There are *kizhusanthis* from 13 Nambudiri families and their duties are to prepare the offerings for the *pujas*, etc. Then there are a number of *Ambalavasis* (temple servants) whose chores consist in collecting flowers, making garlands, etc. The administration, control and management of Sree Krishna Temple, Guruvayur, its properties and management were vested in the hereditary trustees, viz., the Zamorin Raja of Calicut and the Karnavan for the time being, the Mallisseri Illam at Guruvayur. This administration was taken over by the Government of Kerala by virtue of Guruvayur Devaswom Act, (Act 6 of 1971). This Act was subsequently struck down by the High Court of Kerala. The Guruvayur Devaswom Act, 1978, came into force on 29.11.1977. The administration, control and management are now vested in a committee constituted as per the Act of 1978 called Guruvayur Devaswom Managing Committee.

The main source of income of the Guruvayur Devaswom are (1) the *hundial* collections of Sree Krishna Temple, (2) share of offerings made by the devotees in the temple, (3) interest on various investments, (4) annuity received from the Government, (5) rent derived from buildings and (6) hire-charges of elephants. The approximate annual income will be Rupees two crores. The other temples belonging to the Devaswom are (1) Thalakkottukara Siva

Temple, (2) Anjoor Ayyappankavu Temple (3) Manganchira Vishnu Temple, (4) Punnathur Temple, (5) Narayanankulangare Bhagavathi Temple, (6) Thamarayur Temple and (7) Vermannur Siva Temple.

The Devaswom is running the following institutions; (1) one First Grade College, (2) one High School, (3) One Kalanilayam consisting of *Krishnanattam* troupe and a Vadya Vidyalayam. The Vadya Vidyalayam imparts training to students in temple musical instruments such as *Chenda*, *Kurumkuehal*, *Kombu*, etc; (4) A free Hospital having Civil Surgeon I Grade, (5) Gosala consisting of good milch cows, (6) comfortable lodgings to give to the pilgrims the necessary facilities, (7) free *satram* to provide accommodation to the lower income group of the pilgrims, (8) *satram* having four two-storeyed buildings and one five-storeyed building (under construction) to provide accommodation to the middle income group of the pilgrims, (9) A Rest-House, a five-storeyed building-to provide accommodation to pilgrims who have substantial income, (10) A Guest-House for V.I.P.'s (11) A Museum, (12) A Public Relations and Publication Division and (13) Library -, The temple has nearly a thousand employees on its rolls serving it in various capacities. Besides, the temple provides daily bread to many. Poor-feeding is done daily with the interest on endowments made by many devotees. Guruvayur has become a great pilgrim centre and it has already secured an important place in the tourist map of India.



The Sikh Shrines of Haryana and Punjab

P.C. ROY CHOUDHURY

The Sikhs all over the world have a deep veneration for their shrines and *gurudwaras*. In Himachal Pradesh, there are very few shrines and *gurudwaras*, but there is an abundance of them in Punjab and Haryana. The Sikhs are proud of their *Sangats* and naturally so. Throughout the world, every stranger Sikh could just walk into a *gurudwara* and seek shelter and food for a few days. The Sikhs are still building new and massive shrines in Punjab and Haryana, not to speak of the ones in United States, Canada or Australia.

Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikh faith, was a widely travelled man and he had visited and preached in many inaccessible places in India. Considering all the road hazards in his times, this indeed was a great achievement. Most of the famous shrines and

gurudwaras are located in places visited by Guru Nanak.

This tradition was carried on by the successive *gurus*.

Among the *gurudvara* associated with Guru Nanak, the most famous is the one at Kurukshetra, in Haryana, a place venerated by the Hindus also as the site where the *Gita* was disclosed to the wavering Arjuna

by Lord Krishna Himself. The *gurudwara* at Thaneshar near Kurukshetra is also associated with Guru Nanak's visit and is known as 'Sidhbati.' Thousands of Sikh pilgrims visit Sidhbati.

The third Guru, Amar Das, visited Kurukshetra near about 1556. He had visited also Pehowa, famous as a place of pilgrimage for the Hindus. This visit is commemorated by a Sikh *gurudvara* and a shrine. At Thaneshar, the Guru was



questioned as to why all his preachings were in vernacular and not in Sanskrit. The reply was that well-water cannot reach the fields far away, but rain-water reaches everywhere. The Guru elucidated that he wanted the hymns to reach the masses and so they were in vernacular. The portion of Punjab now carved out as Haryana was visited by other Gurus also and the number

of *gurudwaras* increased. Guru Hargobind (6th Guru), Hari Rai (7th Guru), Tegh Bahadur (9th Guru) and Gobind Singh (10th Guru) had also visited Pehowa, Kurukshetram, Thaneshar and the neighbourhood. That is why these shrines and *gurudwaras* are held in such high esteem.

Before his execution in 1675 under the order of Emperor Aurangazeb, Guru Tegh Bahadur had set up *gurudwaras* at Kaithal, Jind and Rohtak. *Melas* and fairs are held at all these places every year and lakhs of pilgrims visit, bathe in the sacred pools and worship. These places are also held in veneration by the Hindus.

The 10th Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, raised his voice against the oppression of the poor, social injustice in society and wanted the distinctions of caste and creed to go.

Guru Gobind Singh was a restless traveller and a walking Messiah. At least, 222 villages were consecrated by his visits and there are some incident or other at the places to commemorate him. A grateful resurgent India, has built a 640 kilo metre long road connecting 91 historical places and 222 villages associated with the Guru, aptly calling it Guru Gobind Marg. Before we take up the Golden Temple of Amritsar, a brief mention of the shrines on Guru Gobind Marg stretching from Sri Anandpur Sahib to Sri Damdama Sahib must be given. The *gurudwaras* and shrines on this path speak of the greatness of Guru Nanak and of the other Gurus and of the sublimity of the faith which shone all the more because of the endless

persecutions.

Sri Anandpur Sahib town was founded by Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur. Guru Gobind Singh (born on December 22, 1666 at Patna) changed the name of the place from Chak Nanaki to Anandpur and made it his headquarters. It was here on the day of Baisakhi in 1699 that Guru Gobind made the people give up distinctions of caste and creed. Five fearless devotees then offered their heads to the Guru and became



the *Panch Piyaras*. The Guru's declaration of the common wealth of man at Anandpur Sahib was a challenge to the small rulers of the area and the Mughal Emperor and war was declared on the Guru and his devoted band of followers. After holding out for some time, the Guru had to move out from Anand Sahib. This sacred place is looked at with a feeling of nostalgia and a high sense of belonging by every follower of Sikhism.

Anandpur Sahib includes a number of other shrines and *gurudwaras* associated with Guru Tegh Bahadur and his son, Guru Gobind, such as Sri Kashgarh Sahib, Manji Sahib, Sisganj Sahib, Akali Bunga Sahib, Bhora Sahib, Guruke Mahal, Dam Dama Sahib, Anandgarh Sahib, Saheed Bagh, Lohgarh Sahib, Holgarh Sahib, Fatehgarh Sahib and Matajitoji Ka Deohara. Each of these places has a sense of dignity and pride in regard to some incident or other. At Damdama Sahib, the historical *gurudtoaras* associated with the life of the Guru are Takhat Sahib, Jandsar, Tibbi Sahib, Likhansar, Gurusar, Manikaran and a few others. There are two other *gurudwaras* associated with Guru Tegh Bahadur. There are also some other *gurudwaras* in memory of Bhai Dhir Singh and Bir Singh. It is memorable that though the Guru was being pursued and harrassed by the then Muslim rulers, there were some Muslim admirers of the Guru who offered him protection at times. Gurudwara Sri Bhatha Sahib and Nihang Fort Kotla commemorate the Pathan Nihang Khan's devoted service to the Guru and protection to the wounded Bhai Bachittar Singh. The Mughal army was tricked here through the strategy of Nihang Khan. The gurudwara at Chamkaur Sahib

recalls the sacrifice of forty devoted disciples who faced the thousands of the Mughal army and perished. The Guru's two elder sons were sacrificed here.

Guru Gobind Singh Marg is really unique with the pentagonal pillars with compositions of the Guru in Punjabi, Hindi, English and Urdu versions and also the historical account connected with that particular area. Originating from Anandpur Sahib, where the Guru spent nearly two-thirds of his life and where he initiated the creed of a bold and relentless struggle against injustice, it ends at the religious and historic Dam Dam a Sahib. The religious aura of places like Chamkaur Sahib, Machiwara and Muktsar on the way to Dam Dama Sahib is enhanced by the historic deeds there.

Any short account of the more famous Sikh *gurudwaras* will end ultimately with an account of Amritsar, the most famous city in Punjab. The city was founded in 1579 by the 4th Guru, Amar Das. It has now a population of over five lakhs. It contains the Golden Temple of the Sikhs and some famous temples of the Hindus and the Jallianwala Bagh, the Mecca of the patriots where General Dyer truly laid the foundation of India's Independence by killing hundreds in 1919. It is providential that Guru Ram Dass should obtain the land as a grant from Emperor Akbar, whose line should so bitterly persecute the later Gurus and the Sikhs. Ram Das wanted a central congregational place for his followers and a temple. He commenced the work which was completed by his successor Guru Arjun Dev. The temple was completed by him. Har Mandir and *Adi Granth*, the sacred book of Sikhism were installed. He also appointed

the first *Granthi* to read and recite the Sikh scriptures and organised a devoted religious institution. The very fact that a Muslim, Mian Mir of Lahore, laid the foundation stone of the temple shows the liberal religious ideas of the two faiths.

During the time of Ranjit Singh, the astute ruler of Punjab, the lower half of the temple was decorated with marble, while the other half was inlaid with copper coated with a thin plate of gold. There is a large pool surrounding the temple connected with a marble causeway. The causeway is reached through a gate. The perambulatory passage around the pool is paved with marble slabs covering more than 10,000 square yards and the slabs were offered as a homage by the sikhs and Hindus. The marble on the temple is richly carved with various motifs.

The temple has three storeys with a canopy at the top of a gilded dome surrounded by golden turrets. The *Granth Sahib*, the sacred scripture of the Sikhs, is kept on the ground floor.

The first floor has a balcony around an open courtyard with walls rising upto the base of the dome. Delicate filigree and enamel work in gold work adorn many parts. The specimens of frescoes in line are very artistic. It is one of the most dignified and solemn shrines in the world and is over-crowded on special days observed as sacred by the Sikhs during which lakhs of

visitors pay their homage to the Lord and to Guru Gobind.

About 50 yards away, facing the portico of the Golden Temple is the *Akal Takht*, the seat or the immortal throne, the seat of the highest theocratic authority of the Sikhs. This *Takht* or seat is the throne from where Guru Har Gobind, the 6th Guru, proclaimed that the spiritual head of the Sikhs was also the supreme temporal authority and henceforth he would have two swords, representing his spiritual and temporal authority. Even today all matters spiritual and temporal, so far as the Sikhs are concerned, are finally decided from here. It is worthwhile to mention here that no policeman is allowed to enter the temple precincts to execute any warrant of arrest. This temple complex has several other *gurudwaras* and sacred sites. The *gurudwara* of Baba Atal, nine year old son of Guru Har Gobind, stands by another tank called the Kaulsar. It is a magnificent tower-like edifice and is remarkable both for its



history and construction. The name of the tank comes from a young Muslim girl Kaulan who renounced her worldly life to become a disciple of Guru Har Gobind. Atal Rai was a young boy with a wise head. Close by is the office of the Shiromani, *Gurudwara* Prabhandha Committee, a statutory society with an income of millions to manage on a democratic basis the Sikh shrines all over. Every *gurudwara*, to attain prestige and disciples, must be affiliated to the society. There are several *Serais* for free accommodation and boarding for the devotee-pilgrims for a few days. There is a well-equipped research library also.

The Golden Temple has a replica in Durgiana Temple, a Hindu place of worship, outside Logharh gate. This is also located in the middle of a tank with a wide caseway. The massive temple is also venerated by the Sikhs. Tara Taran, fifteen miles south of Amritsar, has a Sikh temple built by Guru Arjun Dev as an ancillary to the Golden Temple at Amritsar. It has a pool larger than the one at Amritsar.

A few words about what a *gurudwara* means and how they are propagating Sikh faith. 'Gurudwara' literally means 'The House of the Guru' and is the Sikh place of worship where there is a copy of *Adi Granth*, the (sacred book of the Sikhs). A *gurudwara* without the holy book is unimaginable. The entire temple complex is known as the *gurudwara*. There is a paid or an unpaid *Granthi*, the keeper of the book. *Gurudwaras* at times serve as elementary schools, particularly in the rural areas and in this aspect the *gurudwaras* could well be compared to the Buddhist monasteries of Thailand and other South-eastern Buddhist countries. There, the Buddhist

priest, known as *Wat* is the school-teacher, the law-giver and the honorary arbiter of small disputes as well. In the rural areas, the Thais know and venerate the Buddhist priest more than they do the local Police or the Magistrate. In the changed circumstances that prevail in India, the *gurudwaras* do not enjoy that degree of power or temporal jurisdiction, but they are still supreme so far as the social and domestic problems of the Sikhs are concerned. It may be mentioned that some of the *gurudwaras* are noted for achievements in music in the clinical or pharmaceutical fields. There are also some other *gurudwaras* and all of them keep the torch of Sikhism bright and encourage an allround cultural and spiritual upliftment of the Sikhs. They all the while emphasise the importance the *Mul-Mantra* or *Ek Omkar Sat Guru Prasad*, encourage the *Seva, Bhakti, Karma* and the politics of martyrdom which are the basic principles of Sikhism. With all the pomp and glory in the Amritsar Golden Temple, the Sikhs do not forget the real man who has withdrawn himself from the objects of senses and has dedicated himself to god. It is this god-orientedness in the Sikhs in general that strikes every non-Sikh. Through the *Path, Kirtan, fairs, melas* and other rituals, the Sikhs have been knit into a well-organised body and the element of militancy that we see in them is due to their dedication to the cause.



Vishnupada - Temple and other Important at Gaya Temples

MATHURA MOHAN CHAKRAVARTY

Gaya: The Eternal City

Gaya, located in south Bihar, stands on the banks of river Falgu and is girdled by seven hills. The city is well connected with all important centres of India by railways and bus routes.

The holy land of Gaya has been the earliest centre of various religious doctrines and civilisations of the pre-Aryan tribes of *Vraryas Kikatas* and *Asuras*, as well as, of the Aryans, Buddhists, Jainas and neo Brahmanical Hindus.

The Vedic name of the Gaya-region was *Kikata* (*Rig Veda*, II. 53.14), afterwards, *Magadha*. The city of Gaya or *Gayapuri* has derived its name from the *Rajarshi Gaya* (*Mahabharata, Vana-Parva*, ch.95.9) and the *Siddha* demon, *Gaya-Asura*, lent his name to *Gaya-Kshetra* (*Vayu Purana*, 106.65).

The distinguished scholar Dr. P.V. Kane, 'Bharat Ratna' rightly said, "There is hardly any city in the world that can claim greater antiquity, greater sanctity and greater veneration than Gaya." (*History of Dharma-sastra*, Vol.IV, P.618, Poona, 1953).

Gaya: The Pilgrim City

The *Gaya-Shraddha-rite* has a pre-vedic background. In the age of *Smritis* and *Puranas*, the ritual techniques of the *Gaya-Pinda-Dan-rite* were much elaborated and

popularised. Gaya is the best place for ancestor-worship (*Matsya Purana*, 22.2). There were 360 traditional Puranic *Shraddha-Vedis* in the '*Pancha-Krori- Gaya-Kshetra*.' Out of these 360 *Vedis*, at present, only 45 *Vedis* are current, where the pilgrims offer *Pindas* to the departed ancestors to release them from the doleful spirit-life. Amongst these aforesaid 45, there are some compulsory *Vedis*, viz. *Vishnupada*, *Falgu* and *Akshayavata*. It is noteworthy that *Bodha-Gaya* also forms a *Pinda-Dan- Vedi* (*Vayu Purana*, II. 77) and it is here, Lord Buddha achieved supreme wisdom.

Gaya: The Temple City

"Our temples and centres of religious pilgrimage are our heritage and give the configuration of India's personality."-Dr. R. N. Majumdar.

Under the patronage of benevolent kings and generous persons, hundreds of temples have been built and re-built in the ancient and renowned *Gaya-Tirtha*, since the time of the great *Vaishnava Gupta Emperors* of *Magadha* (4th/5th century A.D.). The ruins of *Hindu Gaya* bear sufficient evidence of the ruthless destruction of numerous shrines at the hands of the iconoclast *Moslem rulers*. But with the rise of the *Maratha power*, early in the 18th century. *Gaya* again resumed its religious activities and glory, as it is seen today.

Vishnupada- Temple

The *Vedic Vishnu* is a prominent god of the *Hindu Trinity*. He is responsible for preservation and prosperity. *Yaska* (600

B.C.), in his *Nirookta (Daivatakanda, 6.19)*, giving an explanation of a Rig Vedic verse (1. 22.17), states that Trivikrama-Vishnu set his foot on Vishnupada and Gayasuras. Both of them form holy spots of Gaya, where *Pindas* are offered to the manes by the pilgrims.

Contradicting the opinion of the renowned scholar, Br. R. L. Mitra *Buddha-Gaya* p.18), Swami Vivekananda, in his letter to Sampurnananda, rightly said, "Gaya was a place of ancestor-worship already and the foot-print- worship, the Buddhists copied from the Hindus." And this is "indicative of this (Swamiji's) true historical and archaeological spirit." (*Life of Swami Vivekananda* by his Eastern and Western disciples, p.729.) This prudent view of Swamiji has been fully supported by the great pali scholar, Dr. B. M. Barua, (*Gaya and Buddha-Gaya*, Vol. I, pp. 41-45, 1931). It is noteworthy that nowhere in India, excepting Gaya, Vishnu is worshipped by His foot-print.

The gist of the legend of the Gaya-Asura, given in the *Vayu purana* (ch. 106), is as follows: At the requests of the gods, lord Vishnu subdued the Siddha demon, Gaya-Asura, with his mace or *Gada*, hence He is called 'Gadhadhara'. The Lord made the giant's body completely motionless by putting His foot on the Asura's head. Being pleased with Gaya Asura's devotion and austerities, the Lord granted his prayer with the boon that all gods and *tirthas* would always be present on his body extending to five *krosas*, representing the sacred Gayakshetra and all men would be able to release their deceased ancestors from the painful spirit-life by offering *pindas* in this holy land.

The sanctity of Gaya-Kshetra and its time-honoured *Pinda-Dan-rite* performed at Vishnu pada and other holy spots, has been extolled in the epics, *Samhitas* and *Puranas*, By offering *pindas* to the deceased ancestors and relations at the Vishnupada, the pilgrim takes them and also himself (after death) to the ever-blissful abode of Lord Vishnu. (*Vayu Purana* II-I. 45). An ascetic need not offer *pindos*, but only show his stick to Vishnupada. (*V. Purana, 105.77*).

The existence of the Vishnupada temple at Gaya in the time of the great Vaishnava Gupta Emperors of Magadha (4th/5th century A.D.), is evident from the discovery at Vaishali of a terracotta seal containing Vishnu's emblems "*sankha, chakra and gadha*" with the legend 'Vishnupada Swami Narayana' and this seal must have come from the famous Vishnupada-temple of Gaya. (*Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Report, 1903-4, pp.104-111*).

The Gupta-temple of Vishnupada at Gaya ceased to exist long ago and over this site another small- brick-built temple of Vishnupada is said to have been erected; and this also being ruined, the present stone-temple was built on the same site by the generous Rani Ahalyabai Holkar of Indore in 1783, at a cost of two Lakhs, having for its chief architect, Damodar Lal, of Jaipur. The grey granite stones, employed in building this temple were brought from the famous old quarry of Patharkati, 19 miles north-east of Gaya.

The east-facing present Vishnupada-temple with attached Sabhamandapa in front, stands on the western bank of the only river, Falgu, at the eastern foot of the *Puranic* Mundaprishtha hill (modern-

Karath). The temple with mandapa is surrounded by open irregularly shaped courtyards cramped with several buildings. Inside the *garbha-griha* of the Vishnupada-temple, there exists the holy imprint (16" X 6") of the right foot of the north - facing Lord Vishnu, stamped on a piece of rock called *Dharmasila* and it is the main object of worship where *pindas* are offered. The foot-print lies in a silver trough, having a silver-made ornamented *chhatra* over it.

The Vishnupada-temple represents the Ashta-bhadra-type, i.e, it is octagonal in plan (38' across externally). Its pyramidal tower (100' high) is truncated at the top, sealed by a massive square abacus. The sides of the octagons of the tower are alternately plain and indented, each angle as it reaches the pyramidal roof finishing in a series of small pinnacles, one above the other, until they culminate in a single tall and lofty pinnacle, crossed by lotus-shaped *amalaka*, ornamental finial, gold kalasa and *dhvaja*. The stone blocks of the temple and its *mandapa* are joined with iron clamps and a special kind of adhesive paste.

The huge brass-plated, decorated and screened doors of the main (or eastern) entrance of the sanctorum, faces to the east. Within the sanctum, besides Vishnu's foot-print in the middle, there are in niches images of Visva Devas, Mahalakshmi, Ganesha and other deities. The small northern door of the sanctum faces a Garuda-sthambha with a figure of Garuda, Vishnu's vehicle and it stands outside the sanctum. The massive stone door jambs and lintel of the main entrance of the sanctum are richly carved with elaborate decorative works including some distinct

floral stripes. These are the motifs of ghata and other stylised decorative features finely carved on the tower's outer walls.

At the middle of these walls, there are conventional figures of crouching lions, guarding the cardinal directions.

The artistic designs and the neat and graceful craftsmanship of the structures of the temple and the mandapa, show smooth, regular and symmetrical stone-carving, creating a graceful appearance.

The Vishnupada-temple, having two tiny shrines attached to its north-east and south east corners, represents the tri-ratna type of Indian temple and at Gaya it is a solitary example of this particular type.

Adjacent to the east (front) of the Vishnupada-temple, there stands an impressive, spacious and airy '*sabha-mandapa*' or an open pillared hall, made of grey granite. It is a double height space covered with galleries all around, accessible by stairs and used by the ladies attending the religious functions being held in the *mandapa* below. There are two small shrines on the north-west and south-west corners of the *mandapa*, containing a *Siva-linga* and a 'Lakshmighar' (the temple's treasury room), respectively. The *mandapa* (58' square) has 42 neat pillars, with corners indented and having eight rows of clustered polygonal columns, four in each cluster, leaving an open space in the centre, 16' square.

The pillars are disposed in two stories. Over the central portion is a graceful dome, 80' high, formed by overlapping of stones. It is noteworthy that the erudite scholar, Dr. F.Buchanan, highly praised the novel techniques and skill of the masonry of the dome of the *mandapa*, adding that same

were unknown in Europe. (*An Account of Districts, Patna and Gaya in 1811-12*, I, 116). The lithic pillars of the *mandapa* contain various artistically executed decorative designs and objects including the *ghatapallaua* or vase-foliage motif.

The exceedingly beautiful style of the Vishnu-pada-temple and its impressive *sabha-mandapa*, with inspiring decorative effects, represents the Indian architectural glory of comparatively recent date.

It is interesting to note that the massive bell, hanging down from the cupola of the *mandapa*, was donated by a pious Englishman, F. Gillanders, the pilgrim-tax-Officer at Gaya, as is evident from the inscription engraved on the bell. Another big bell in front of the *mandapa*, was gifted in 1835, by Ranjit Pandey, Minister of Nepal. The generous Gayawal priest, Pandit Balgovind Sen, donated in 1907 the silver encasement around Vishnu's foot-print and the *chhatra* over it and also the brass-doors of the sanctum and the gold *dhvaja*. Recently, another smaller gold *dhvaja* and the marble-slabs engraved with the *Vishnu-sahasranama* kept inside the sanctum, are donated by a pious gentleman of Gaya, Sri Gangadhar Dalmia. The Vishnupada temple possesses some houses and land properties and also some valuable gold and silver articles donated by generous persons.

Over the northern gate of the Vishnupada-temple, there stands the Nahbatkhana for playing *sahnai-music*. The stone flight of the Gadadhara Ghat leading to the river, Falgu, lies close to Vishnupada. On the western gate lies the newly built Ahalyabai-Vishnupada road connected with the town and also car-park, rest-house, Vishnupada library and enquiry office.

Within the enclosures of the Vishnupada-temple, there exist the granite hypo-style or open-pillared hall called *solah-vedi*, temples of Gadadhara (1040 A.D.), Nrisingha, Jagannatha, Gayesvari (1459), the guardian deity of Gaya, Pancha-Ganesh, Ahalya-mandir and Bara (1787), etc. and also 400 years old Uttaradi Mutt of the Madhava-sect where resides Gayawal's *yeti-guru*, the recently founded Sringeri Jagadguru Sankaracharya Mutt close to the Sankaracharya Park, etc. To the south of the Vishnupada-temple, lies the Vishnupada Park.

The shrines, cells and courtyards, around the Vishnupada temple, contain hundreds of beautifully modelled stone-images of various deities, mostly belonging to the Pala and Sena periods (800-1300 A.D.), such as the Ananta-Sayana Vishnu, Harihara, various types of *Siva-ling as*, Uma-Maheshvara, Kartikeya, Ganesha, various forms of Durga, Surya, Hanuman, Indra, etc.

There are some historically important stone inscriptions lying scattered within the hallowed precincts of the temple recording religious activities, such as, of the *time* of King Narayanapala dated 867 A.D., King Nayapala dated 1045 A.D., King Govindapala dated 1175. (*Memoir*, Asiatic Society of Bengal, Vol. V. pp. 30-61, 78, 109), etc.

It is interesting to note that, according to hearsay, a thief, while attempting to steal the gold *kalas* of the Vishnupada-temple, fell down and turned into stone. It is identified with a stone on the south-west corner of the back side of the temple. The Kanchi Kamakoti-Sankaracharya Mutt and the Ramanujacharya Mutt are located near the Vishnupada temple. The *Gayawal*

Chaudasahia, as old as the Gaya pilgrimage, is an organisation of the Gayawals, the Madhva-Sampradayi officiating priests of the Gaya-pilgrimage and custodians of the Vishnupada and other *vedis*. It conducts the daily worship, *bhoga*, *arati*, etc. The *bhogas* of morning and night consist of sweets and fruits and the *bhogas* of noon and evening consist of cooked rice, pulse, bread, etc. The *Chaudasaia* run the Vishnupada-area library, *pathasala* and *gosala*. It also undertakes repairing and cleaning of the temple and other holy *Gaya-vedis*. The Gayawal Kirtan Samaj entertains the pilgrims and visitors by *bhajan-kirtan* held in the *sabha-mandapa* of the temple every evening.

There is a century-old government-sponsored institution at Gaya-Lodging House Committee, which looks after the various conveniences and amenities of the Gaya-pilgrims and also undertakes all-round development works of the Vishnupada and other holy spots of the Gaya-pilgrimage. By the committee's efforts, tulasi-leaves and flowers of the Tulsibagh-garden are being provided daily to the Vishnu-pada-temple and also Sahnai-music is provided daily at the temple during the time of *mangala-arati* in the morning and *Sringara-arti* in the night. The notable religious festivals ceremoniously held at the temple are the Jhulan utsava on Sravanapurnima, Rama-Navami in Aswain, Lakshmi-Puja on Kartik-Amavasiya, etc. Besides these, Ramakatha, Krishna-Lila, *bhajan-Kirtan*, *Sastriya-Sangeet*, religious speeches, etc. are occasionally held at the *mandapa* of the temple. Since 1962, the death-Anniversary ceremony of Rani Ahalyabai, the donator of the present temple, is being

solemnly held annually at the Vishnupada rest-house on the Bhadra-Krishna-Chaturdashi tithi, under the auspices of the Lodging House Committee.

The average number of daily visitors to the Vishnupada-temple is two hundred. On auspicious days of Ekadashi, Mesh-Sankranti, Kartik-Purnima, etc, the number is higher. In the dark fortnights of Chaitra and Pausa, more than twenty-five-thousand pilgrims, coming from different parts of the country, offer Pindas to the manes at the Vishnupada and other holy spots. During the famous *pitripaksha* (dark fortnight of Aswin), more than two lakhs pilgrims come to Gaya, from all parts of the Hindu-world, to offer pindas at Vishnupada and other Vedis. Other notable Puranic Vaishnava temples at Gaya are, Gadadhara, Adi-Gadadhara, Janardana, Pundarikaksha, Jaganatha, Nrisimha, etc. RanaLaksha (1390 A.D.), Rana Sanga (1590) of Udaipur and other kings, as guardians of Hindu religion, gallantly fought with the iconoclast Muslims and saved the Vishnupada and other temples of Gaya-tirtha. Rao Jodhan of Jodhpur (1452) and other benevolent kings compelled the Muslim rulers to decrease the exorbitant pilgrims-tax, forcibly imposed on the poor Gaya pilgrims. (J. Todd's '*Annals & Antiquities of Rajasthan*' chs., 14, 15, 32, etc. and K. Gurda's *Gaya-Mahatmya* in Hindi, p.102, Gaya, 1916).

The temple of Vishnupada at Gaya is one of the greatest Vaishnava temples of India and is also the most sacred *pinda-Dana-Vedi* of the Gaya-pilgrimage. As such, it attracted many venerable saints and celebrated persons. Their sacred tours at Gaya increased the popularity and sanctity

of Gaya and the Vishnupada temple throughout the Hindu-world. Some of them are mentioned below:- The great Vaishnava leaders of south India, viz., Ramanuja (1017-1137 A. D.), Madhva (1199-1303) and Vallabha (1478-1530) visited it; Sankaradeva, the reputed Vaishnava teacher of Assam, performed Gaya-shraddha in 1481; Chaitanya Deva, the great Vaishnava leader of Bengal, performed the Gaya-shraddha in 1508. The very sight of Vishnu's foot-print completely melted his tender heart and he veritably became a God intoxicating *bhakta*. He took *diksha* from the saint Ishwarpuri of Gaya. Raja Mansingh of Amber was the governor of Bihar and Bengal (1587-1605)



under Emperor Akbar. Mansingh performed *Gaya-shraddha* and is said to have re-built the lofty Gadadhara temple close to the Vishnupada. Sri Khudiram Chattopadhyaya of West Bengal was the revered father of Sri Ramakrishna. Khudiram came to Gaya in April, 1835 for performing *Gaya-shraddha* and stayed here about a month. He offered *pindas* at Vishnupada, "the most-sacred shrine of all which contains the foot-print

of Vishnu." That very night, Lord Vishnu appeared before him in a dream and affectionately said, "Khudiram, your great devotion has made me very happy. The time has come for me to be born once again on earth. I shall be born as your son."

After Khudiram's returning home, he was blessed with a son, whom he named as Gadadhara after the presiding god of Gaya-Kshetra. He became later on, renowned as Sri Ramakrishna (1836-86), the greatest saviour of the world. (Christopher Isherwood 'Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples' pp.19 & 20). Hence the divine Gadadhara and Vishnupada-temple at Gaya are deeply connected with the noble life of Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ma Sarada Devi was the celebrated wife of Sri Ramakrishna. He had expressed his desire to his devoted wife that she should offer *pindas* to his deceased mother at the Vishnupada-temple. Accordingly, Sarada-Ma, accompanied by the aged Swami Adwaitananda, came to Gaya on 25.3.1890 and properly offered *pindas* at Vishnupada and other holy spots of Gaya. She also visited Bodh-Gaya and went back to Calcutta on 2.4.1890. It

may be mentioned here that the philanthropic institution, Sri Ramakrishna Ashram, was founded at Gaya- by the local people fifty years ago and the same has been affiliated to the Math of Calcutta. Swami Vivekananda in company with Tarak and Kali, first visited Gaya in April, 1886. He went to Bodh-Gaya and sat under the famous Bodhi-Tree, deeply and meditated there. This is the most sacred spot where Buddha achieved supreme wisdom. Vivekananda went to his father's friend, Umesh Chandra Sarkar's house, the first Government leader of Gaya and sang there many songs before a number of citizens. In January, 1902, Swamiji paid his second visit to Gaya. On the morning of his last birthday, he went to Bodh-Gaya. Then he went back to Calcutta. It is gratifying to state that the Gaya Municipality has named a road as 'Vivekananda Path' to commemorate the noble name of Swamiji.

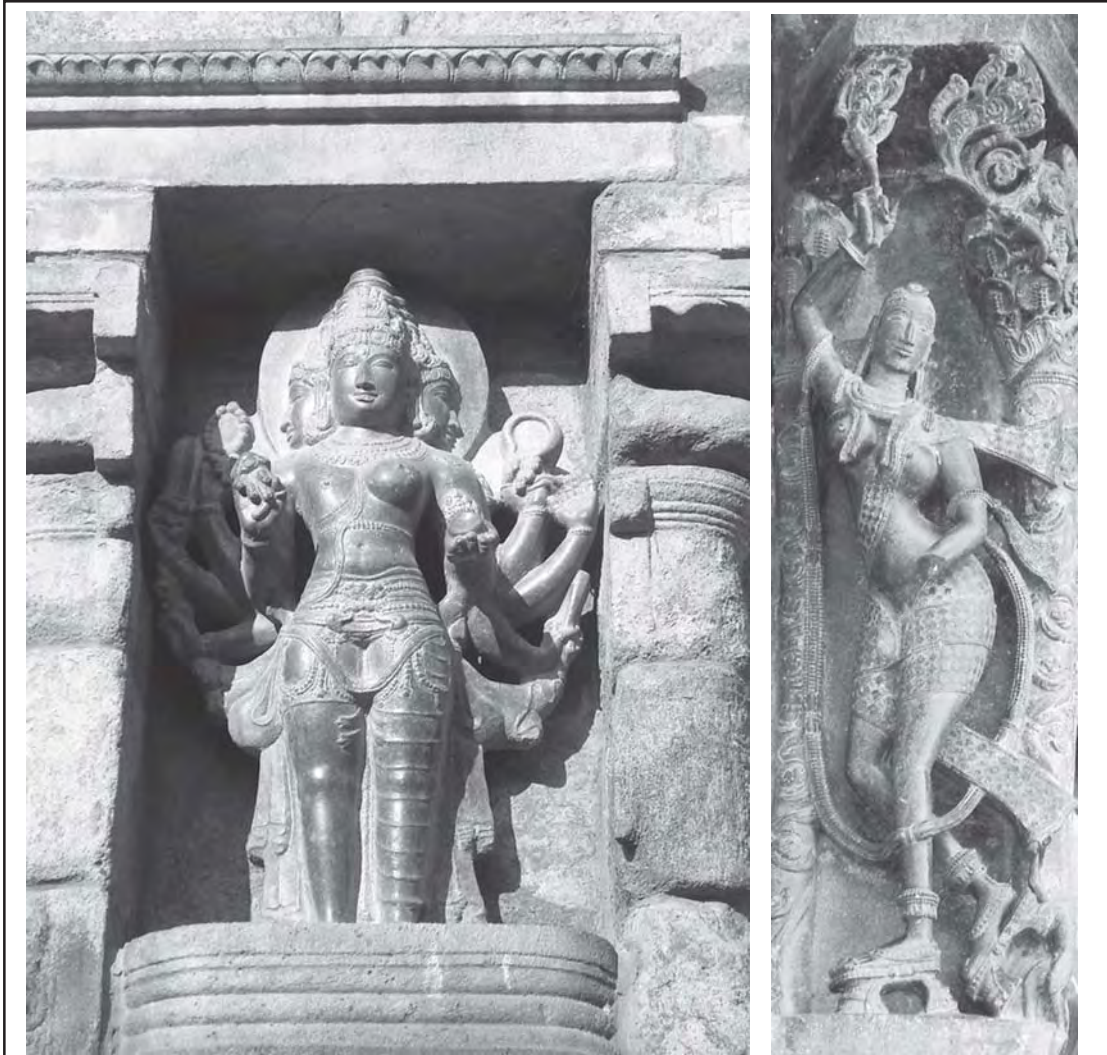
Prapitamaheshvara Temple

No *deva-puja* is so old and so famous in India as that of Siva or Mahadeva (the great god), who occupies an honoured place in the Hindu Trinity. Historically, it is as old as the Indus Valley civilisation. Copious references have been made in honour of Siva, in the *Vedas*, epics and *Puranas*. The mighty king Jarasandha-Asura of Magadha, (which includes Gaya), was a devout worshipper of Rudra-Siva. The *Mahabharata* (*Vana-Parva* 84, 91.92) has mentioned the figure of Nandi of Griddheshvara-Siva existing on Griddhakuta at Gaya and the same still forms a holy spot of the Gaya pilgrimage (*Vayu Purana*, 108.62).

The impressive black-basalt stone-temple of Prapitamaheshvara, referred to in the *Agni Purana* (116.23), stands at the feet of two adjoining sacred hills of Brahamayoni and Vasma-Koota and just to the east of the holy Rukmini Kendra, on the northern side of the famous *shraddha-vedi* of Akshyavata. The charming hilly environs of the temple present pleasant views. It is one of the oldest and loftiest existing temples of Gaya. The pyramidal tower of the temple is surmounted by *amalaka*, ornamented finial and a broken iron trident. This temple was originally built in 1050 A.D. by Visvaroopaa at the time of King Nayapala belonging to the famous Pala dynasty, as is evident from the stone inscription found in the neighbouring Vatesha-Temple (1050) standing under the famous Akshayvata where *pindas* are offered by the pilgrims. (*Memoir*, Asiatic Society of Bengal, Vol.IV, pp. 81 and 82.)

The sanctum of the temple contains the phallic symbol of lord Siva (45"X 54") called Prapitamaheshvara. The shape of the *Linga* is of uncommon type. Its upper part is tapering and its base bears a circle of lotuses. The top of the *Linga* is bulged out like a *jata*. Its cylindrical body shows three circular belts and fifteen vertical stripes. It is an *Ekmukhi Linga*, representing the face of lord Siva. He is bedecked with a '*munda-mala* with eleven beads and other ornaments. The *Linga* stands on an uncommon type of *Argha*, which is circular in shape instead of being projected to the northern side.

The temple has its attached *sabha-mandapa* in the front, i.e., to the east. The *mandapa's* massive stone-roof-slabs are supported by huge polygonal stone



Exquisite sculptures in South Indian temples



pillars placed one above the other, causing the great height of the *mandapa*. These columns bear little ornamentation. There are five graceful domes over the *mandapa*, revealing its unique type. The enormous size and height of the *mandapa* do not conform to that of the structure of the temple. The *mandapa* contains an old and elegant image of Ganesha. It is assumed that the stone-materials, employed in rebuilding this temple (excepting the original lower part of the sanctum) and its *mandapa*, were brought from some ruined temples of the neighbourhood, in about 13th/ 14th century A.D. This may be known from the fact that a stone door-jamb has been used as the roof-slab of the *garbhagrihe*; a huge stone door-lintel has been utilised as a step leading to the *mandapa* and the stone blocks of the temple's tower are of different shapes, sizes and ornamentations.

According to the *Puranas*, Prapitamaheshvara, like Gadadhara, is a witness-deity for the performance of the *pinda-dana* ceremony completed by the pilgrim at Gaya. This is also supported by a stone inscription dated 1240 A.D. of the time of Sultana Maujiddina (or Sultan Maujuddin) fixed in the northern outer-wall of the *mandapa*, recording that one Rajput chief, Mantreshvara Kamdeva, performed *Gaya-shraddha* duly witnessed by the god, Prapitamaheshvara of Gaya. In front of the *mandapa*, there is a brickmade, small, circular platform. According to local tradition, it is the burial place of a military chief who died on the spot, immediately after his breaking a part of the iron trident on the top of the temple by an arrow and this broken trident is still seen there. It is

noteworthy that the people of the locality, as a customary rite, perform, within the precincts of the temple, some funeral rites. Other Puranic Saiva deities, enshrined in the temples at Gaya-kshetra are, Pitamaheshvara, Vriddha-Prapitamaheshvara, Markandyesha, Falgisha, Kedara, Rameshvara, Matangeshvara, Rinamoksha, Papa-moksha, Ekadas-Rudra, etc. viz., *Pitarauni*, *Ekoddishtha*, etc.

Mangalagauri Temple

Sakti denotes power. Sakti-worship or worship of the Divine Mother has been prevailing in India since the pre-Vedic and Vedic times till the modern times. The Vajrayama-Buddhists also adopted this cult, based on the-ancient Hindu *tantra-sadhana*, having female energy as the supreme object of worship. Arjuna propitiated Mother Durga for granting victory in the Bharata War. (*Mahabharata*, Bhishma - Parva, ch, 23).

According to the hoary mythological story, Sati, the perfect wife of Siva, immolated herself at the insult to her Lord by her father, Daksha Prajapati. Siva madly roamed about with her dead body on his shoulders. To pacify the furious Siva, the gods persuaded Vishnu to intervene and He, by His *sudarshana-chakra*, severed Sati's body into bits falling down in various spots, which became *Sakthi-Pithas*, charged with great spiritual power. They are held as holy *tirthas* of the *Saktas*. There are fifty-one Mahapithas. Besides these, there are some upapithas also. They are lying scattered throughout India.

The east facing small brick built Mangalagauri temple has a dwarfish tower

surmounted by the finial in the shape of a Siva-linga. The temple stands on the puranic *vamakoota* (modern Mangalagauri hill), half a mile to the west of the famous Vishnupada temple. The sanctum contains the breast-symbol of the goddess Mangalagauri lying in the middle of the temple. The small *mandapa*, rather a room, stands just in front of the temple. The surroundings of the temple represent picturesque views. The flight of steps, leading to the Mangalagauri-hill and the temple from the main road stand on the eastern side. There is a motorable road over the hill reaching the temple. It runs on the western side of the temple. The Mangalagauri-temple, including its eastern steps and the road-side gate and also the entire temple-area, has been thoroughly renovated, beautified and developed in recent times.

Within the sanctum, there are some finely carved ancient relief sculptures of Kalyana-Sundara-Siva, Uma-Maheshvara and other deities of the Hindu pantheon. There are two brick-built temples with Siva *lingas* located in front of the Mangalagauri-temple. Within the covered shelters standing on the back-side of the main temple, there are ancient images of four-armed Mahishasura-Mardini-Durga and four-armed Dakshina-Kali.

There is a small room on the western side of the temple, which contains an ancient "Pancha-Mundi-Asana," possessing great spiritual power, on which advanced *tantriks* severely practised *sadhana* in olden days. About one hundred years ago, a powerful *tantric*, Chandrachur Bhatta, is said to have achieved *tantra-siddhi* over the *asana*. In the courtyard of the temple, there

stands an open hall as "*Tajna-sala*" containing an '*agni kunda*' (fire-pit) for '*homa*'. Mangalagauri is the only temple at Gaya where animal sacrifices are made. The custodians of the temple are the local priests, bearing the title of Giri. They belong to the Saiva sect. Every Tuesday and Saturday, hundreds of devotees visit this Devi Temple. During the special auspicious *Nava-ratra* days of the months of Aswin and Chaitra, thousands worship Mother Mangalagauri and recite there *Mantras* in honour of the Devi.

There are other notable Puranic *sakta*-temples at Gaya which contain icons of various forms of Kali, namely, Falgu-chandi, Smanakshi, Mundapristha, Sankata, Kamakhya (a piece of rock), Gayeshvari, the guardian deity of Gaya. The present temple was built in 1459 A.D.

It is a remarkable fact that at Gaya, Lord Vishnu is the supreme god of the Vaishnavas, while Mother Mangalagauri, with a symbol of breast signifying nourishment, is the most sacred goddess of the Sankatas and both Vishnu and Mangalagauri are bestowers of preservation and prosperity to the ardent devotees.

Sun-Temple

The sun being visible, lustrous and powerful, is considered as one of the greatest and popular deities since time immemorial. He is worshipped by all the primitive and civilised peoples of the world. The *Rig Veda* (I.II.I) states that the sun is the supreme soul and creator of the universe.

The name of Magadha (or Magah), including the Gaya-region, might have been derived

from the archaic Iranian word 'Magi', the sun (or fire) worshipping priests of ancient Iran, who had founded a colony in Magada in the remote past. They were called Maga-Brahmanas (*Vishnu-Purana*, 2.4. 69-71). They are also known as *Saka-Dvipi-Brahmanas* (Saka-sthan, i.e, Eastern Iran), referred to in the Mahabharata and Brihat-Samhita and Samba, Bhavishya and other Puranas. They propagated and popularised sun-worship in the Gaya region and other places. Lord Vishnu, the presiding god of Gaya, is considered as a member of the Dwadashatta Adaityas (or twelve aspects of the sun).

In bygone days, the Sauri-cult was very popular in the Gaya region and this may be known from the numerous old images and temples of the sun-god and also a great number of sun-worshipping *Saka-dwipi-Brahmanas* found in all parts of Magadha. Still, now, the number of sun-worshippers is great in this area.

The east-facing sun-temple at Gaya, close to the famous Vishnupada temple stands just to the West of the tank 'Surya-Kunda' or 'Dakshina-Manasa', mentioned in the *Vayu* and *Agni* Puranas (ch.116). The sanctum of the sun-temple is 8' 9" square. The pilgrims visit the sun-image enshrined in the sun-temple and offer *pindos* to the manes at the 'Dakshina-Ma-nas' tank lying in front of the temple. The simple and plain stone and bricks built sun-temple, having a dome over it, contains the harmoniously carved granite standing figure of the sun-god named 'Dakshinarka' (48' X 26" X 16"), placed over an impressive stone pedestal. The image belongs to the 12th 13th century A.D. The double-armed figure of Surya holds lotus-stems. Over his head

there are '*chatra*' and tiny figures of *navagrahas* carved on the nimbus. The god is adorned with *aranda-mukuta*, *harha*, *kundala* and other ornaments. He wears 'Udichya-vaha' (jacket used by the northerners), *Avanga* (waist-girdle) and high boots, which follows Iranian tradition. Near the legs there are figures of the earth goddess and the charioteer, Aruna, who drives the seven-horsed-chariot of the god. The sun-image is flanked by figures of usha, Pratyusa, a Dandi, Pingala, Vidyadharas and attendants.

The *sabha-mandapa* (39' X 25') stands just in front of the sanctum. The *mandapa's* side-walls are brick-built and the roof-slabs rest on massive and high stone pillars, representing the trun-cited style of Hindu architecture. The huge size and height of the *mandapa* is not proportionate to the smaller structure of the temple. Within the *mandapa*, there are some ancient and graceful stone-sculptures of Brahma, Vishnu, Kalyana-Sundara-Siva, Surya, Durga and other deities.

The sun-temple is one of the oldest existing temples of Gaya. It was built according to Dr. F. Buchanan, by King' Prataparudra of Warangal of South India, in the 13th century and its supporting inscription lies in the Pitrichhaya-temple near the Vishnupada-temple. There is a stone inscription, fixed on the *mandapa's* wall, dated 1819 Buddha-Nirvana-Era (or 1341 A.D.) recording the construction of a Buddha-shrine by Purushottama Simha. Another inscription slab dated 1372 A.D., fixed in the sanctum's wall, records the repair- works of the sun-temples by Thakkura Kula Chandra, Governor of Gaya, at the time of Emperor. Firoz Shah Tughlaq

of Delhi. (Dr. D. R. Patil: *Antiquarian Remains in Bihar*, p.141, Patna, 1963). It is suspected that the Thakkura Kulachandra repaired the sun-temple, along with *mandapa*, with the stone materials, including the inscribed slab 1341 A.D. brought from the Buddhist ruins.

The deep and big Surya-kunda tank, lying just to the east of the sun-temple, is surrounded by high walls. Visits to the sun-temple and baths in the Suryakunda are especially undertaken to get rid of leprosy and other skin diseases. Every Sunday, hundreds of devotee visit the Surya Mandir and take their bath in the Suryakunda. During the famous *Chhat* festival, held in the months of Chaitra and Aswin, thousands of votaries congregate at Surya Mandir and Surya-Kunda to perform the time-honoured religious rite of *Chhat*.

At Gaya-kshetra, there exist two other notable temples of the sun-god, containing ancient and graceful sun-images, namely, *uttararka*, on the Uttara-Manasa-tank and *Gayaditya* on the river Falgu and they, being *shraddha-vedis*, are mentioned in the *Vayu* and *Agni Puranas*.

"The temple is the symbol of Righteousness, of law and cosmic order, of *Dharma*. Those who built the temple accept the supremacy of lower Dharma in their lives and society. The temple in this respect was as perfect a substitute of the Vedic yajna which also symbolised the cosmic order and was an anonymous rite."



Kailas- The Magnificent Monolith

Dr. M. K. DHAVALIKAR

There was a very strong tradition of rock-cut temples in Maharashtra and hence, structural temples, save a few exceptions, came to be built only after the 10th century. The Buddhists were the first to carve rock-cut shrines in the Sahyadri trap followed by Hindus and Jains. The Buddhist activity came to a close in sixth century, when the Hindus accepted this art idiom and perfected it to such a degree that the Kailasa at *Ellora* is taken to represent the ultimate in rock-cut architecture.

The Hindu activity begins in Bombay under the patronage of the Kalachuris in the late fifth or early sixth century when the rock temples at Jogeshwari and Elephanta were excavated. After this, the centre of rock-art shifted from 6th to 8th century and we can trace the development of Hindu rock-cut architecture from Elephanta to Kailasa which has been recognised as "the most extensive and elaborate rock-temple in India, the most interesting as well as the most magnificent of all the architectural objects." There is definite epigraphical evidence to show that Kailasa was excavated under the patronage of the Rashtrakuta monarch, Krishna-I (752-72 A.D.). Kailasa, in fact, is a complex of different monuments. Besides the main temple, there are free standing elephants and victory pillars and rock-cut shrines, some of which are contemporary with the main temple, while others were added later. The temple proper has a most imposing

front which consists of a storied entrance gateway of the *gopura* type in the enclosure wall having niches divided by pilasters. They contain images of several divinities and among them are included the *ashtadikpalas*. Siva, *Nataraja*, Narasimha, Trivikrama, Varsha, Vishnu with Garuda, Brahma, etc., all of gigantic proportions. The entrance doorway is flanked by Ganga and Yamuna. Nearby are a *Naga* king and his queen and at the base are rows of elephants, lions and *vyalas*.

On entering through the gateway, there are rooms on either side, slightly on a higher level. The front door is flanked by Sankhanidhi and Padmanidhi, the guardians of wealth. Facing the entrance is a huge panel of Gajalakshmi who is shown sitting on a lotus and is being bathed by elephants. In the open court on either side are free standing life-size elephants carved in the living rock. Near each elephant is a massive victory-pillar (*dhavja-stambha*) each. On the left wall of the *gopura* are carved panels showing the god of love (kama) and his consort, Rati. The Mahishamardini panel is noteworthy because the buffalo-demon is shown in it in human form and recalls to the mind that at Mahabalipuram.

The temple has the typical Dravida *sikhara* and is almost an imitation of the Virupaksha temple at Pattadakal. The edifice stands on an inordinately high plinth on which are carved life-size elephants and lions. On either side of the temple proper steps have been provided for going up to the shrine. Around the *garbhagriha* are five small subsidiary shrines and the temple is thus of the *panchayatana* variety. In front of the *garbha-griha* is a small *antarala* to which is joined a large *sabha-mandapa*

which can be described as the *navarangamandapa* because of the four sets of four pillars which divided it into nine square compartments. It has *ardha-mandapas* on the sides and an *agramandapa* at the front and all the three parts are joined by a sort of rock-cut bridge. On either side of the *nandi-mandapa* are huge monolithic pillars, about 17 feet high. They are similar to the pilasters inside the *sabha-mandapa* and were once crowded by tridents. The entire edifice is of the *tritala-three-storeyed* variety of the Dravidian order.

The enormous wealth of sculpture that is carved on all the available areas on the interior and exterior walls of the temple and its adjuncts is divisible, at least stylistically, into the following two broad categories:

1. Sculptures which were carved in the area especially reserved for them, as for example the Gajalakshmi panel at the entrance.
2. Sculptures carved in order to fill in the vacant spaces.

There are only a few sculptures in the former category. They are vast compositions which must have been thought of when the entire complex was conceived and obviously, they are contemporary with the temple proper.

Among these are the panels depicting Gajalakshmi flanked by elephants bathing her which is carved near the entrance, the Andhakasurvadha-moorti and Siva as Mahayogi in the *nandi-mandapa*. These compositions are gigantic *in* size and are closely related to those in the upper floor of the Dasavatara, cave 15 at Ellora. They are characterised by massive forms and

tremendous vitality and because of their outburst of energy, they almost appear to be stepping out of their frames. Their powerful representations on such a colossal scale have no parallels *in* Indian art. These sculptures share all the characteristic traits of the Rashtrakuta style.

Some of the sculptures, however, are stylistically of a different category. This is the case *with* the Markandeya anugraha moorti of Siva carved on the west face of the north staircase in Kailasa. It has an exact parallel in the Dasavatara cave. Superficially at least, both of them have many points of similarity, but the one in the Dasavatara, which is much larger, is characterised by tremendous force and vitality, a distinguishing feature of the Rashtrakuta sculpture. The representation in Kailasa, however, is static and almost lifeless, even the god of death, Yama, is shown in a supplicant's attitude. The relatively slender human forms and the tall conical head-dress of Siva are rather in the Chalukyan tradition. One somehow feels that we have here a Chalukyan sculptor who was asked to copy an earlier Rashtrakoota panel. The same holds good in the case of the standing Lakulisa on the south wall of Kailasa.

There are a number of panels in the Kailasa complex which do not stylistically conform to the Rashtrakoota style, but belong more to the Chalukyan School. This obviously was due to the presence of the Chalukyan artists at Ellora since the edifice itself, as is known, was being carved out on a Chalukyan prototype, the Viroopaksha temple. In fact some of these from the latter are to be met within Kailasa. The narrative sculptures depicting episodes

from the epics are present at both the places; they, are carved in narrow running bands. But there are larger panels such as those depicting the fight between Vali and Sugriva, Jatayu, the eagle attacking Ravana for abducting Sita, both of which have been carved on the south wall at both the places. Similarly, the Varaha incarnation of Vishnu in Kailasa and that in the Viroopaksha temple have many common features. Also comparable is the Lingodbhavamooorti at both the places. The figures of Kiamadeva and Rati from Kailasa are not far removed from a couple in the Papanatha temple at Pattadakal. The similarities between the sculptures from Kailasa and Pattadakal show that they were the handiwork of Chalukyan sculptors. Therefore, it must not have been very difficult, but on the contrary, easy for the Chalukya artists to repeat their performance at Ellora.

Pallava influence is also discernible in the sculptures in Kailasa, though not as strong as the Chalukyan. There are two panels, both depicting the Mahishamardini Durga, one on the north wall of the entrance *gopura* and the other on the south wall of the entrance corridor. According to Goetz, these are imitations of Chalukyan reliefs. He observes, "this is especially evident in the Mahishamardini on the north wall of the entrance *gopura* which is a variation of a Mahishamardini in the Mallikarjuna of Pattadakal, which later again is an elaboration of the famous Pallava relief in the Mahishasura mandapa at Mamallapuram." But it is necessary to emphasise that among the various form, of the goddess we find that Mahishasura, the buffalo-headed demon, was usually depicted in his

zoomorphic form in the Chalukyan sculpture whereas in the Pallava art he was shown in an anthropomorphic form as is evident from the famous panel at Mahabalipuram. Perhaps the most important and the most artistic of the sculptures in Kailasa is the panel on the south which depicts Ravana shaking the Kailasa mountain. This colossal sculpture is carved in the Rashtrakoota tradition because it is full of vitality and is marked by tremendous movement and energy. But the figures of Ravana, Siva, Parvati and others are not inordinately heavy as those in the Rashtrakoota panels in the Dasavatara cave and a few ones in the Kailasa itself. In fact, there is every possibility of the temple being named Kailasa after this panel as first suggested by D. R. Bhandarkar. This is one of the finest sculptures in the whole range of Indian art and we can do no better than quote Sherman E. Lee, a renowned authority on oriental art. He states: "The composition is treated not only in terms of light and shade in depth, but also sculpturally and representationally in depth. The result is a massive, large scale-composition unique in Indian art and worthy of any tradition at its peak". The panel obviously is a later addition.

The rock-bridge joining the Kailasa and Paralanka is a very clear proof of the latter being in the original plan of the edifice and even contemporary with it. The idea of excavating storeyed cave temples was not new to the Rashtrakoota artists. Do Thal (No.12), Tin Thal (No.13) and the Dasavatara are a clear enough proof of that tradition. But the Paralanka has no decorative ornament which would enable us to date it stylistically. Only the

yajnasala, which is on the same level of first floor of the Paralanka has some exquisite sculpture. Among them are a group of *Sapta-matrikas* (actually they are eight) with Ganesha, Durga, Kala and Kali and on the east are a queen flanked by *chamara-dharinis* and a dwarf (*gana*). All these figures have shed the heaviness which marks the sculpture in the Dasavatara and have consequently gained elegance, but at the same time they have nothing of the attenuated forms of the Chalukyan sculpture in the Virupaksha temple. They are, however, related to the representations of Ganga and Yamuna on the doorway of the *garbha-griha* in Kailasa itself. Although many of the statues in the yajnasala are badly mutilated they demonstrate the refinement in the female form achieved by the Rashtrakoota artist. "They are amongst the most glorious works of Indian sculpture of an overwhelming might, vivacity and beauty", observes Goetz who further rightly points out that here "vitality and refinement meet in a poised exuberance." There is no evidence to show that the chapel of the mother goddesses was in the original plan and it therefore appears to be an after-thought. But much time could not have elapsed between the two; there may be a hiatus of a generation or two and the chapel can be dated to the last quarter of the 8th century, that is, to the period of Govinda-II (793-814).

Lankeshwar

The Lankeshwar cave, carved in the northern escarpment of Kailasa, is a unique edifice in many respects. Stylistically it

marks a further stage of development of the Rashtrakoota art, nay, it is the very acme of the early mediaeval art of Maharashtra. Its plan is similar to that of Kailasa, a large hall supported by four sets of four pillars each and the rectangular *garbha-griha* at the back around which a *pradakshina-patha* is provided. The pillars are stumpy and more massive than those in Kailasa and their decoration is more florid too. They must have served as prototypes for those in the Indra Sabha of the Jaina group. The figure sculpture in Lankeshwar has undergone a noticeable change which is best illustrated by the famous panel showing the *Tandava* dance of Siva. It is no doubt conceived after the Dasavatara prototypes, but has none of their heaviness. Here the Supreme Lord is at once elegant and agile and has electrifying energy. The twisted body in the *tribhanga* posture, as if in a somersault, has a solitary parallel at Ellora where in the scene showing Ravana shaking Kailasa on the southern face of the principal shrine, one of the female attendants of Parvati is seen running in panic with her body squirmed in a similar fashion. This betrays the stylistic relationship between the two panels, but it cannot be stretched beyond this. Although the figure *is* badly mutilated below the waist, this Nataraja is perhaps one of the finest of its class. The massive pillars, though akin to those in Kailasa, have a faceted *ghata-pallava* shaft and capital and also sometimes have female



figures on brackets which are reminiscent of much earlier Chalukyan bracket figures at Badami. There is neither epigraphic nor much stylistic evidence to securely date the Lankeshwar, but the beginning of the 9th century not be far off the mark in view of the similarity of pillar-types in Indra Sabha.

Shrine of the River Goddesses

In the northern face of the rock on the left and to the west of Lankeshwar is the shrine of the river goddesses *which* contains images of Ganga in the centre and Yamuna and Saraswati on her left and right respectively. Although the river goddesses are somewhat worn out and have lost some of their relief features, they are all extremely elegant and mark a further advance of the Rashtrakoota art. They each stand *in* a highly ornamental arch issuing out of the mouths of crocodiles-*makara-torana*, *which* is distantly related to the Chalukyan prototype, whereas the elongated female figures are reminiscent of the Chalukyan tradition. It is quite likely that this shrine was carved by Govinda II in order to commemorate his victories in north India, where the three mighty rivers of the sub-continent meet at Prayag. The shrine of the river-goddesses may therefore be assigned to the first half of the 9th century.

Gallery at the Back

On level with the ground floor of the main temple is a carved gallery which surrounds the entire back half of the court. The back wall of the gallery is divided *into* compartments by means of pilasters each containing a sculptured panel. There are forty-three such panels, all of gigantic proportions reminiscent of those in the Dasavatara. They represent several forms of Siva, Vishnu and Shakti and are of great iconographical interest. They are all characterised by elongated forms, extremely slender bodies and tall conical head-dresses which are to be noticed in the late Pallava and early Chola art. They can therefore be dated to the *reign* of Govinda II (793-814) who had overthrown the Cholas, captured Tanjore, marched down south to Rameshwar and had annexed the northern areas of the Chela territories to his Empire.

The foregoing analysis of the architectural and sculptural peculiarities of the Kailasa complex shows that the principal shrine Kailasa with its gateway, *nandi-mandapa*, the so-called lower storey, the elephant-lion *frieze* and elephants in the courts and the *dhvaja-sthambhas* were all executed during the reign of Krishna I (757-72). This stupendous edifice was carved during a short span of 12 to 15 years. Its *shilpin* was therefore justified in singing its praise, its divine character as given in the Baroda copper plate grant of Karka-1.



THE AMARNATH YATRA

SWAMI TAPOVANJI MAHARAJ

It is generally on the Full Moon day of *Shravan* that pilgrims visit Amarnath. During this holy annual festival, thousands of people from Punjab and other provinces assemble at Srinagar and then proceed, more or less, in a procession to the heights of Amarnath. The distance from Srinagar to Amarnath is only 92 miles. Of this up to Pahelgam (61 miles), it is level land. But from Pahelgam, it is all a rugged ascent. Up to Pahelgam, there is a fine broad road and there is busy motor-traffic during the season; for most of the pilgrims cover the first stage of their journey by car or bus. Generally the pilgrims who start from Pahelgam, stop to rest at Chandanavati, six or seven miles along the route. Naturally, from here, pilgrims begin to feel the strain of the ascent. The route leads up along the banks of Dugdthaganga. The wooded mountains with their lovely grandeur reduce the strain of the journey to some extent. For those who leave Chandanavati, the next station is Seshanag. "Seshanag" is really the name of a beautiful lake about a mile in circumference. It is situated 12,000 feet above sea-level. Its milk-white waters make the lake remarkable. The Dugdthaganga referred to earlier, is a stream starting from this lake. Above the level of the lake, at a distance of about one mile, is a vast plain. It is here that the pilgrims *en route* to Amarnath pitch their tents for rest and refreshment.

After this exertion, the pilgrims reach the famous spot called Panchatharangini. During

this part of the journey, they have to endure the rigours of cold as well as the strain of steep ascent. It is an interesting sight to see aged men and old women, ascetics as well as householders, all marching, side by side, up the mountain, panting like exhausted horses and finding some relief by shouting, with or without devotion, "Amarnath Ki jai!" Some actually shed tears, being unable to endure the strain; some laugh merrily enraptured by the beauty of the surroundings. Yet others move forward silently, insensible to pain or pleasure.

Whatever physical discomforts one has to put up with in these regions, they are all immersed in the ocean of joyful experience. The famous cave of Amarnath is situated at a distance of four miles from Panchatarani.

As there is no level land along the route, pilgrims seldom carry their tents beyond this point and hardly ever spend a night near the cave. But, of course, many *sadhus* do live within the cave for long periods, worshipping Amarnathji. The usual practice with pilgrims is to start early on the morning of the Full Moon day, have their *darshan* and return to the low lands immediately afterwards. There are two routes leading from Panchatarani to Amarnath. The older route is more rugged, full of steep ascents and still more dangerous descents. The new route is comparatively less difficult; it goes up spirally to the mouth of the cave, whereas the old path leads directly to the top of the mountain and then descends as abruptly on the other side. Since the old route is dangerous, it has been closed to pilgrim traffic.

After taking a dip in the extremely cold

stream, *Amaraganga*, which washes the foot of the cave and which is covered with ice here and there in *its* course, the pilgrims enter the holy cave wrought by the hand of the gods. The whole place was reverberating with the cries of "Amarnath Ki Jai" and our hearts were filled with wonder and devotion. People forgetting everything else in the frenzy of devotion, were pressing forward to the presence of the Deity. The cave is 150 feet high, as many feet long and broad. It is situated 13,000 feet above sea-level, on the side of a rock 18,000 feet high. Within the cave may be seen ice-formations resembling the figures of gods, in four or five places. The biggest of those figures is regarded as the idol of Mahadev (i. e., Amarnath). Among other idols, are those of Parvati, Ganesha, etc. Modern critics are of the opinion that all these figures are formed by the freezing of the water drops trickling down through the cracks and crevices in the rock, in winter time. Basing their surmises on external observation they say that between the middle of May and the middle of July these ice-formations appear bigger and from the middle of September to the middle of November they disappear completely. But people of the older generation and people of faith, do not accept this materialistic and atheistic view. Relying on ancient tradition, they hold that the idols of Amarnath and other deities are not the result of water freezing afresh every year; that there are no cracks in the rock to let in water; that the idols are ice-formations independent of seasonal changes; that like the moon, they wane in the fortnight after the Full Moon and wax in the fortnight after the New Moon,

reaching their full size on the Full Moon day. What force on Earth can alter a principle established by faith? There is a limit to the extent theories and theorists can go. They have to stop at the gate of the faithful; they cannot even enter and hold their heads erect before them. Victory to Thee, O Goddess of Faith! But for your triumph in the world, how can there be a religion or a spiritual life for man?

Within the cave there is a smaller cavity that yields a kind of white earth which very much resembles the holy ashes. Visitors to the cave accept it as *prasada*, smear their bodies with *it* and even take *it* home.

Tulja Bhavani- Goddess of Shivaji

K. B. PRAYAG

Shri Tuljapur is a small town in Marathwada. Balaghat Mountains ranged in a crescent shape at a height of 2121 feet from sea-level. It is the central station of a bus-route of 56 miles between Sholapur and Yedsi. The number of pilgrims visiting this place on the full-moon-day of *Aswini* and *Chaitra* is more than a lakh. Actually, pilgrimage to Tuljapur is a regular affair throughout the year but crowds are especially heavy on Tuesdays, Fridays and on the full-moon-day.

The idol in the holy place of Tuljapur is called by three names, "Bhavani, Jagadamba and Ambabai". The idol of mother Shri Bhavani is of black *Gandaki* stone. To the *right* of the idol, there is a lion and to the left is Tapaswini Anubhuti practising penance. The Goddess has assumed the Sumbha on her head. The sun and the moon are portrayed on the left and *right* shoulders of the Goddess respectively. She is holding *with* her left hand the tuft of hair on the head of Mahishasura. She has thrust her *Trishul* into his ribs. Under her feet is the dead body of a he-buffalo. The idol of Goddess Bhavani is movable and she lies down in bed three times a year. Opposite the idol is Shri



Bhavani Shankar facing Her. The environments of the temple have been rendered attractive and charming by its being surrounded on three sides by rock cliffs and thick groves of trees.

The construction of the Bhavani temple is of the style of Hernadpant. Some are of the opinion that the temple belonged to the Rashtrakoota period. The door facing south is made of brass. Three doors are made of silver. From the temple gateway, one has to go down a long flight of steps. After three stages, one comes to the door facing east. It is called the Nimalkar door. Going through this and going down the flight of steps, one can see the sacrificial altar of the Goddess and then the temple of the Goddess. The towers of the sacrificial altar and the temple of the Goddess attract the attention of all by their unique display of art. Chintamani is a



round stone. After joining hands before it with strong devotion *in* one's heart, if one holds it in one's hands for some-*time*, this oracle-stone gives its verdict. The devotees try hard to get the verdict of the oracle alone.

The Family Deity of Shivaji

While executing the plans for the establishment of Swarajya, Shri Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj pleased the Goddess by his propitiation.

Moreover, the Goddess Tulja Bhavani would

appear in his dream and would express Her desires. By appearing in full incarnation, the Goddess gave Her dearest devotee the Bhavani sword.

Devotees of Tuljamata

Pilgrims belonging to various sects of Hinduism and from various parts of India, come to Tuljapur to have "darshan" of mother Bhavani and get absolved of their sins. Really it is a wonder that several men from the Mohammedan community are devotees of the Goddess. They also have Her darshan with a devotional spirit. Pilgrims to Tuljapur come mostly from Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra.

The number of Gujarathi pilgrims is also considerable. Fishermen and Lamas from Bombay come on this pilgrimage in a large number. They perform puja in the temple of the Goddess to the accompaniment of musical instruments. They fulfill their vows with all their devotion and with all their might. The devotees of the Goddess who are in Africa, America and England send dakshina (money) for the Goddess and they are sent *prasad* by the priests.



SECTION FOUR

Temple-Festivals of South India

N. R. MURUGAVEL

Among the many glories of South Indian temples, their popular festivals stand first and foremost. Festivals are fountains of joy for all. Festivals are occasions for a close joyous get-together for the members of a social group and thus they give full expression to the social and religious instincts of the people. The expression of the greatest joy and the occasion therefore is called a Festival. The best of any nation can be seen only in its celebrations of festivals. They foster warm fellow-feeling and affectionate comradeship among people.

Though there are many kinds of festivals, such as familial, social, political, literary, etc. Festivals are mainly connected *with* temples and are grandly celebrated only in temples. Some of the various streets of the city of Madurai have been named in accordance *with* the monthly festivals celebrated therein, such as *Chitrai veedhi*, *Adi veedhi*, *Avani veedhi*, *Masi veedhi*, etc. Saint Thirugnanasambandar mentions a series of monthly festivals of Sri Kapaleeswarar temple, in Mylapore, some 1,300 years ago, in seventh century A. D. *Maduraik- kanchi*, one of the ten idylls of the Sangam age, alludes to the many festivals conducted at Madurai, in the various Saiva, Vaishnava, Bauddha and Jaina temples.

The temple festivals are classified into nine kinds, in accordance *with* the number of days they are celebrated:

Number of days of celebration

1. Saivam	One day
2. Ganam	Three days
3. Bandhikam	Five days
4. Bavunam	Seven days
5. Daivikam	Nine days
6. Kaumaram	Thirteen days
7. Saivitrām	Fifteen days
8. Charidram	Seven days
9. Sauram	Twenty days

Temple festivals form the very basis of our culture, philosophy and religion. Here, we shall try to note a few famous festivals celebrated in our temples.

Chitrai- (April-May)

In the month of Chitrai, the New Year Day festival and the Chitra Pournami festival are celebrated in many temples. The *New Year's Day* is expected to usher in new life and happiness to all concerned. Hence it is celebrated in every house and in every temple. Pooja is performed to the Sun-god in an open yard. Reading of the *Panchangam* (Almanac), is an important ritual in the rural communities on this day. Businessmen in Tamilnadu close their accounts on the previous day and open a new account on the New Year Day.

At Thirukkodi-kaval, an ancient Kshetra hymnised by Saint Appar, on the days of *Amavasa* and *Pournami*, Chitragupta and Yama-dharma are respectively worshipped *with* great devotion. The annual Brahmotsavam of the temple is celebrated as *Chitra Pournami* festival for ten days.



Chitrai Festival is very famous in Madurai. This is the marriage festival of Lord Chokkanathar and Goddess Meenakshi. It is a great festival conducted for ten days. On the last day, Lord Kallazhagar of Azhagarkoil alias Thirurmal Iruncholai, who is said to be the brother of Meenakshi, comes to Madurai up to Vaigai river and then returned without attending the marriage. Many lakhs of people throng to have darshan of this grand festival. This is one of the greatest and grandest festivals

of Tamilnadu.

The *Chitrai-Sadhayam* festival, commemorating the attainment of 'Mukti' by Saint Appar alias Thirunavukkarasar at Sri Agneeswaraswamy temple of Thiruppugaloor, near Nannilam, Thanjavur district, is also an important one, during this month.

Chitrai Vasanta Vizha, once celebrated in honour of Indra and Manmatha, has been adopted in many Siva and Vishnu temples when the importance of these minor devas has faded away. This festival is said to have been celebrated at Thiruvaroor, during the time of Sundaramurthy Nayanar with great eclat, in the *Periyapuram* of Sekkizhar. This festival is otherwise known as "Oonjal Vizha" or "Dolotsavam" and symbolises the birth and death of souls.

The Chitrai star, in the month of Chitrai is the natal star of Madurakavi Azhwar, an ardent devotee of Nammazhwar and a poet of the Vaishnava canon.

Vaikasi Visakam (May-June)

The month of Vaikasi has an important festival and that is the Visakam festivals. The asterism 'Visakam' is considered to be the natal star of Lord Muruga. Hence, he is called 'Visakan'. This festival occurs on the day when the asterism Visaka (Libra) reigns during this month. All the temples of Lord Muruga, throughout Tamilnadu, have elaborate celebrations on this day, especially Tiruchendur, Palani, Swamimalai and Tiruttani.

Though this Visaka is special to Lord

Muruga, it is considered equally important to Siva and Vishnu as well, in several places. In the shrine of Thirumazhapadi in Tiruchirapalli district, Siva is said to have performed His dance with a battle-axe in His hand on this auspicious day. Lord *Varadaraja Perumal* of Kancheepuram gives darshan to his devotees, on his favourite vehicle Garuda, on the third day of this Vaikasi-Visakam festival, which is annually celebrated for more than ten days.

Visakam is the birth-day of Nammazhvar. Hence, this festival is celebrated in Vaishnavite temples also. This is an important festival in Simhachala, sacred to the Narasimha Avatar of Mahavishnu. The deity here is always kept plastered in sandal-paste so that His ferociousness on the killing of Hiranya may be cooled down. On this particular Visakam day, this paste is removed and the pilgrims can have a darshan of Lord Narasimhamurthi, without the sandal covering.

Ani (June-July)

Ani-Uttiram is an important sacred day, in the month of *Ani*. This occurs on the day when the star *uttiram* is in the ascendant. *Thirumanjanam* is the sacred ablution or bathing (*abhisheka*) and on this auspicious day, Lord Nataraja is given an elaborate ceremonial bath.

For the Siva Linga in any temple, *abishekam* is performed several times a day and on all the days of the year; but only six *abishekas* are done in a year for Lord Nataraja, at all the temples. Those six sacred days are as follows:

1. *Chitrai Thiruvonam*
2. *Ani Uttiram*

3. *Avani Chadurdasi*
4. *Purattasi Chadurdasi*
5. *Margazhi Arudra*
6. *Masi Chadurdasi*

These six days symbolise, the six periods of a day, in the following manner:

1. *Marghazi Thiruvadhirai*-the dawn hour
2. *Masi Chadurdasi-Ushat Kalam*, Morning
3. *Chitrai Thiruvonam-Noon*
4. *Ani Uttiram-Afternoon*, Pradoshakalam
5. *Avani Chadurdasi-Evening*
6. *Purattasi Chadurdasi-Midnight*

Among these six *abhishekas* to Nataraja, the two *abhishekas* performed in *Ani-Uttiram* and *Marghali Thiruvadhirai*, are very important. *Ani Uttira- Thirumanjanam* festival is celebrated for ten days at Chidambaram, with a grand Car-festival.

Adi-Pooram Festival (July-August)

In the month of *Adi*, the *Pooram* festival is celebrated in both the Saiva and Vaishnavite temples. The star *Pooram* is said to be the natal star of Ambal or the Goddess Sakthi. Hence, it is celebrated in almost all the Saiva temples. Since *Adi-pooram* is the birth-star of Sri Andal also, it is sacred to Vaishnavites as well. This festival is very famous at Srivilliputtur and is elaborately celebrated in honour of Sri Andal, the lady-saint among the twelve Azhvars, for ten days.

Adi- Tapasu Vizha is conducted in the Siva (Sankara-Narayanar) temple at Sankarankoil of Tirunelveli district. Ambal or Sakthi is considered to be the sister of Vishnu and the Ambal, here known as Gomathi Devi, is said to have desired to have darshan of both Siva and Vishnu

inseparably together and performed a penance (*tapas*) therefore. Complying with her ardent desire, both Siva and Vishnu appeared before Her, together in the form, since known as Sankaranarayanar. This form symbolises the integration of the Saiva and Vaishnava sects; the *azhvars* and the *Nayanmars* have both sung on this combined or integrated form.

Adi-pooram festival is enthusiastically celebrated in all the villages of South-India, to all the goddesses like Mariamman, etc., generally called the '*grama-devatas*'.

Avani (August-September)

Avani is the month, noted for *Vinayaka Chaturthi* festival and the *Avani-moolam* festival. Vinayaka is the most popular deity in the whole of South India.

Vinayaka festival is performed on the fourth day, *Chaturthi thithi*, on the bright fortnight of the Tamil month of Avani. Scholars say, that the month of *Avani* was originally the first month of a year, long before the time of Saint Tholkappiyar and Vinayakar being the god who is usually worshipped first, at the very start of every act. His festival has appropriately come to be celebrated in the first month of *Avani*.

Avani Moolam (Scorpionis), is another important festival of this month. It is held as very sacred and is celebrated not only in Madurai temple but also in all the Siva temples of Tamilnadu.

Purattasi (September-October)

In the month of *Purattasi*, *Saraswati Pooja* festival is celebrated with great pomp and rejoicing. This is one of the most important



All-India festivals. This festival is celebrated on the nine days, following the new-moon day of the month of *Purattasi*, (Aswina) and culminates on the ninth day, called the Mahanavami. Hence, this is referred to as Navaratri. The tenth day, called the Mahadasami, is also included in the celebrations and then it is called the *Dasara* (ten nights) festival.

This festival is identified also with *Ram Lila*, in North India. The ninth day is held to be the day of *Ravana vadha* - slaying of Ravana. Rama is considered to have performed the Navarathri pooja and secured

victory over Ravana, The month of *Purattasi* is considered to be sacred to Mahavishnu also and on Saturdays of this month, people worship Him devoutly, observing austere *Vratas*, in all Vaishnava temples. A grand Brahmotsava is conducted for Sri Venkatesa Perumal at Tirupathi, during this month.

Aippasi-(October-November)

During this month, people celebrate Deepavali festival. Deepavali is probably the greatest national festival of India. Deepavali occurs on the night of the 14th day of the dark fortnight called *Chaturdasi* in the Tamil month of *Aippasi*; the next day is the new-moon day, *Amavasya*.

Deepavali, means the festival of a row of lights and is welcomed with an oil bath, done a little earlier than daybreak. All the people of the household wear new clothes; prepare many varieties of sweets and dishes and enjoy a sumptuous and delicious feast. Young children rejoice in firing crackers. But this is mainly a social festival and does not have much connection with temples. But Saivas, Vaishnavas, Jains, Sikhs and others joyfully celebrate this Deepavali festival.

Skanda-Sashti

The month of *Aippasi* is famous particularly for its *Skanda-sashti* festival which is grandly celebrated in honour of Lord Muruga (*Skanda*), in all the Siva and Muruga temples, throughout Tamilnadu. It occurs on the sixth day, (*sashti*) of the bright fortnight after new-moon in this month. Devotees of Lord Muruga all over South

India observe fast for the six days and worship Him in the local temple or in other famous shrines. Though this festival is very peculiar to all Muruga temples, it is mainly very special and sacred to the temples of Sikkal, (near Nagapattinam) and Tiruchendur. Lord Muruga receives the spear from the hands of Parvathi at Sikkal and with it slays the demon Soorapadman who had been harassing the celestial Devas, at Tiruchendur. The *Skanda-Sashti* festival is otherwise known as "*Soora Samhara Vizha*" and this *Soora Samharam* was achieved at Tiruchendur. Hence, for this festival, lakhs and lakhs of devotees throng the sea-shore temple of Tiruchendur. Hence, *Skanda-sashti* is one of the most popular and biggest festivals of Tamilnadu. Allegorically, this signifies the truth that the soul receives the supreme wisdom from Siva's grace, (*Siva-sakthi*) and with that is able to overcome ignorance and then reach final union with god.

Karthigai-(November-December)

The month of *Karthigai* is noted for its *Karthigai Deepam* festival, which though observed throughout Tamilnadu in every home and in every temple, is specially significant to Tiruvannamalai. The festival occurs on the day when the moon is in conjunction *with* the constellation *Karthigai*, (*Pleiades*) and full-moon. In the evening of this holy day, every Siva temple in Tamilnadu is illuminated with thousands of lamps and every home is also lighted with numerous lamps. In Saint Thirugnana sambandhar's sacred hymns of *Tirumayilai*, the modern Mylapore, we find mention of this festival, being celebrated in the temple

of Kapaleeswarar, long before 1,300 years ago. Thus we get to know the antiquity of *this* festival. This festival has been alluded to in Sangam classics, as well.

Marghazi -(November-December)

Marghazi is the month, noted for its two important festivals; one is the 'Thiruvadhirai' (Arudra) festival for the Saivites and the other is the 'Vaikunta Ekadasi' festival for the Vaishnavites. Though the former is celebrated in all the Siva temples, it is particularly a special feature in Chidambaram. In a like manner, though the latter is also celebrated in all the Vaishnava temples, it is of particular importance in Srirangam. It is worthy to note that the chief festivals for Saivism and Vaishnavism, the *Arudra Darsana* and the Vaikunta Ekadasi, occur in this month.

Arudra festival

'Thiruvadhirai', (Arudra) is said to be a favourite star for Lord Nataraja. It is said to be the birth-star of the child-saint-poet, Thirugnanasambandar and he was given the 'milk of wisdom' by Parvathi, only on *this* sacred day. Saint Narasimhamunaryariyar is also said to have invariably performed Siva Pooja on the Thiruvadhirai day of every month.

According to a decad of Saint Appar, Thiruvadhirai festival was celebrated with great eclat at Thiruvarur, 1,300 years ago, in the seventh century A.D. The festival is considered to symbolise esoterically, the performance of the five-fold functions (*srishti, sthithi, samharam, thirobavam* and *anugraham*) done by Lord Nataraja,

for the upliftment of all souls. Nataraja is said to have performed different *thandavas* in various places.

Ananda thandavam is ever being performed by Lord Nataraja at Chidambaram and it is of special importance to *Thiruvadhirai* festival, since it collectively represents the five-fold activities of Nataraja.

The Ardra-abhisheka of Nataraja in the thousand-pillared hall, denotes creation. The food offering on the occasion is, preservation. The sandal-paste smeared on Him is, dissolution. A black cow brought before Him for His darshan is obscuration. Lastly the Deepa-aradhana indicates, the showering of Grace or *Anugraham*.

Vaikunta Ekadasi

Another important festival in the month of *Margali*, is Vaikunta Ekadasi. Ekadasi, the day of eleventh *thithi*, normally occurs twice a month, but this particular Ekadasi, on the eleventh day of the bright fortnight of *Margali*, is held sacred. Many legends such as those of Durvasa, Murasura, Rukmangadha, etc., are associated with this sacred festival. It is said to be equivalent to three crores of Ekadasis and hence called as 'Mukkoti Ekadasi'.

This is principally a day of fasting and keeping awake at night. Devotees of Lord Vishnu observe scrupulously the *vrata* of fasting and non-sleeping and on the early morning of the next day, go to the temple and offer worship. There is a special entrance to the Lord's presence in important Vaishnava temples. It is called the *Swarga Vasal*, (Gateway to Heaven) and is generally kept closed all through the year. It is opened for the devotees on



the morning of this Ekadasi day for admission and the entry of devotees into that gateway signifies entry into Vaikunta itself. The special feature of this festival is that during a period of ten days prior to

this day and another ten days after this day, the recitation of the *Nalayira Divyaprabandam* is made in the august and benevolent presence of Sri Ranganatha at Srirangam and it is called the Adhyayana Utravam, (*Pagal patthu* and *Irap Patthu*). On some of these days, the *Arayars* or the talented musician-priests, would melodiously sing the songs of *Thiruvaymozhi* of Nammazhvar, with appropriate abhinayas and dance-postures.

Thai- (January- February)

The month of Thai is very popular because of its Pongal or Sankaranthi festival. On the first day in the month of Thai, the sun passes from the ninth sign of the zodiac to the tenth sign 'Makara' and this is called Uttarayana, the journey of the sun from the south to the north. Uttarayana is considered to be meritorious. Hence from the first day of Uttarayana in the month of Thai, the Pongal festival is celebrated, continuously for four days. Bhogi is the first of the four days. Pongal proper is on the first of the Tamil month of *Thai* and Bhogi is a day earlier on the last day of the previous month, *Marghazi*.

Thaipoozam

Every month has its own star of importance. In the month of *Thai*, the asterism Poosam, (Pushyam) is considered auspicious and sacred. This is the day where on, Lord Nataraja is said to have given darshan of His "Pancha Krithya Paramanandha Thandavam" to the two

great rishis, Patanjali and Vyaghrpadar at Chidambaram. This is held in great reverence and very grandly celebrated at Vadalur, near the modern Neyveli Township in South Arcot district, since this happens to be the day, Saint Ramalingar of *Thiru-Arutpa* fame, attained his final bliss and lakhs of people from all over Tamilnadu congregate at Vadalur to have the 'Jyothi darshan of the holy Thaiposam.'

Thaiposam festival of Thiruvidadimaruthur temple is most ancient and important as well. Devotees bathe in the water of the holy tank in the temple and worship Lord Mahalingar. The saints Thirugnanasambandar and Thirunavukkarasar have alluded to this festival in their songs of *Thevaram*. The day is also important in many famous Murugan temples such as Palani and Vaideeswaran koil.

Masi- (February-March)

Masimagam is the most important festival, which occurs in the month of Masi, Magham is the day, when the star Magham (Leonis) holds sway. In all places situated near the seacoast, sea-bath is very important for the Masi-magham festival. The deity of the local temple and the other deities from all the temples in the neighbourhood are taken in procession in a festive manner to the seashore or to the riverbanks and ceremoniously immersed in water with due rituals, at an auspicious moment.

Simultaneously all the people attending the festival bathe in the sea. This is referred to by Sambandar as Masi-Kadalattu (Theerthavari). For this festival Sri Bhoovaragaswami of Sri Mushnam temple is taken in a procession to the far-distant

sea-coast near Chidambaram and this procession takes a week to reach the sea-coast. All the people living in the villages, on the route of the procession, participate in the festival with great joy and zeal. Likewise, in many coastal places, this Masimagham festival is being celebrated. For once in twelve years, this festival is celebrated at Kumbakonam, as *Mahamagham* and several lakhs of people come to take bath in the Mahamagham tank at Kumbakonam. The tradition is that the nine rivers celebrated in Hindu lore, Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Saraswati, Kaveri, Sindhu, Narmada, Kumari and Krishna appear in a confluence in the waters of this tank on this Masimagham day and therefore a bath in it is the most meritorious in one's life-time. This is an age-old grand festival of All India importance.

The *Maha Sivarathri* festival also occurs in the month of Masi. On the 14th day of the dark fortnight of Masi, Siva is said to have manifested Himself in the form of an Effulgent Light, (Lingodbhavar), to Brahma and Vishnu. Hence, Siva is believed to be present and to manifest Himself in all the Siva Lingas on this night. This night is held in great reverence as the period when the first creation was made at the beginning of the present cycle of yugas. People abstain from food and sleep during this night and spend the whole night in worship and meditation. In each of the four quarters of the night, special poojas are offered to all the Siva temples. There are many legends explaining the efficacy of worship during this holy night. The Sivarathri day is held sacred by the Jains also and they

say this is the day on which their theerthankarar *Rishabadeva* attained *parinirvana*.

Panguni-(March-April)

In the month of *Panguni*, the festival called Panguni Uttiram is important. It occurs when the full moon is on the asterism 'Uttiram', (Beta Leonis). In the majority of the temples in South India, the annual temple festival known as Brahmotsava, lasting for ten days, reaches its culmination and consummation on this sacred day. Hence it is of importance in all temples. Siva is said to have married Parvathi on this day. The marriage of Goddess Minakshi with Chokkanathar at Madurai



and the wedding of goddess Kamakshi with Ekambaranathar at Kancheepuram, etc., are said to have taken place only on this auspicious day. The marriage of Rama and Sita also is considered to have taken place on this Panguni Uttiram day. Naminandhi Adigal Nayanar of the 63 saints of Saivism was hailed 1,300 years ago, as one who conducted this festival ably and devoutly at Tiruvaroor, by Saint Appar. Thirugnana-sambandhar also refers to this festival, as celebrated at Thirumayilai, (Mylapore), in seventh century A. D. There is an allusion to this festival, even in a poem of *Agananuru*, (137), a classic of the Sangam age, which dates back to 2,000 years. Sangam poet Nakkeerar also refers to this festival and informs that it was very popular and famous at Uraiyur, the ancient Chola capital of the Sangam age. All these

literary references go to prove the antiquity of this festival.

Although Panguni Uttiram festival is very famous in almost all the temples of Siva, Kancheepuram Ekambaranathar temple is noted for it. When the marriage of Lord Ekambaranathar and goddess Kamakshi takes place, many marriages of poor people are celebrated simultaneously and ceremoniously in the immediate presence of the divine couple, Ekambaranathar and Sri Kamakshi devi. This age-old religious and social custom indicates the foresightedness and the far-sightedness of our ancient ancestors, in setting up a highly commendable grand model, for the modern day mass marriages.



The Temple Festivals of North India

NANDINI SHARMA

The fundamental unity underlying diversity in Indian culture is best visualised from the festivals and fairs exultantly lionized throughout the year in all parts of the country. The inborn feeling of a great nation having a long cherished rich historical and cultural background is best reflected by the festivals observed by the people. The celebrated poet Kalidasa has said: *Utsava priyah khalu manushyah.*

The Hindus from the earliest times have been very spiritual and religious-minded. Amidst an intricate atmosphere, it was the conspectus that they should lead a very pious and meritorious life so as to free themselves from the unending chain of births and re-births and attain salvation. They observed fasts, participated in the religious festivals and went out to holy places on pilgrimages. The idea of attaining Moksha finds expression in the verses of contemporary inscriptions: (that) the sovereignty over earth is as shifting as the clouds wafted on the wind, the enjoyment of objects is pleasing for a moment; the life of a man is like a drop of water (hanging) on the point of a blade of grass and dharma is one's only real

companion, in the journey to the next world.

The life of a man in India is deeply doused in colourful festivities both religious and social. The followers of different religions live in India in peaceful conformity practising their faith according to their customs and beliefs and punctiliously following the dictum of the Mauryan



Emperor Asoka that "People of diverse sects should reside in all places because they all desire self-restraint and purity of heart". Religious festivals in deference of various deities have been mentioned in ancient Indian literature and epigraphs:

*Ka imam dasabhirnamendram
krinati dhenubhih I*

*Tada vritrani jadahhanada- dhainam
me punardadat Rigveda IV, 24, 10*

(Who will buy this Indra for ten cows? When he has slain his foes, he may give him back to me). From this some scholars feel that there were permanent images of Indra for Indra festival.

In the two epics namely the Ramayana and Mahabharata and other works of later periods, the word 'Samaja' has been used for festivals:

*Narajake janapade
iprahishianatanartakalt
Utsavascha samajascha vardhante
Rashtravardhanah.*

Ramayana, Ayodhyakanda, LXVII. 15.

(While lamenting the death of King Dasaratha of Ayodhya, the ministers and sages highlight a King's role in organising festivals in honour of deities and pleasant events for the enjoyment of their subjects). Vatsayana refers to Samaja as gathering at the temple of goddess Saraswathi. It is also learnt from the Virataparva that in the festivals, a large number of persons used to assemble and wrestling shows were arranged. The festivals whether religious or social did not begin all of a sudden. Every festival is a consequence of some important consociate event. Great importance has been attached to various temples because of the fact that they orientate themselves to the religious aspect which forms the solemnization of the festival. Thus the observance of temple festivals has been carried on from the ancient times to the present day.

SIVARATRI

The festival of Sivaratri, which falls on the 13th day of the dark fortnight of Phalguna (February - March) is observed *with* great

pomp and show. Sri Sankaracharya paying his obeisance to Lord Siva says:

*Mahesam Suresam Surarartinasam
Vibhum Viswanatham Vibhuty-
angabhushanam,
Virupakshabhindarka vanhitrinetram
Sadanandamide prabhum
panchavaktram.*

"I glorify the five-faced Lord Siva, the ever blissful ruler of gods, the all-pervading protector of the universe, the reliever of the distress of gods, who has ashes for the ornament of His body, has an odd number of eyes, nay, who has the moon, the sun and fire for His three eyes".

Siva is considered as the highest Supreme Being-formless, beyond the comprehension of anyone, subtle, luminous and all-pervading.

On Sivaratri day, people of all classes go to nearby temples to worship the linga, the aniconic representation of Siva. The Siva-linga is worshipped by offering milk and bilwa leaves, dhatura, rice and water. The night is spent in singing bhajans in the praise of the Lord and reciting the Siva-Purana.

According to ancient scriptures, Siva manifests Himself in the form of a huge Jyotirlinga to shower His grace on His devotees. Tremendous gatherings take place in the temples situated in all parts of the country. Varanasi, the most ancient and sacred city of India is famous for the holy temple of Lord Viswanath as also for having numerous Sivalingas.

The ancient temple of Lord Viswanath has one of the twelve Jyotirlingas which is consecrated with milk and bilwa leaves.

This festival is observed with great enthusiasm and devotion at other temples

such as Mahakala temple at Ujjain, Kammachapra temple in Vaisali (Bihar), Matangesvara, Kandariya and Nandi at Khajuraho and Omkareshvara in Madhya Pradesh and Vaidyanath in Eastern India. On Sivaratri day, a large number of people go to the famous rock-temple of Siva commonly known as Maheshamurti an Elephanta caves near Bombay to pay their obeisance to the Lord. Likewise, this festival is observed with the highest

goddess Durga or Chamunda is more popular and there are Durga temples in Varanasi and West Bengal where a large number of people assemble, observe fast and recite bhajans from Durga Saptashakti. She is considered the most powerful and is adorned as the goddess of war. Somadeva prescribes the worship of the goddess in the form of Aparajita. According to Skanda Purana (Avanti-Khanda, XIX 3, XXI 15) if she is duly worshiped with



reverance and devotion in the temples of other States in India.

MAHANAVAMI

Mahanavami is celebrated with great enthusiasm on the 8th or 9th lunar day of the Asvina and is the culmination of the Navaratra rites beginning from the Pratipada of the month. During the nine days, goddesses Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati are worshipped. The worship of

offerings of buffaloes on the Mahanavami day, she fulfils all the desires of her devotees:

*Ta idam prapatennityam Durganama
Satashtakam,*

*Nasadhyam Vidyate Deoi Trishu Lokeshu
Parvati. (Durgasaptatyam 1-16).*

On the concluding day, the image of Durga is merged in the river (Visarjan) and the ceremony is performed while chanting hymns and mantras.

KAILAMATA

In an ancient temple situated on the bank of river Kali-sil, near Kaila (Jaipur) two idols namely Kailamata or Mahalakshmi and Chamunda are installed. In the month of Chaitra (March-April), a festival for 15 days is held every year in honour of Kailamata and Chamunda, The pilgrims including those from royal families assemble there and pay their obeisance to the deities.

DOLPUJIMA

In the month of Phalguna (February-March), the followers of Lord Krishna celebrate this festival throughout the country. The devotees sprinkle coloured powder on the image of Lord Krishna, decorate with flowers and take it out in procession from the Krishna temple. The devotees sing devotional songs in praise of the Lord. In Bengal, this festival is observed with greater enthusiasm as this is observed as the birth-day of Saint Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

SHITALA ASHTAMI

Shitala Ashtami is celebrated in honour of Shitala Mata, the goddess of small-pox in the month of Chaitra (March-April). It is celebrated in her temple by offering sacred water along *with* rice and milk on Sundays and Fridays. Women along *with* their children visit the temple in the morning and offer prayers. Food is offered to seven virgin girls to attain the blessings of the deity.

BURWA MANGAL

At Varanasi, after Holi, on the first Tuesday, people visit the Durga Kunda, where they take bath and then go to the Durga Temple for offering prayers.

JANMASHTAMI

Lord Krishna, the 8th incarnation of Vishnu, was born on this day at mid-night on a full-moon day at Mathura. After birth He assumed a divine form:

*Tamadbhutam Balakam ambujekshanam
Chaturbhujamsankhagadayudham,
Srivatsalakshmam galasobhikaustubham
Pitambaram Sandra payoda sowbhagam.
Maharha vaidurya Kirita Kundalaunsha
Parishvakta Sahasra Kuntalam,
Udhama Kanchyangada Kankanadibhih
Virochamanam Vasudeoaikshai.
BHAGAVATA PURANA X-9-10*

This festival is observed in the month of Bhadra (August-September) every year throughout the country.

The occasion is celebrated with great enthusiasm. The temples as well as the houses are decorated. Since Mathura was the birth-place of the Lord, pilgrims assemble at Dwarakadhish temple to offer their prayers. The devotees observe fast, devote their time *in* reciting Bhagavata Purana and Gita and singing devotional songs *in* the praise of the Lord. While all temples are beautifully decorated, the temples at Mathura and Vrindavana are specially decorated on this festive occasion, *in* particular the Rangaji temple. After mid-night, Prasada and Charanamrita are distributed among the pilgrims.

CAR FESTIVAL OF SHRI RANGAJI TEMPLE

In Shri Rangaji temple which is situated in Vrindavana near Mathura, idols of Lord Vishnu and Lakshmi are worshipped. This festival is observed for ten days every year in the month of Phalguna (March-April). The beautifully decorated images of Lord Vishnu and his consort Lakshmi are taken out in a procession on well-decorated chariots through the street of the city. There *is* singing of devotional bhajans and hymns by the devotees in praise of the deities as the procession moves. In this temple, Vrindavana Shravana festival *is* also observed in the month of Shravana in which prayers are made to the Lord to protect the devotees in the same way as he had saved the elephant in distress from the clutches of the crocodile.

RATHA YATRA OF JAGANNATHA

Lord Jagannatha is considered as the incarnation of Lord Vishnu. The temple has three wooden images-Lord Jagannatha, his brother Balabhadra and their sister Subhadra and they are installed in the temple situated on Nilachala Mountain in Puri. The Ratha Yatra is the procession of chariots which are taken out every year in the month of Asadha (June- July). In the three chariots are mounted the three idols and the procession is taken from the temple to the garden-house of the deities. They stay there for seven days and then the chariots are brought back in procession to the temple.

For the purpose of Adap Darshan, a large number of people from all over the country

visit the temple on the festival day and participate enthusiastically in the dragging of the chariots. Similar Ratha Yatra processions are taken out at Serampore - jagannathapuri and Ramnagar. The temple at Jagannathapuri is considered as one of the four 'Dhams' and the Hindus are supposed to visit them.

RAM NAVAMI

Lord Rama was born on Chaitra Navami At Ayodhya. This festival is one of the five Mahavratas. Devotees go to temples on this auspicious day and generally worship the Lord with the following:

*Shrirama Rama Rameti Rame Rame
Manorame
Sahasranamatattulyam Ramanama
Varanane.*

Ramayana is recited in the temples and at homes and there are particular celebrations held at Kanak Bhawan temple at Ayodhya, the birth-place of Lord Rama and Chitrakoot in Banda district. Devotees observe fast, sing devotional songs, offer food to cows and gifts to Brahmins.

DIPAWALI

Dipawali is celebrated in the month of Kartika (October-November) annually with great rejoicings. It is a very important festival. In ancient India also *it* was observed with great joy and enthusiasm:

*Tvam jyoti Shri Ravichandro
Viyatsowarna tarakah,
Sarvesham jyotisham
jyotirdipajyotisthite nabhah.*

According to some, it is celebrated to mark the destruction of the demon, Narakasura,

in Assam, by Lord Krishna. There is also a legend that *it* is celebrated on account of Lord Rama's safe return to Ayodhya from exile after his *victory* over Ravana.

The deities, Lord Ganesha and goddess Lakshmi are worshipped in temples as well as in houses. In Kanak Bhawan temple at Ayodhya and Ram temples at Chitrakoot, Lakshminarayan temple in Delhi, devotees assemble to pay their obeisance to the god. On the evening of Dipawali, Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and Lord Ganesha are especially worshipped in temples and *in* houses which are profusely illuminated with oilfilled earthen-lamps and candles. Ramayana is recited. In Bengal, instead of Lakshmi, 'Kali' is worshipped in Dakshineswar and other temples. The festival also marks the commencement of the new year of Vikramismvat and the businessmen open fresh account books. Some people also enjoy gambling on this occasion:

*Ya Lakshmidivase punye Dipavalyascha
Bhutale
Gavam Goshte cha kartikyam Sa
Lakshmir Varda mama.*

HANUMAN JAYANTI

Hanuman, the son of Marut and Anjani was a great devotee of Lord Rama. *His* birthday *is* celebrated in the month of Chaitra (March-April) throughout the country. He was blessed by Jagadjanani Sita that like Vishnu he would be worshipped.

Hanuman's image is placed in a temple or under a Peepal tree. Vermilion is coated on the image and the deity is worshipped.

On this day, special functions are held in the temples particularly at Sankatomochan



in Varanasi, Balaji near Bharatpur, Hanumandhara at Chitrakoot. People observe strict fast and celibacy, recite Ramayana and Hanuman Chalisa and offer sweets to the deity.

HOLI

Holi is enthusiastically celebrated throughout India in the month of Phalguna (February- March). Particular interest in the festival is shown by the local people of Mathura, Vrindavan, Nandgaon and Barsana where the image of Lord Krishna in the temples is sprinkled with Abir and

Gulal (red-coloured powder.) In other parts it is more or less observed socially. The festival takes two days for its observance. On the first day, a bonfire is lit on the night. On the second day, from early morning till moon, people irrespective of caste or creed, amuse themselves by throwing gulal on each other. In the evening, people exchange sweet-meats and enjoy.

NAGAPANCHAMI

Nagapanchami is held on the 5th bright day in the month of Shravana (July-August). In ancient India, Naga worship was very popular and there were temples for the purpose.

Near Raisen in Madhya Pradesh, a life-size Naga capital which is as old as 3rd century is worshipped in a new temple. Naga worship is very popular in Mathura in U. P. and Rajgiri in Bihar. On Nagapanchami day, fast is observed and cobras are worshipped.

Devotees *visit* Siva temples and offer milk and flowers to Siva and the snakes which are worn by Him as His ornaments. It is believed that by offering milk, the snakes do not harm the devotees.

MAHAVIR JAYANTI

To commemorate the birth-anniversary of Lord Mahavira, the 24th and the last Jain Tirthankara, Mahavira Jayanti is observed by Jains on the 13th day of the bright half of the month of Chaitra (March-April) every year. While the festival is celebrated in all the Jain temples all over the country, special interest is taken by pilgrims in visiting the ancient Jaina shrines at Girnar

and Palitana in Gujarat, Pawapuri and Bihar and Parasnatha temple at Calcutta. During the festival, the Jain scriptures, 'Samayak Sutra' is recited by the devotees and the idol is taken out in procession.

TIJARA RATHA YATRA

In the month of Phalguna Sukla Saptami (February-March), Jains from all over India assemble annually at Dhera area at Tijara in Alwar district, Rajasthan, to offer prayers to Tirthankara Chandraprabha in the famous Digambara Jain Temple which has five images of the Tirthankara. After offering prayers in the morning, the Ratha Yatra commences in highly decorated chariots. Devotional songs are sung. Offerings are made to the deity.

BUDDHA JAYANTI

The Buddhists worship on Vaisakhi Purnima (April-May) as it is said that he was born, attained enlightenment and finally salvation on that day. The image of Lord Buddha is worshipped in all Buddhist temples. The temples at Saranath (near Varanasi), Bodh Gaya, Sanchi (near Vidisha) and Kusinagar near Gorakhpur are crowded by Buddhist pilgrims from all over the world to pay their obeisance to the Lord. The Buddhist sacred scriptures are recited and the idol is taken out in pompous procession. The devotees observe fast and spend their time in meditation on *this* day.



Siva Worship-Its Origin and Significance

R. MANIAN

Brahman, the ultimate reality, is both with attributes and without attributes. As Sri Ramakrishna narrated through the parable of chameleon, the Nirguna Brahman is like the chameleon having no colour, while the *Saguna Brahman* is like the same creature changing colours. So Hindus conceived numerous forms of the Supreme Being to suit the needs and tastes of innumerable people in society. This led to complexity of worship and many sects sprang up. Based on the Vedic scriptural authority, there are six systems of religion known as *Shanmathas*. The predominant ones among these six are Vaishnavism, Saivism and Saktam. Even Saivism had many subsects. Though in the popular conception Siva, the destroyer, belongs to the Hindu Trinity of which the other two are Brahma and Vishnu, Saivism exalts Siva above all other gods and accepts Him as the Supreme Being.

The worship of Siva dates from pre-historic times. Worship of *Sivalinga* has evoked the purest and the most precious impulses in religion, literature and art. Millions and millions have been worshipping this three-eyed god in a million shrines for aeons. Many scholars having faith in the myth of Aryan invasion against Dravidians, say that Siva was a pre-Vedic god worshipped as Pasupati. They also seek to prove that the phallic symbols and seals having the pose of a Yogi seated in meditation unearthed in Mohenjodaro and Harappa are the

indications for the popularity of Siva-worship in pre-Aryan society. Later, when the Aryans came, they superimposed their Vedic god, Rudra, over Siva. But we need not go into these controversies but be content with the fact that Siva worship is the most ancient and that its origin is lost in obscurity.

The word 'Siva' signifies one who controls everything and whom none can control. (Siva-Vasi) , just as Simha signifies the creature that attacks other animals and whom other animals cannot attack (Simha-Himsa.) The word 'Siva' is given another interpretation. The syllables 'Si' means Permanent Bliss. The letter 'I' means Purusha (the primordial male energy) and the syllable 'va' means Sakti (the primordial female energy). A harmonious compound of these syllables is 'Siva'. The devotee must likewise make his own soul a harmonious whole and worship Siva.

Siva Alias Rudra

Siva is also known by the name of Rudra. It is believed that there are 11 varieties of Rudra. There have been several interpretations of the term 'Rudra'. Bhatta Bhaskara in his commentary on the *Rudradhyaya* or the *Sata-rudreeya* which forms part and parcel of the *fifth kanda* of the *Yajurveda*, has given different derivations. 'Rudra' is one who melts away all miseries connected with life. 'Rudra' is one who dispels all that is inauspicious. Rudra is always associated with *Tejas* and in turn He ignites the fire of knowledge. The recitation of *Satarudreeya* extricates an individual from all sins.

Siva alone is glorified as Nishkala (nameless

and formless) since He is identical with the Supreme *Brahman*.

He is also *Sakala* as He has an embodied form. He is both *Sakala* and *Nishkala*. It is in His *Nishkala* aspect that the *Linga* is appropriate.

In the *Sakala* aspect, the worship of His embodied form is appropriate. Since He has the *Sakala* and *Nishkala* aspects, He is worshipped both in the *linga* form and in the embodied form by the people and is called the Highest *Brahman*. Other deities, not being *Brahman*, have no *Nishkala* aspect anywhere.

To treat the *Linga* worship as a phallic cult is nothing but a misunderstanding. Phallic cults might have existed among many prehistoric tribes, but the *linga* may have been in origin no more than just as a symbol of Siva, as the *Salagrama* is of Vishnu. In later days, legends came to be invented of the origin of worship of the *linga* as the phallus of Siva.

Explaining the feature of the manifestation of the phallic aspect of Siva, the *Sivapurana*, a later mythological book, says that long, long ago, in the famous first Kalpa, the noble souls, Brahm and Vishnu, fought with each other. In order to eradicate their arrogance, Lord Parameswara showed his unembodied *Nishkala* form in the form of a column in their midst. He showed his phallus emblem separate, evolved out of the column, with a desire to bless the worlds. The word '*Linga*' has a philosophical connotation.

'*Linga*' means that in which this *Jagath* (universe) attains *Laya* (dissolution), that into which this *Jagath goes-gamyathe*. The three *gunas* are represented by the three-tiered *Peetha*. The *Linga* above symbolises

the goal of life. *Linga* means a symbol, the symbol of creation, the result of the activity of the three *gunas* and of the *Brahman* which permeates it and gives it a meaning and value. When we worship the *Linga*, we must do it with faith in this symbolic significance.

Saiva Agamas

Saivagamas are the texts written in Sanskrit on the Saiva religion and philosophy. The Saivites regard these as having equal spiritual authority with the Vedas. The word '*Agama*' means that which came and logically it is concluded that all the *Agamas* have come from god. There are twenty-eight main *Saivagamas*. They are said to constitute the body of the formless Siva. Temples are built and worshipped according to the injunctions in these *Agama-shastras*. A flexible but effectively restraining code is essential for temple worship and that has been provided in the *Kriya* and *Charya Padas* of *Saivagamas*. The *Vidya Pada* of the *Agamas* deal with the Saiva philosophy. It speaks about the five functions of *Pati* symbolised as the *pancha-kriya* dance of Nataraja.

Saiva-Siddhanta

Umapati Sivacharya says that the three words, '*Pasu*', '*Pati*' and '*Pasa*', sum up the essence of the Vedas. According to Saiva Siddhanta, *Pati* is none else but Siva, who is also called as Rudra. Siva is the Supreme Being, who evolves, sustains and involves the phenomenal universe. The whole universe, constituted of all beings, male and female; and those which are without

life, but which come into phenomenal existence, subsists for a while and then subsides. Three kinds of impurities-*aanava*, *karma* and *maya* constitute the *pasa* which bind the *Pasu*. He is the formless and has the form of wisdom.

The *Pasu* obtains release by the removal of the bond (*Pasa*) through the grace of Siva.

Nataraja- The Dancing Siva

The very word 'Nataraja' means the Lord of Dance. Siva is worshipped in this popular dancing posture in all Siva temples. Almost all Siva temples have a separate shrine for Nataraja. But in Chidambaram, the famous Saivite centre in the South, the main deity is Nataraja. Behind the idol of Nataraja and separated from it by a veil, there is that great *Akasa* or the Ether *Lingam* which is the real secret of Chidambaram. Chidambaram is one of the *Pancha Tattva Linga Kshetras* in the South. Tradition says that there are five Siva Lingas in the South corresponding to the five *Mahatattvas* or physical elements, namely, the earth, water, fire, wind and ether. The *Prithvi* or earth *linga* is situated at Kanchipuram, while the *Ap* or water *linga* is at Jambukeshwar. The *Tejas* or fire *linga* is at Tiruvannamalai and the *Vayu* or wind *linga* is at Kalahasti. As we saw earlier, the *Akasa tattva* is ascribed to Chidambaram.

The dance of Siva represents "the primal rhythmic energy". According to the *Amsumad-Bheda-Agama* there are 108 varieties of the dance of Siva of which nine are the principal ones. Of these nine varieties the one at Chidambaram and several other Siva temples is very common

and known as *Bhujanga- Trasa* pose. This kind of dance is called *Bhujanga- Trasa* because in it the dancer suddenly lifts up his leg as though he discovered a snake very near him and appears to be of unsteady gait. Thus explains the *Natya Shastra* of Bharata.

Dr.Ananda Coomaraswamy in his famous book, *The Dance of Siva*, has given a very profound interpretation. This dance represents the five activities or the *Pancha Kriyas* (1) *Srishti*, creation (2) *Sthiti*, preservation (3) *Samhara*, destruction (4) *Tirobhava*, removal and concealment and (5) *Anugraha*, grace. These five are Siva's activities, but are carried on by others silently. The first four activities concern the evolution of the world and the fifth one is the cause of salvation. These activities are observed in the five elements. Everything is created by earth; everything flourishes by virtue of the waters; everything is urged by the fire; everything is removed by wind; and everything is blessed by the firmament. The *Panchaksharamantra* 'Na-ma-Si- Va-ya' is used as a secret technique of meditation on the five great elements.

The dance of Siva is meant to keep up the life of the cosmos and help seekers of liberation in achieving it. The *Agama Shastras*, while describing the posture of Nataraja say that the image is to be prepared according to the "*Uttama Dasa Tala*" measurement. It has four hands and two legs. The front left hand is in the *danda hasta* or *gaja-hasta* pose across the body and the back left hand carries Agni in the palm. The front right arm is in the *abhaya* pose. On the front arm of this hand is the *sarpa-valaya*. The back right hand

holds a *damaru*. The right leg *is* slightly bent and placed on the back of the *Apasmarapurusha*. The left leg *is* lifted up, somewhat turned towards the right leg and kept across it. On the head of the Lord is *the jata-mukuta* with flowers, snake, jewels, skull and the crescent moon and with *several jatas* whirling in the dance: The Lord must have a *Yajnopaveeta* and an *Uras Sootra*.

The face should be smiling. Saffron paste is applied on the chest and the rest of the body is milky white with ashes. The garment of the Lord is the tiger's skin. The *Apasmara-purusha* has his head on the right side of the Lord.

He *is* black in colour and plays with a snake. The *Agamas* say that to the left of Nataraja should be His consort, Parvati and on his right there should be either the sage Bhringi or Bhadrakali.

Saivism in Kashmir

"The land of Kashmir is Parvati incarnate and the ruler of that country is the *Amsa* or particle of Siva." So says Kalhana's *Raja-tarangini*.

In the north-eastern direction from Srinagar at a distance of about 86 miles and at a height of about 13,000 feet from the sea-level is the famous cave of Amarnath where Lord Siva is worshipped in the form of *linga*-shaped ice-blocks made by drops of water oozing naturally in the cave. Some people believe that this is one of the twelve *Jyotirlingas* called "Amareswara".

The sacred cave of Amarnath is not a man-made temple or even a cave artificially carved out. It is an open rugged door less cave constructed by Nature.

Amarnath *yatra* is considered very sacred and capable of rewarding one with *mukti*; and pilgrims from all over Bharata Varsha *visit* this spot as zealously as they *visit* Varanasi, Badri, Kedar and other celebrated places.

It is said that Lord Siva first appeared in this cave on the full moon day of Sravana and therefore there is special merit in going on pilgrimage to Amarnath on this day which falls in the month of August. Even in view of the climatic conditions of this region, the month of Sravana is the most convenient time for the *yatra*.

The annual *yatra* to Amarnath is just one of the proofs of Kashmir's devotion to Lord Siva. The tradition of Siva worship in Kashmir is very old. Kashmir Saivism is called the *Trika Mata* and it had its rise in the eighth century. Its literature is divided into three parts, (1) the *Agama Sastra*, (2) the *Spanda Sastra* and (3) the *Pratyabhijna Sastra*. *Agamas* are of superhuman origin. The majority of them taught the dualistic doctrine. Idealistic monism was revealed in the *Siva-sootras* which are said to have been revealed by Siva Himself in the form of Srikatha to Vasugupta. On these *sootras* there is a *vritti*, the *varttika* of Bhaskara and the *Vimarsini* of Kshema- raja.

The *Spanda Karikas* and their *Vritti* were composed by Kallata, a pupil of Vasugupta, in the second half of the ninth century. Somananda, another pupil of Vasugupta, supplied, through his *Sivadrishti*, the philosophical reasonings. Utpala, Somananda's pupil, wrote *Eeswara Pratyabhijna Karikas* and his grand-pupil, the celebrated Abhinavagupta, wrote a number of works including *Paratrishtika*, *Tantraloka* and *Tantrasara*. He flourished

in the beginning of the eleventh century and became the most dominant figure in all matters pertaining to Kashmir Saivism and the Pratyabhijna Darsana as well as in aesthetics. His pupil Kshemaraja and his grand pupil Yoga-raja kept up the tradition. Madhava in his *Sarvadarsana Sangrahas* has summarised this Darsana. In this Darsana, Siva is the Highest *Tattwa*. There are 36 *Tattwas*. The *Sakti* of Siva by which He manifests Himself in this universe, is not different from Him. When this *Chit-Sakti* has her *Unmesha*, there is an expansion of the universe; when there is her *Nimesha*, there is the absorption of the universe. *Moksha* is nothing but the recognition (or *Pratyabhijna*) of the individual soul that it is not different from Siva.

Jyotirlinga

It is a belief in our tradition that just as certain limbs of the body are purer than others, so are certain places on the earth more sacred some on account of their situation, others because of their sparkling waters and others because of the association with or residence of saintly people.

In keeping with this traditional belief, out of the innumerable phallic images of Siva being worshipped on the earth, there are twelve very important *Jyotirlingas*. Even if one hears the names of these *lingas*, the person becomes sinless. The twelve *Jyotirlingas* are Somanatha in Saurashtra, Mallikarjuna in Srisaila, Mahakala in Ujjain, Parameswara in Omkara, Kedara in the Himavat, Bheemasankara in Dakini, Visvesa in Varanasi, Tryambaka on the banks of Gautami, Vaidyanatha in Chitabhoomi in

Santhal Parganas, Nagesa in the Daruka forest, Ramesa at Sethubandha and Ghumesa near Ellora caves.

The Significance of Sivarathri

Different stories explain in different ways the origin of the festival of Sivarathri. What is the significance of the *rathri*- (*the night*)? The moon is the presiding deity of the mind-*Chandramma manasojathah*". Out of the Manas of the *Purusha*, the moon was born. There is a close affinity between the *manas* and the moon. Both are subject to decline and progress. The waning of the moon is the symbol for the waning of the mind also, for the mind is to be annihilated finally for attaining Bliss. When the mind is totally silenced, the *maya* is sent asunder and the reality revealed. Every day during the dark half of the month (Krishna Paksha) the moon and symbolically its counter-part in man, the mind, wanes and diminishes by a fraction; its power declines and finally, on the fourteenth night, the *chathurdasi*, there is just a small bit left, that is all. It a little extra effort is made that day by the *Sadhaka*, even that bit can be wiped off and *manonigraha* completed. The *chaturdasi* of the dark half is therefore called *Sivarathri*, for that night must be spent in *japa* and *dhyana* of Siva, without any other thought either of food or sleep. Then success is assured. And, once a year, on the Mahasivarathri night (in February-March) a special spurt of spiritual activity is recommended, so that what is *savam* can become *sivam*, by the removal of this dross called *manas*. On Sivarathri day, the mind must become *laya*, reduced to nothing.

Influence of Siva worship

Siva is said to be the prime source of sound. Sound originated from His *damaru* and filled the space. The sounds produced were collected in the form of *Maheswara Sootras* which later on Panini learnt and used for his famous grammatic work *Ashtadhyayi*. So Siva is the *Nada Brahman* and is described as Vageeswara.

Siva who is adored as Tyagaraja is the first and foremost god associated with asceticism which later became the key-note of spiritual life in India.

Hindu art finds its most glorious expression in the sculptures of Siva. There is no parallel to an image of Nataraja either in stone or in metal.

The supreme examples of Saiva sculptures are those at Elephanta and Ellora.

Literature in regional languages has been enriched by Saivism. The works of Tamil Saints like Manikkavachakar, Appar, Sundarar and Tirugnanasambandar are remarkable not only for their poetic beauty, but also for their philosophical context. Saiva Siddhanta which had its beginnings in Kashmir, found its fullest expression in Tamilnadu in Meykandar's *Sivajana Bodham*.

Siva, the ancient god of our land, riding on His bull and playing on *His damaru* (tabor) will be worshipped by millions forever. No attempts by anyone will ever be able to stop it.



VAISHNAVISM

Prof. M. R. SAMPATHKUMARAN

According to Indian tradition, the worship of Vishnu is of immemorial antiquity. Vishnu is mentioned in the *Vedas*. Western scholars find a gradual evolution of the Vishnu cult from the *Vedas* downwards, while orthodox opinion holds that Vaishnavism is well expounded in the Vedic scriptures. It is argued by European and American students of our ancient texts that Vishnu is a minor god in the Vedic pantheon, less important than Indra or Varuna and associated with the *Adityas*. They seem to ignore a well-known Vedic declaration that Vishnu is the greatest and Agni the least among the gods. The *Katha Upanishad* identifies final release with attaining the world of Vishnu.

It is supposed that Vishnu gained the importance by becoming the protector of sacrifices and that later Bhaga, Bhagavan, Narayana and Vasudeva became amalgamated with him in course of time. Later still, Krishna is held to have been identified with Vasudeva. The *Bhagavatas*, a sect of worshippers of Bhagavat (Bhagavan), are said to have swelled the number of Vaishnavas.

It is well-known that the epics celebrate the incarnations of Vishnu as Rama and Krishna. The *Puranas* elaborate the other incarnations. The prominent place occupied by Vishnu in the epics and the *Puranas* has been regarded as both the cause and the result of the popularity of the cult. Another factor to be taken into consideration is the contribution of texts of semi-scriptural validity known as the

Agamas. Works of this kind are available glorifying Vishnu, Siva and Sakti. The Vaishnava *Agamas* form the basis of the worship of Vishnu in temples. They prescribe how the idols are to be made, how temples are to be constructed, how the daily worship and festivals are to be conducted and so on. It should also be noted that they lay down rules for carrying on domestic worship also and that the religious life of the Hindus is today largely governed by the *Agamas* of the three sects. The Vaishnava *Agamas* belong to two slightly different schools of thought and practice—the *Vaikhanasa* and the *Pancharatra*. The former uses Vedic *mantras* to a greater degree and its followers are confined to a small hereditary caste. The *Pancharatra* has no such restriction.

The dates of the *Agamas* are unknown, but temples in India ante-date the Christian era. An inscription at Besnagar of the 2nd century B.C. mentions a shrine to Vasudeva. Panini earlier still refers to worshippers of Vasudeva. The *Geeta* speaks of god being satisfied with sincere offerings of flowers, fruits or leaves or water, implying idol worship. The epics refer to temples or temple-like structures.

This over-all brief historical outline refers to the early developments of Vaishnavism. What is important about them however is the philosophy and practical teachings evolved by the cult. Vishnu and Bhagavan have been associated with benevolence and compassion and protection from the earliest days. Vaishnavism grew up as a religion of love and service. In this way, Vishnu became identified with *Brahman* of the Upanishads as god possessed of an

infinite number of auspicious qualities. He is both the goal and the way, the Redeemer and Saviour. Ramanuja's definitive interpretation of the *Upanishads* and *Brahmasootras* as Vaishnavite was not an absolute innovation. There has been a long tradition of laying stress on the *Upanishads* as theistic rather than as cosmic and monistic. Sankara himself refers to earlier views opposed to his more than once and sometimes gives them even a limited approval, presumably on account of long-standing traditions in their favour.

The cult also must have been promoted by liberal-minded orthodox reformers who were dissatisfied with the limited circles to which the study of the *Upanishads* was confined and the lack of broad appeal of any philosophy of abstract monism. Vyasa is said to have composed a fifth *Veda* in the *Mahabharata* in order to provide a scripture accessible to all. And that epic glorifies Vishnu.

Similarly Vishnu also evoked considerable devotion among poets and mystics in all Indian languages. Among these the Tamil mystics known as *Azhvars* made a magnificent contribution in that their works have significantly contributed to later philosophical developments in Vaishnavism. They lay stress on *prapatti* or self-surrender. It is a very ancient concept traceable to the *Vedas*, but it has gained in prominence and popularity as a result of the influence of the *Azhvars'* works.

The concept of *bhakti* prominent in Vaishnavism has a wide range from Ramanuja's intellectual approach to the purely emotional approach in many later sects centering round Rama or Krishna. According to Ramanuja, *bhakti* is a form of

jnana or knowledge. It is deep meditation with love on a mental concept of god derived from the study of scriptures. Ecstatic absorption in love of Krishna or Rama or in the sports of Radha and Krishna is also a form of *bhakti*.

The point about *bhakti* is that it is natural for men to love and to turn love from worldly objects or their near and dear ones to god may be easier than to meditate on abstract truths about the nature of god or the self. It has been pointed out that strict monism is emotionally forbidding to religious fervour which, if it has no alternative, may fritter itself away or fix itself on some unworthy fetish or superstition. As a matter of fact, men are never irreligious. If good religion is not available or fashionable, they run after worthless or even dangerous substitutes. The irreligious 20th century has encouraged drug-taking. The distinction of Vaishnavism is to have offered a philosophy that is intellectually satisfying, a deserving object of devotion and a life rich in emotion and aesthetic appreciation and wholesome in morality and social service. For it has preached love not merely to god but also to His creatures.

The highlights of the Vaishnavite creed are a belief in a god of love and compassion who cares for us, who gives up His infinite freedom in seemingly finite incarnations to punish unrighteousness, protect righteousness and establish the balance of *dharma* upset by the predominant human tendency to indulge in selfishness, sensuality and cruelty. Manifestations as incarnations spring from His love, compassion and redemptive grace.

God in Vaishnavism is conceived as omnipresent, immanent and transcendent.

He is the internal controller of all things and all selves. The selves are real. Though their relations with god are variously regarded by different Vaishnava sects, they all believe that devotion to god and surrender to His will and pleasure are implied by these relations. There is general belief that the souls can be saved only by the Lord's redemptive grace.

The approach to god for devotion and self surrender is denied to no one on account of rank or caste or sex. Traditional restriction have no place in the religion of grace. Worship can be offered to the idol at the temple, the idol at home or the Lord in the heart. It can be formal worship, or it can be through prayers and praise and through chanting the names of god (*nama-sankeertana*). Devotees can study the scriptures or read about or listen to the glories of god as set out in sacred books or realised in the experiences of latter-day devotees. Frequenting the company of the devout (*satsanga*) is recommended. Preceptors are often considered necessary to *practise yoga* or to be initiated into simple sacraments like wearing marks on the forehead and being taught easy mantras which are often a series of divine names or an expression of surrender to His will of course, god's grace is free and spontaneous and cannot be compelled.

Vaishnavas have often held that service to god is incomplete without service to His devotees and in some cases to His creatures in general. This has promoted a sense of brotherhood among them and inspired social service. Vaishnavism today remains a living force throughout India.



Parthasarathy Temple

M. N. PARTHASARATHY

Triplicane and Sri Parthasarathy Swami temple have figured prominently and frequently in the battles which were fought between the English, the Dutch, the French and the Muslims. In the siege of Santhome by the French in 1672, the Muslims occupied the temple and later they were dislodged by the French who established their garrison within the temple. In 1673, Dutch Ships landed on the Triplicane beach and supported by the Moorish cavalry, moved into the temple and shots were fired from there. Later, the Nawab's troops occupied Triplicane until it eventually passed into the hands of the British. It is curious that, of all places of religious worship around Madras, this temple alone should be the scene of battles fought in those days. Perhaps this was due to the fact that the presiding deity was Sri Parthasarathy who as the charioteer of Arjuna in the battle-field of Kurukshetra delivered His divine message, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, which embodies within it a code of conduct of universal application to mankind in general. The temple and the tank were treated with great sanctity and reverence always. An interesting incident is recorded. One Sunkurama, an influential merchant of the East India Company, appeared in a dispute against another merchant Mahadeva, who held the lease of the village of Triplicane. In the enquiry relating to the dispute by the Council of the Company, the form of oath that Mahadeva was asked to take was that he should bathe in the tank in

Triplicane and with a garland around his neck he had to go to the temple and swear that Sunkurama obliged him to pay a large sum. And in confirmation of all this he had to put out the lamps according to custom. The thought occurs that the oath to be prescribed to witnesses must be something which would make them really feel that they are taking the oath on something which they hold really sacred. Swearing in the witness box with an easy conscience and tendering perjured evidence so easily are to a certain extent due to the ineffectiveness of the oath that is now prescribed to persons who depose or even assume office.

There are some features about Tiruvallikkeni which are quite unique among the Vaishnavite shrines in India. One of the earliest of the Azhvars, Peyazhvar, has sung a verse on the deity enshrined in this place. His contemporary and also disciple, Tirumazhisai Azhavar has also sung a verse. Their age is about 4-5th century A.D. The last of the Azhvars, Tirumangai Azhvar, has sung ten stanzas on the deities enshrined in the temple at Tiruvallikkeni. In fact, every one of the nine out of the ten stanzas ends with the words '*Tiruvallikkeni kandene*'-(I saw Tiruvallikkeni). The age of this Azhvar is about 7-8th century A.D.- a gap of about 350 years between the first and the last of the Azhvars. Peyazhvar says that the deity at Tiruvallikkeni has acquired greatness on account of His having on His chest the damsel without comparison, who is on the lotus (Lakshmi). '*Dru Vallittamaraiyal onriya sirmarban*'. The deity under reference is inferred to be Ranganatha as the words '*Dru Vallittamaraiyal*' are presumed to refer to

Vedavalli, the spouse of Ranganatha, Tirumazhisai Azhvar, however, is more specific in his description; he speaks of the deity lying on the couch of the five-hooded *serpent*-*'aindalaivai nagattanai'*.

Tirumangai sings in praise of all the deities in Tiruvallikkeni-Venkatakrishna as Parthasarathy, the charioteer of Arjuna in the first six stanzas, Rama in the seventh, Narasimha in the eighth and Gajendra Varada in the ninth. The tenth stanza is the *phalasruti* in which the Azhvar assures *paramapada* (supreme heaven) to all those who regularly chant these verses. It is believed that in the second stanza the phrase, *'yennai aludai appan'*, refers to Ranganatha as. He is known as *mannatha* in Sanskrit meaning 'my lord'.

It is curious that the two earlier Azhvars had not mentioned those whom Tirumangai has mentioned. Could it be that the shrines for these four deities *in* the temple were additions after the time of the earlier Azhvars?

Or, could there have been two or more different temples, the deities from all of which were housed in one temple between the times of Peyazhvar and Tirumangai Azhvar? Tirumangai mentions one *tennan tondaiyar kon*, evidently a Pallava King. Is he the same Tondaman to whom the Lord of the Seven Hills is said to have lent His conch and discus, the absence of which led to the claim that the deity was not Vishnu?

The description of Tiruvallikkeni by all the three Azhvars is *quite* interesting. It is always mentioned along with Mayilai (Mylapore): *mamayilai mavallikkeni*, *nanmayilai-tiruvallikkeni*, *madamamayilai tiruvallikkeni*. The place has been described



to be with groves, flower gardens, wells, peacocks and cuckoos, the foliage being so dense that the rays of the sun could

not penetrate. The waves of the sea beating on the beaches of Tiruvallikkeni cast up pearls and coral which in the light of the evening sun shone like bright lamps. The reference may be perhaps to the white foam of the waves and bright red phosphorescence *in* the sea. The place is further described to be with mansions and ramparts and peopled by women without comparison. It is a depressing thought that since the time of the last of the Azhvars, except the temple and the peerless women, all other attractive features of Tiruvallikkeni appear to have disappeared.

However, there *is* one claim for greatness for Tiruvallikkeni in the post-azhvar period. It *is* the traditional belief that Sri Ramanuja, the sage and philosopher of Bhutapuri (Sriperumbudur) was born to his childless parents after they made a supplication to Sri Parthasarathy for a child.

The temple of Tiruvallikkeni seems to be the only one in India where inside a single shrine, there are *mula-betas* of Krishna, Rukmini, Balarama, Saryaki, Pradyumna and Aniruddha, the entire family of Krishna comprising his wife, brother, son and grandson. And it also appears to be the one temple where there are deities in the standing posture (Venkatakrishna and Rama), sitting posture (Narasimha in *yogic* pose), lying posture (Ranganatha on Adishesha-Bhujangasayana) and flying posture (Gajendra Varadaon Garuda). Venkatakrishna is characterised by having two hands only, the right hand holding Panchajanya (conch) and the left hand pointing to his feet in the boon-giving pose (*varada-mudra*). This unusual pose is believed to reveal Sri Krishna as Gitacharya, with the conch in his right hand

(*Panchajanyam hrisikesah: Bhagavadgita* 1-15) preaching the doctrine of absolute self-surrender indicating by the other hand His own feet as the end and the means. *Sarva-dharman ... ma sucah* 18.66).

The shrine for Narasimha is an independent one with its own *dwajasthambha* (flagstaff) and the deity has the usual annual festival (*Brahma Utsava*). It is rare to have inside one temple two deities, each having a separate *dhwaja sthambha* and *Brahmotsava*.

Even though at present Venkatakrishna with Parthasarathy (the processional deity) is the principal deity, there is no separate *nacciar* (female deity) shrine for his spouse. The principal *nacciar* who has a separate shrine is Vedavalli who is the spouse of Ranganatha, who at present is neglected and whose shrine till very recently did not even have a *vimana*. Ranganatha here is lying south to north facing east. This temple houses the idols of all the twelve Azhvars and there are idols for Acharyas like Nathamuni, Yamuna, Ramanuja, Kurartazhvan, Embar, Mudaliyandan, Pillai Loka-charya, Vedanta Desika and Manavala Mamuni and also for Tirukkacchi Nambi.

It is no wonder that a place of such uniqueness attracts pilgrims and visitors from all parts of the country throughout the year. One more unique and renowned characteristic of this temple is the *sakkaraippungal* (sweet rice pudding) served to the deities.



The Cult of Mother Worship

v. RANGARAJAN

Mother is the name for God in the lips and hearts of little children", says Thackeray. There is also a Jewish proverb, "God could not be everywhere and therefore he made mothers."

Long before the Semitic culture came into existence, here in this holy land of Bharata Varsha, Mother and Motherland were proclaimed to be more sacred than Heaven itself. The Primal Energy, which is the cause of the whole creation, was propitiated in the form of the Divine Mother.

"God is worshipped as the Great Mother," says Sir John Woodroffe, "because in this aspect God is active and produces, nourishes and maintains all." Parasakti is the Goddess of Nature who was worshipped in ancient times in various countries under various names such as Isis, Mari and Durga. The worship of Mother-Goddesses is an extremely widespread religious phenomenon and in its development in other parts of the world, it affords several parallels with what we find in Hinduism

wherein the Cult of Mother-worship is still predominant.

The great poet-patriot-philosopher, Mahakavi C. Subramania Bharati says: "God the Father is the ideal. God the Mother is the actual. That I am one with the Pure Being is a spiritual realisation. That I am one with the manifested world is an actual, every day experience. Indeed, ultimately the ideal is the same as the actual, but we, the children of the earth, find in the motherhood of God, a dearer relation, a sweeter rapport." E.A. Payne, author of

'The Saktas', says that the highest conception of Fatherhood contains within it the Mother ideal.

The Cult of Mother-worship is as old as civilization; in India. The archaeological remains of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa clearly proclaim that the Cult of Mother Goddess was very popular in the pre-Vedic days. We find in the *Devi Sukta* of the *Rig Veda Samhita* that *Vak* (speech) realised her identity with the Divine Mother. She is adored as the "true companion of the helpless and oppressed souls", "the sole guardian of the Universe and all deities" and the conferrer of "success and bliss" upon her devotees. The *Atharva Veda* declares that she is the Mother of all beings. She is known as Ambika in



Yajur Veda. The *Upanishads* mention her names, Uma and Haimavati and sing her glory. Her greatness is narrated in forty chapters in the *Brahmanda Purana*.

According to the *Brahmavaivarta Purana*, Krishna worshipped Her in Goloka, Siva before the fight with demon Tripura, Brahma when he was in fright on seeing Madhu and Kaitabh and Indra when cursed by Durvasa. The *Tulasi Ramayana* tells that Sita worshipped Her to get Rama as husband, while the *Bhagavata* says, Rukmini did so to get Sri Krishna. In the *Mahabharata*, Krishna advises Arjuna to praise Her before commencing the Kurukshetra war. Durga is one who is inaccessible and who causes obstacles to ill-conduct (*Durgam durgamam Devim duracharavighatinim*). Krishna says that "Durga is Primal Energy; She is the -power behind creation, protection and destruction." According to *Devi Mahatmya*, She is manifested in three significant forms, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi and Mahasaraswati, in which She is respectively the consort of Siva, Vishnu and Brahma, the trinity. Besides, being the mother of Ganesha and Kumara and the effulgence of Surya, She unifies the six great streams of Hinduism, viz., Saivam, Vaishnavam, Saktam Ganapatyam, Kaumaram and Sowram.

This Supreme Mother is worshipped by Her devotees from the Himalayas, the "Abode of Snow", the northern home of Shiva, to Kanyakumari in the south. To the Sakta, God is his Supreme Mother. Countless mothers he has had in innumerable births and he may, in future, have many. The human mother is sacred as the Giver of Life, but it is the Divine Mother of All, the 'Treasure-House of Compassion', who alone

is both the Giver of Life in the world and of its joys and who is the Saviouress from its miseries and who again is, for all who unite with Her, the Life of all lives-that unalloyed bliss, Liberation. The Sakta Tantras are the particular repository of Mother-worship. They outline an elaborate ritualistic pattern of Sakti worship. The word, Sakti, means, 'Energy'. Power or Force is conceived as the active principle in the universe and is personified as Goddess. Tantra means that which protects (trayate) the body (tanum). In this worship, the Sound Force of Letters are employed as Mantras in invoking the Devi Svarupas, proving thereby that the world is a creation by sound waves emanating from the root sound AUM. The Tantras are regarded traditionally as the revelation of the three Supreme Deities-Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. Even Tantric Buddhism is permeated with Sakta ideas and in Hinduism it is only the Sakta Tantras that have proved of great influence. Sir John Woodroffe goes to the extent of saying, "He who has not understood, Tantra Sastra has not understood what 'Hinduism' is as it exists today."

Mother-worship unifies religions and cultures too. The Divine Mother is the Tara of Tibetan Buddhism and Padmavati and Saraswati of Jainism. The Babylonian word Ummu or Umma, the Acadian Ummi and the Dravidian Amma for the mother are only different variations of Uma, the Mother of all, the Simhavahini Durga who is the daughter of Himavan. A Cretan deity depicted on a signet-ring, as flanked by two lions and standing on the top of a hill, the Greek Mother-goddess guarded by the lords of the forest and the Mother Goddess

of Asia Minor who had beasts kneeling at Her feet, are all, perhaps, different representations of Durga. The coins of the Kushana King, Huvishka depict the figure of the Mother with a Greek legend, OMMO, which is rightly rendered as Uma. Even earlier, a golden plate belonging to the Maurya period and coins of Saka King, Azes I, contain figures of Hara and Parvati depicted on them. Payne points out, "The hard, stern and somewhat grim pictures of the Madonna in ancient Byzantine art attract the worship of many Catholics more than the tender charm of the Madonna of Raphael. This trait is most signally evident in the case of certain figures of Gods in the Indian pantheon." Das Gebet gives instances from every part of the world to show that the conception of God as Mother is as natural and ultimate as the conception of Him as Father. The Goddess worshipped by the Semitic peoples had many names-to the Cananites and Phoenicians. She was known as Ashtoreth or Ashtart, to the Babylonians as Istar and possibly to the Arabs as al-Lat and al-Uzza. Both Greeks and Phoenicians have identified Her with Aphrodite whose rites were mostly of Phoenician origin. Payne admits: "There are traces of this worship in the Old Testament, though it seems likely that the texts have been worked over by latter hands anxious to conceal these things as much as possible." The development of the worship of the Mother Goddess in the Mediterranean world has been very similar to that in India and the same kind of character has been ascribed to the Goddess by Her devotees. Ashtart is sometimes the tutelary deity of a city and in consequence its protectress and champion, a war

goddess. She ranks as the Queen of the gods and Princess of heaven and earth. She is identified, too, with the planet Venus, largely because in the astrotheology of the Babylonians, the planet Venus was the star of Istar. Rudolf Otto has noted that 'from the standpoint of comparative religion it is very striking and remarkable that the worship of Sakti in India became powerful and forced its way into the higher cult, in almost precisely the same centuries as those in which in the West the worship of the Panagia, the Theotokos, the Regina coeli developed.' In the case of Mary, we discover a remarkable growth in the ecclesiastical tradition and belief regarding her person, a growth which ended in the formulation of absolute sinlessness and her peculiar relation to the Godhead, by which she is fitted for special and successful intercession on behalf of mankind. The Mother-idea is also traceable in many references to the Holy Spirit. In the Apocryphal Gospel according to Hebrews, Jesus is made to speak of 'My Mother, the Holy Spirit' and the phrase is quoted by Jerome and others of the Church Fathers. A similar series of ideas is to be found connected with the Church, which is often spoken of as 'the Mother of the Faithful'. Auguste Comte sought to bring back religion, which positivism had banished, in the form of a sentimental worship of Humanity, symbolised by woman and in particular by the Virgin Mary.

Almost all the existing antique temples of India are centres of Mother Worship. Right from Kanyakumari to Kashmir, renowned temples dedicated to Her are spread all over the Bharatavarsha in a uniform pattern, corresponding to the *sakti-*

peethas in Sri-Chakra. She is Bhagavati in Kerala, Kali and Lalitha in Tamilnadu, Kanakadurga in Andhra, Chamundeswari in Karnataka, Bhavani in Maharashtra, Ambika in Rajasthan and Gujarat, Kali and Durga in Bengal and Kamakhya in Assam. She is Sita and Radha too in Uttar Pradesh.

Countless are the scholars, saints and spiritual men who have attained glory and immortality by worshipping Her. Kalidasa, who worshipped Her at Ujjain, became a great poet. The Tamil poet Kampan too was Her devotee.

Sankara showered hymns in praise of Her and Ramaprasad of Bengal burst into devotional songs. Sri Ramakrishna, the advocate of harmony of all religions, saw Her face to face and proclaimed: "My Divine Mother is not only formless, She has forms as well the Mother reveals Herself to Her devotees in different forms. I saw Her yesterday. She was clad in seamless, ochre coloured garment and She talked with me."

With the Divine Grace of Mother Tulja Bhavani, Chhatrapati Sivaji Maharaj rebuilt the Hindu Rashtra. Swami Vivekananda, who wrote his celebrated 'Hymn to Kali' after worshipping the Ksheer Bhavani of Kashmir, had the grand realisation of the mission of his life when he sat at the feet of the Goddess of Kanyakumari.

During the Freedom Movement of the country, great patriots like Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Bankim Chandra, Sister Nivedita and Subramania Bharati awakened the national consciousness by reviving the worship of the Motherland in the form of the Mother-Bhavani Bharati. The new awakening created by them was not confined to any

creed or community. In the words of Sister Nivedita, "The Mohammadan boatman of Eastern Bengal is not in his own person a worshipper of Durga and yet the words 'with folded hands before the Mother' may carry as much' to him as to the Hindu heart." She further says: "Every year that goes by, the images of the Mother become more and more deep, each in its turn, entwined with the thought of India to the Indian heart. Mother and Motherland-where ends the one and where begins the other? Before which does a man stand with folded hands, when he bows his head still lower and says with a new awe: 'My salutations to the Mother?'. The Sarvojanin Durga Pooja of Bengal inspired Bankim Chandra to conceive our Motherland in the image of Durga and proclaim, "*Twam hi Durga dasapraharana dharini*"-'Verily Thou (Motherland) art Durga, the wielder of ten weapons'-in his celebrated national song *Bande Matararn*.

The origin of Durga Pooja for nine days during Navaratri is traced to *Saradotsava*, a season festival at the conjunction of the cessation of rains and the incoming of autumn. *Devi Bhagavatam* says: *Vasanta* and *Sarad-ritus* are like two incisor teeth of Yama, meaning, that during these months the scourge of ill-health in the world is at its highest. Consequently, Devi is worshipped to save mankind from pestilence. According to the Bengal school of Durga worshippers, the Mother visits the earth, Her parental home, every year for three days in autumn and returns to Her husband's house over the Mount Kailasa on the Vijayadasami day. The *Bhagavatam* says that Durga is eternally nine years old and hence the nine-day worship. On the

ninth day, She is worshipped as Sarada or Saraswati and on the tenth as Aparajita or the invincible form of Durga, which accounts for the name of Vijaya Dasami for that day. The universal nature of Her worship is declared by *Bhavishya Purana* which says that Devi should be worshipped not only by Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras, but also by Mlechhas and all other men and women. Vijaya Dasami is also considered as the day of final victory of Sri Rama over Ravana and accordingly celebrated with picturesque Ram Lila in the North. On this day, the Pandava brothers were supposed to have worshipped, after the expiry of the period of their Ajnatavasa, the sami tree on which they had deposited their weapons on the eve of their leaving in disguise.



Raja Kangsa Narayan of Taherpur in Rajshahi District (now in Bangladesh) is believed to have introduced in Bengal the public festival of Durga Puja in the year 1580, during the reign of Akbar. He celebrated the festival at a cost of rupees nine lakhs. The Bhonslas of Nagpur also celebrated it on a grand scale. In the South, the great Kings of Vijayanagar patronised the public celebration of Navaratri. The much travelled Portuguese traveller, Domingo Paes, who visited the capital of Vijayanagar, gives a grand panoramic description of the Navaratri celebrations during the reign of the great emperor Krishnadeva Raya. Inheriting that tradition,

Raja Wadiar of Mysore instituted the observance of the public festival in his State in 1610 A.D. Some of the features of the celebrations in Mysore like the pooja offered to State horse, State elephant and State carriage represent the worship of Indra's horse, Uchchaisravas; his elephant, Iravata and his chariot, Devaratha. These suggest that in the early days Dasara festival was probably connected with Indra, the greatest of Vedic gods. The festival is observed on a grand scale in the Tirupati temple in Andhra Pradesh. In Tamilnadu, the festival is celebrated in every home with the traditional 'Kolu' or arrangement



of dolls of gods, goddesses, men, animals and even inanimate beings, with the image of Durga in the centre, which symbolically represents that the Mother rules the entire universe. As the story of Her annihilation of Mahishasura symbolises the removal of the darkness of ignorance by the light of knowledge, the Vidyarambham or the commencement of school-going of a child is performed on the day of Vijaya Dasami, Like any other cult, Saktism or the Cult of Mother-worship had also its ups and downs in the course of its historical development

through centuries. At one time it was even denounced and denigrated as a bundle of nefarious occult practices or some sort of magical art in the hands of notorious criminals. However, not only the advent of great spiritual personages like Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, but also the untiring and exemplary services of Western savants like Sir John Woodroffe, brought to light in the modern period, the pristine glory of our ancient Tantras and Sakti sadhana. It is the bounden duty of every Indian to protect and preserve this great heritage by worshipping the Divine Mother in the form of our Motherland. Let us all pray together chanting the 'Hymn to the Divine Mother' in the words of Sri Aurobindo:

"Mother Durga! Rider on the lion, giver of all strength, Mother, beloved of Siva! We, born from thy parts of Power, we the youth of India, are seated here in thy temple. *Listen Mother, descend upon earth, make thyself manifest in this land of India.* "Mother Durga! From age to age, in life after life, we come down into the human body, do thy work and return to the Home of Delight. Now too we are born, dedicated to thy work. *Listen O Mother, descend upon earth, come to our help.*"



SRI VENKATESWARA TEMPLE, HYDERABAD

*Vanopaanta nadi-saila-
nirjharopaanta bhumishu
Ramante Devataa nityam
pureshudyavanavatsu cha.*

The Gods always play where groves are near, rivers, hills and springs and in towns with pleasure gardens." For this, Lord Venkateswara has chosen Kalapahad (Neeladri), a rocky hill with an elevation of about 250 feet, centrally located in the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad in Andhra Pradesh State.

With the blessings of Sri Venkateswara, Sri Brajmohanji Birla, and Sri Ganga Prasadji Birla, Chairman of Hindustan Charity Trust, acquired the hillock of Kalapahad from the Government of Andhra Pradesh and built the temple as a part of the cultural centre unit of Hindustan Charity Trust.

Within a short period of about six to seven years, a magnificent milk-white temple of Sri Venkateswara in the dark, rocky Kalapahad hill, has become an ornament to the twin cities. The hill is also named Neeladri, the abode of Sri Venkateswara. It was on 13th February, 1976 that the *prathistha* of the temple was performed in a befitting manner " as *Pramaanesthapitaa Devait pujaarhascha bhavantih*" adhering to the Pancharathra Agama worship, prevalent in South India with the Bhakthi

cult of the Prabandic School of Thought. It is significant that the temple has been constructed out of white marble stone, procured from Makrana, Rajasthan. The



craftsmen, descendants of those who built the world famous Taj Mahal, also hailed from there. A reputed sculptor, Sri Ganapathy Sthapathi, and the architects M/S. Ballardie Thompson and Matthews, Calcutta, deserve congratulations for their sound advice in the construction of the temple. The tradition of shilpa and agama have been given due weight, though modern concepts have been imbibed, wherever necessary.

A Magnificent Pilgrim-cum-Tourist-Centre

Tirtha is the name of pilgrimage to a temple. The place of pilgrimage is the end of the journey, but it is not itself the goal, but the only means of crossing over to the

centre, *Sadhana*.

Sri Venkateswara temple has been developed into a pilgrim centre, attracting devotees, visitors and tourists from far and near. When illuminated at nights, the temple presents a splendid sight and a dazzling view.

The main shrine of Sri Venkateswara has a Vimana known as the Jagadananda Vimana in the Kalinga style of Konarak, a grand feature. On one side is the shrine of Padmavathi and on the other is Sri Andal temple with Vimanas in the South Indian style guarded by traditional lions in marble. Facing the main deity is the temple of Garuda. The Dhvaja-sthamba in brass rises to a height of 42 feet, behind the Garudalaya where is located the Balipitha. In the sanctum sanctorum (Garba-griha), a 11 ½ feet high idol of Lord Venkateswara, made of black granite weighing 8 tonnes, and majestically, blessing the devotees. Lotus, decoratively carved on the inner ceiling of the garba-griha, just over the main idol, forms a natural umbrella traditionally used in temples.

The central Mukha Mandapa has a beautiful carving, like a circular Yantha engraved as Mandala in white marble. In this mandapa, the holy water and *satari* (blessing of Sri Venkateswara) are served to the devotees, who wait in long queues to have the darshan of the Lord. On the three sides of the white marble wall, are the panels of Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu and on the opposite sides their consorts, Saraswathi, Parvathi and Lakshmi have been exhibited as if these deities come to pray to Lord Venkateswara as "*Sa chaturmukha shanmukha panchamukha Pramukhakila daivata moulimane*". Sri Rama's portrait

on one side and on the other Sri Radhakrishnaa, the incarnations of Vishnu, decorate the Mukha mandapam.

The mandapa in the fore is another masterpiece, with a circular carving in the ceiling. On one side, of the wall is the panel of Seshasayee and on the other side, Samudra Madan decorates the whole mandapa. Here, you will find the dwarapalakas-Jaya and Vijaya, standing vigil. Sri Rama, the Dharmavigrahavan and Sri Krishna, the stabiliser of Sanathana Dharma emerged in Kaliyuga with Sri Venkateswara as *Kalou Venkatanayaka*. A pure white marble torana hanging at the entrance of the mandapa in front with gandharvas readily welcomes the devotees to the temple for the darshan of the Lord. An imposing five-storeyed Pallava styled Rajagopuram made of white marble, 51 feet high and the Simhadwaram create a spiritual atmosphere in the minds of devotees, leading to Bhuloka Vaikuntam. A large panel of Gitopadesa in front of the main entrance sets the tone for the devotee. A few steps ahead, on both sides, one finds 18 panels depicting select sequences from the *Ramayana* by Saint Tulsidas, with the original text in Hindi and below, the Telugu translation inscribed in golden characters. Scanning them, transports a devotee to spiritual realms.

Pooja Vidhan of the deities and the deities installed in the temple

Pooja in the South Indian style with Pancharathra Agama of the Prabandic School of Bhakti cult is conducted. Apart from the main deity, Sri Venkateswara, Lakshmi, Andal and Garuda have been

housed in separate temples as already indicated. No special poojas or archanas are being performed on behalf of devotees but they are allowed to be present during the poojas and *tirtham* and *satari* are offered to them. The Trust, from its funds, performs *Poolangiseva*. One of the outstanding features of the temple is stress on absolute cleanliness and aesthetics and no levy of fee of any kind. The object is to enable one to be face to face with his god. Recitations of Vedas, Puranas, Prabandas, and Stotrapatas are daily conducted in the morning pooja hours and in the evening for about two hours, by learned pandits. On festival days, the deity is taken round the prakara with traditional recitation of Vedas in conformity with the Agama Sastra. There are quarters provided for archakas and security guards.



A Yagashala mandapa and a Dhyana mandapa are being completed according to tradition. A library with a good selection of religious and spiritual books is being set up. The setting up of a Vedic Research Centre for Sanskrit education is one of the proposals under consideration. The Sri Hanuman temple and the Shiva temple at the foot of the hill are nearing completion in white marble which would be an additional attraction. A 23 feet high image of Chakradhari Krishna at the foot of the temple complex is likely to be installed on an elevated spot. The ritual of two elephants garlanding the idol every day at a given time will add luster to the scene. Standing on a picturesque site overlooking

the waters of Hussainsagar lake, at an elevation of 230 feet from ground level, the white marble temple of Sri Venkateswara, is a new focal point for Hyderabad seen prominently from all round, by air, rail and road. It has been variously described as a crowning edifice to the glory of Hyderabad. The temple appears as a huge celestial light, hanging from the sky, when flood-lit. With the beauty of rocks preserved in their natural setting, a fine garden has been laid, in addition to the despite rockery, enhancing the beauty of the temple and its attraction.



Sharda Peeth - The Marvel in Marble

DR. J. L. SHARMA

Sharda-Peeth, the shrine dedicated to the Goddess of Learning, is located at the very heart of Vidya Vihar Campus in Pilani, rightly called "the oasis in the desert". Situated at a distance of 200 kms, from Delhi in the north-east of Rajasthan, Pilani synthesises India, Ancient and Modern. Set in rural surroundings, where tradition informs the life of local communities, it is also the seat of one of the most modern educational and cultural complexes in the nation. The shrine, here, is a unique model in the history of Indian architecture, both in spirit and form as well. It may not be hyperbolic to say that it is an embodiment of Indian culture, emphasising the paramount significance of knowledge, presenting its compendium in the form of this shrine. The marvel of its symphonic structure in white marble of Makarana, attuned with the very essence of Indian attitude towards life—a synthesis of both old and new and assimilation of whatever is best in East or West, makes one spell-bound at its very first glimpse. It embodies the vision of *its* builder, the great philanthropist, educationist and thinker, Padma Vibhushan Shri G.D. Birla, who has been dedicated to the cause of education and revival of Indian tradition.

Keeping in view the very goal of education—the total development of personality—physical, mental, moral and spiritual, it was but natural to have a place where the afflicted souls wandering



frustrated and confused amidst the din and dazzle of the modern world, could find a place for solace and solution of inner conflicts. Thus the Chairman of Birla Education Trust finding a cue from the desire of his late father decided to erect a temple dedicated to the Goddess of Learning--Saraswati. On the 20th January 1956 Shri S. D. Pande performed the preliminary Puja, followed by the laying of foundation stone by the then Vice President of India, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, who himself was an ardent supporter and propagator of the revival of spiritualism in the system of education, on Feb. 27, 1956. The work started under Master craftsman Shri Ghulam Farid with 410 skilled artisans of Rajasthan. The job, costing Rs, 23 lakhs at that time,



was completed within a scheduled period of our years and the temple was inaugurated by Shri Morarji Desai, the then Finance Minister of the Republic of India on Feb. 6 1960. On the advice of Acharya Vinoba Bhave it was named "SHARDA-PEETH".

Sharda-Peerh is perhaps the only temple in India solely dedicated to Saraswati. So far as the style is concerned it belongs to the Jain-cum-Indo-Aryan architecture.

It is a replica of the temple of Kandanya Mahadeva at Khajuraho, with its own distinctive features. The temple at Khajuraho stands on 56 pillars, whereas in Pilani it stands on 70 pillars having seven parts. Copper wire is used to join the stones to ensure a longer life which is estimated to be at least 2000 years. The temple is surrounded by green lawns and trees, and a visitor forgets for a while that he is

standing on the soil of a desert. The basement is at a height of 7 ft. from the ground as though in an effort to rise above the temporal surroundings, covering an area of 234ft. X 109ft, covered by square tiles of marble. The busts of Late Raja Baldev Das Birla and Smt.Chhogi Devi on separate plinths at the right and left side are bridged with the main plinth as a mark of honour and homage to the parents of the builder keeping in line with the first teachings of *Upanishads*- 'Matrudevo bhava, pitrudevo bhava'. Two monolithic figures of elephants holding lotus in their trunks stand on the sides of the stairs leading to the plinth.

Like that of Khajuraho, the temple has five apartments. The Sanctum

Sanctorum or Garbha-Griha is enshrined with a 5 ft. high idol of Goddess Saraswati standing on a lotus flower, holding Veena in two hands and a book in her left hand representing *Vedas* or knowledge eternal and fine arts, and a lotus in her fourth hand in a posture of bestowing blessings. The idol, 'sculptured in round, showing a well-decorated hallow of Prabhamandal reminds us of the sculpture of the Gupta Period whence started the tradition of decorated hallows behind the heads of Gods and Goddesses. The cella is surrounded by narrow Pradikshinapatha or ambulatory. The basement of the sanctum sanctorum is surrounded by rows of figures sculptured in relief. On the roof of this rises the traditional Shikhara or tower in pyramidal shape, like its architectural counterpart in the spire of Gothic Church and its highest part consists of traditional

Amalaka. The ceiling of this apartment has magnificent carvings. Facing the Garbha-Griha is Antarala or Vestibule, which is an intermediate chamber between the Sanctum and the pillared mandapa, where devotees gather at the time of worship. It is joined with Ardhamandapa-the entrance portico.



The Ardhamandapa, and mandapa are the developed forms of Jagmohana of the temples of the Gupta period. There are transepts called Mahamandapa on each side of Garbha-Griha and Mandapa, appearing like pillared terrace from outside to give passage to fresh air and light. The heights of pyramidal towers like that of Kandariya-Mahadeva, are graded in such a way that the tower at the Sanctum is the highest that is 110 ft. and that of the Mandapa becomes the lowest that is 42'6". The Shikharas are crowned with many 'Kalashas' 18 out of them are made of gold-plated copper. The arch of the doorway decorated with cusped festoons containing the figures of Mithunas and nymphs offering flowers on each side, appears more like a drapery hanging under the lintel than chiselled stone as often found in Jain architecture.

The interior of the temple is adorned with many a figure, most of them being those of Vishnu, Shankar and Ganesh. The brackets on the capital of the pillars inside the temple and at the centre of the lintel

of the cella are decorated with the inclined figures with their hands upward in such a beautiful posture that it appears as if they are supporting the weight of the lintel and the ceilings, as in the temple of Khajuraho and in Kalyan Mandap of Vellore. The tenuous flowing lines on the spires give it a most elegant look. The exterior of the temple is decorated with exquisite floral and geometrical designs and over four hundred figures of saints, philosophers, poets, scientists and great leaders of the world like Valmiki, Panini, Kalidas, Meera, Archimedes, Einstein, Nehru, Kennedy, Tilak, Gandhi and Vivekananda etc.-the stalwarts both in the field of 'Paravidya' and 'Apara-Vidya', representing the very cosmopolitan nature of the place, in harmony with our ancient ideal '*a no bhadra kratavo yantu visvatah*' i.e. let the noble thoughts come to us from every direction. There are some beautiful sculptures of mythological figures also on the facade like Mrityunjaya, Shiva-Parvati, Durga, Rama and Krishna, etc. The majestic and elegant look of the contour is a synthesis of religious

spirit and aesthetic genius. Thus it stands as a master-piece of 20th Century Indian architecture.

The shrine facing the main building of Birla Institute of Technology and Science and being the consecrating nucleus of Vidya Vihar Campus is an embodiment of human achievements and aspiration to find relation with the divine and seek perfection through knowledge which is expressed through its upward movement and lofty spires. The knowledge is not simply a collection of information, geared to career-making but it is the manifestation of the inner being and realisation of self. That is the very acme of real knowledge. Swami Vivekananda says, "whatever man knows should in strict psychological language, be what he discovers or unveils. What a man 'learns' is really what he discovers by taking the cover off his soul." The shrine is thus the most sublime projection of the vision of Shri G. D. Birla to bridge the gulf between spiritualism and modern scientific and technological knowledge-leading to a blend of human ascent and divine descent.

Spirituality in India is an integral part of the material world. The fact has not been ignored by the Vidya Vihar. The temple of Saraswati in the campus is a dream in itself. A majestic imposing architectural harmony and Euclidean symphony has been woven in white marble. The figures of saints, philosophers, thinkers, scientists and leaders of the world are sculptured on the outer walls of the temple thus imparting to it a unique universality.



BIRLA MANDIR

Shri Lakshmi Narain Temple, New Delhi

Lakshmi Narain Temple in New Delhi, popularly known as Birla Mandir has, over the years, attracted lakhs of visitors, pilgrims and devotees from all over the world. The foundation-stone of this famous temple was laid by Maharana Udai Bhan Singh of Dholpur on the 26th of March 1933. Pandit Vishwanath Acharya of the Hindu University, Banaras, assisted by 100 Pandits from different parts of the country, performed the installation ceremony of the idols of Gods and Goddesses in the Temple and on the 18th of March 1939, Mahatma Gandhi, Father of the Nation, performed the opening ceremony of the Temple.

Birla Mandir was built by Raja Baldeo Dass Birla at a cost of several lakhs of rupees. To accomplish this task, Raja Sahib drew inspiration from Sanatan Dharma Sabha, New Delhi, and Goswami Ganesh Dutt, a prominent religious leader. The temple, which took about six years to build, epitomises the best of all the ancient Aryan religions as adjusted to modernism.

The Temple has been a pioneer in removing the barriers of caste, creed, and colour, as its doors are open to all. There are separate sanctums of Shri Lakshmi Narain in the centre, Goddess Durga on the left and Lord Shiva on the right. The dome of Lakshmi Narain sanctum is 165 feet high while those of Goddess Durga and Lord Shiva are 116 feet in height. On the right side of Lord Shiva's sanctum is Gita Bhavan which has been adorned with an attractive idol of Bhagwan Shri Krishna and beautiful



paintings of legends from the *Mahabharata* and the *Gita*. On the left side of the central structure is an exquisite temple of Bhagwan Buddha with walls having fresco paintings depicting his life and teachings. The walls and upper gallery of the central structure have been beautified with numerous paintings of breath-taking charm which project fundamental teachings of the Aryan Dharma. The paintings have been done by known artists from Jaipur while experienced masons again from Jaipur are responsible for the sculptured panels.

All Hindus, following different branches of Hindu (Arya) Dharma, namely, Sanatanists (including Harijans), Arya-Sarnajisrs Buddhists, Sikhs, Jains, etc. are welcome to participate in the daily worship, Sat-sang and Kirtan held in the Temple in perfect harmony and mutual good-will, according to the best traditions of the Temple.

To provide accommodation to pilgrims and devotees from outside Delhi, there is a

Dharmasala in the temple which has a number of rooms. The rooms on the first floor are reserved for foreigners who come to the temple with a view to learning Hindu Religion or Sanskrit and Hindi languages. The temple also has a well-equipped library and a reading room.

The back-side of the temple adjoining the ridge has been developed as an artificial mountainous landscape. Indraprastha Vatika has caves, waterfalls, fountains and canopies, besides *Vyayamshala*, *Natyashala* and *Yagashala*, All these present a beautiful spectacle.

Thousands of visitors and devotees pay a visit to the temple every day, exhibit their devotion to the idols of various Gods and Goddesses and pay homage to the different aspects of Sanatan Dharma. A large number of foreigners from different countries with diverse faiths, tastes and views visit the temple with reverence and devotion. Needless to say that with the passage of time, Birla Mandir has acquired a coveted position of national and international significance. Here, an unprecedented assembly of devotees is witnessed on festivals and functions of religious, social, cultural, national and historical importance, such as Shri Krishna Janmashtami, Shri Ram Naumi, Basant Pancharni, Independence Day and Republic Day. On such occasions, huge multitudes of devotees fill the roads right from the crossing of Punchkuian Road to the roundabout of Talkatora Road covering an area of about 4-5 kilometres.



AKSHARDHAM SWAMINARAYAN TEMPLE

Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi epitomises 10,000 years of Indian culture in all its breathtaking grandeur, beauty, wisdom and bliss. It brilliantly showcases the essence of India's ancient architecture, traditions and timeless spiritual messages. The Akshardham experience is an enlightening journey through India's glorious art, values and contributions for the progress, happiness and harmony of mankind.

The grand, ancient-styled Swaminarayan Akshardham complex was built in only five years through the blessings of HDH Pramukh Swami Maharaj of the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha

(BAPS) and the colossal devotional efforts of 11,000 artisans and BAPS volunteers. The complex was inaugurated on 6 November, 2005.

Akshardham means the eternal, divine abode of the supreme God, the abode of eternal values and virtues of Akshar as defined in the Vedas and Upanishads where divine bhakti, purity and peace forever pervades.

For the first time ever in the world witness the heritage of India in all its facets, insights and beauty at the Swaminarayan Akshardham through its mandir, exhibitions, verdant gardens and other attractions.



The beautiful mandir built without steel, consists of 234 ornately carved pillars, 9 ornate domes, 20 quadrangled shikhars, a



spectacular Gajendra Pith (plinth of stone elephants) and 20,000 murtis and statues of India's great sadhus, devotees, acharyas and divine personalities.

The mandir is a fusion of pink stone and pure white marble, where pink stone symbolizes bhakti in eternal bloom and white marble that of absolute purity and eternal peace. Akshardham was created by HDH Pramukh Swami Maharaj in fulfillment to the wish of his guru, Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj, the fourth successor in the spiritual hierarchy of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. In only a short timespan of five years Swaminarayan Akshardham became a reality through the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, 300 million man hours of epic services rendered by 11,000 volunteers, sadhus and artisans and the immense sacrifice, austerities, prayers of hundreds of thousands of young and old devotees of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha. Delhi is the capital of India and there the sovereign Purushottam Narayan is to preside. So we want to hold a grand pratishtha celebration....

"It was Yogiji Maharaj's wish, so the mandir festival will be grand..."

From over 1400 kilometres away, Pramukh Swami Maharaj, in Mumbai, enthusiastically told the sadhus in Delhi to organise a grand celebration for the breathtaking new mandir in New Delhi.

Despite frail health, Swamishri was recovering from a 10-day bout of fever and diarrhoea, his voice over the telephone was fresh and encouraging. The satisfaction that Yogiji Maharaj's long-held wish would be fulfilled was plainly evident.



From the very beginning he had set the standards, "It is Yogiji Maharaj's wish that a mandir be built on the banks of Yamuna in Delhi. So we want to make it the best."

Thirty-five years ago, Yogiji Maharaj expressed his heartfelt wish that a mandir dedicated to Akshar Purushottam Maharaj be consecrated on the banks of Yamuna in New Delhi.

This wish of Yogiji Maharaj became a mission for Pramukh Swami Maharaj. By his tireless efforts over the past three decades, this wish has been fulfilled and it is a reflection of Swamishri's singular devotion for his guru. Sculpted in intricate detail, entirely from Italian Carrara marble, the 60 ft. high mandir was constructed, from foundation to pinnacle, in a record-breaking nine months.

The shilanyas ceremony was performed by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami on 4-5-2001.

It was Yogiji Maharaj's wish that a marble murti of guru Shastriji Maharaj be consecrated in this mandir, hence, Pramukh Swami Maharaj chose 6-2-2003, Vasant

Panchmi, the birthday of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, as the murti-pratishtha date.

Together with the mandir, a host of ancilliary buildings - residence for sadhus, residence for volunteers, residence for pilgrims, kitchens, etc. - have also been built within a year.

The task of completing this challenging project was spearheaded by Ishwarcharan Swami and a support team of sadhus and volunteers.

Responsibility for sculpting the marble was wholeheartedly undertaken by Harshad Chavda. Under his supervision, volunteers and craftsmen at the Sanstha's workshops in Pindwada and surrounding villages worked day and night to meet the demanding schedules.

On the mandir construction site, the sculpted marble stone were assembled



under the guidance of the project's chief engineer, Ashwin Patel, Dharmavatsal Swami and Atmakirti Swami.

To enhance the beauty of the mandir, Swamishri had made a priceless suggestion to build a parikrama or colonnade around its perimeter. This was built out of red stone from Rajasthan. This feature in itself was a big project and was completed on time by the efforts of Yogesh Swami and his team of volunteers and craftsmen based at

Secundra near Jaipur in Rajasthan.

With less than 15 days remaining before the pratishtha, anyone seeing the site would have thought it impossible that everything would be completed on time.

And to add to the problems, New Delhi's erratic weather hindered more than helped. The biting cold, heavy fog and frequent rain showers interfered with the best of plans.

But, however, as the auspicious day drew nearer, Swamishri's frequent words of encouragement inspired all work with maximum vigour. Finally, with the divine blessings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Gunatit Gurus the entire construction was completed on time.

With many devotees expected to arrive from UK, USA, Africa and other countries,



Swamishri arrived in New Delhi late at night on 31 January, still recovering from his recent illness.

With the inclement weather the sadhus prayed to Swamishri for a change in weather so that final preparations for the celebrations could be completed.

Swamishri smiled and said, "From tomorrow Maharaj will make everything fine."

And sure enough, the following day, the clouds were nowhere in sight and the sun shone brightly in the morning sky.

With favourable weather, the pace of work quickened and everything was ready for the celebrations. Over 250 sadhus and 7000 devotees from throughout India and abroad were expected to attend the 2-day celebrations.

On 3 February 2003, at 6.45 a.m. Swamishri performed the traditional Vedic worship of the kalashes and flagstaffs to be placed on the pinnacles of the mandir. Swamishri also performed the Vedic worship of the painted murtis of Akshar Purushottam and Radha Krishna to be installed in the old mandir in place of the current marble murtis, which would now be transferred to the new mandir.

