

A STUDY OF DHVAJAROHANA (HOISTING FESTIVAL) WITH BASED ON AGAMIC TRADITIONS AT MAMANKAM TEMPLE IN BATTICALOA DISTRICT

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INTRODUCTION

The Hindu Tamil of Batticaloa are Saivites but the Hindu religious tradition of that region has a local flavour. It is a curious mixture of Saivism and a variety of cults within and outside the fold of orthodox Hinduism.

There are only two temples dedicated for the worship of Siva in the entire region of Batticaloa and these are Tantontrisvaram and Mamankeswaram.

MAMANKESWARAM – SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE

Mamankeswaram is of special significance to the Hindus of Batticaloa. It is the resort of thousands of pious devotees and pilgrims from all parts of the region of Batticaloa during the season of the annual festival, which culminates in the water cutting ceremony.

It is famous on account of its sacred tank, the waters of which are believed to possess healing qualities. The mud in the tank has the likeness of sandal paste and pious devotees believe that it has the efficacy of healing incurable diseases.

ESTABLISHMENT OF MAMANKAM

The origins of the temple of Mamankam are obscure. There are no inscriptions or archaeological remains of ancient buildings at the site. Nor are there written or oral traditions of any significance pertaining to religious services at the temple and its social interactions. There are some folk traditions about the temple and its origins.

According to one of them the temple was established by Rama. He is said to have stayed at the site for some time after the conclusion of his war against Ravana, and decided on propitiating Siva.

On his instruction, Anumar proceeded to the Vindhya mountains for fetching a Linkam. As his return was delayed, Rama made an earthen Linkam and established it for worship. For the purpose of obtaining water for consecrating it, he created a spring by planting his bow, Kotantam, firmly on the ground.

There was a continuous flow of water from that spot and thereby the sacred tank of Mamankam was formed. Later, the Linkam brought by Anumar was established within it. No w-days the temple is called Mamankappillaiyar.

ANNUAL FESTIVAL AT MAMANKAM

The annual festival at Mamankeswaram, which is of ten days duration concludes with the water – cutting ceremony on the day of Atiamavacai, the New Moon day in the month of July – August.

Besides the annual festival there are special occasions when, as at other Hindu temples, the rituals and worship conducted here assume the proportions of festivals in Mahotsava. Namely, Adhivasa (drawn in the white banner), Netromilana (opening of it eyes), Jaladhivasa (kept directly in water), Jivanjasa (infusing life in the picture in the banner), Worship in Fire, Worship in Banner, Procession, Pratistha of Dhvaja – danda and Nyasa of it different parts. Typing of rope to the banner and Vrsabha Pratistha, Bheripooya and Bheri – tadana (Drum – beat), Astraraja worship, Recitation of Curnika (poetic text of agamas), Puspanjali and Dhvajarahana (raising the flag) are to be correctly done in Mahotsava Rituals.¹ These are observed as holyday when rituals are conducted elaborately according to Agamic norms. It may also be noted here that at Mamankeswaram, unlike at most other temples in Batticaloa, the officiating priests are Brahmins.²

According to the Agamic tradition, we can explain the detail of rituals as following orders.

ADHIVASA (BULLDRAWN IN THE WHITE BANNER)

On the day prior to Dhvajarahana, special rituals are to be performed for the bull drawn in the white banner as briefly described above. As suited to its dominant sattvic nature it is crystal white, it thoughts are centred on Rudra and it has three eyes and looks a perfect embodiment of Dharma.³

After drawing the bull, life is infused into it by the subsequent rituals.

NETROMILANA (OPENING OF IT SEYES)

Two sthandilas (sanctified place with rice spread out) are arranged for the banner, honey and ghee.

With a golden eye pencil or Durva shoot the two eyes are opened along with the recitation of Mrtyunjaya mantras. The past of honey with ghee is then applied to the eyes, considered as sun and moon.⁴

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JIVANYASA (INFUSING LIFE IN THE BULL AND BANNER)

This is the most important function. Such enlivening is done at three levels of worshipping the bull in the banner, in the central kumbha with eight surrounding ones, and in the heart of Siva fire. The main common functions performed to all three of them separately.⁵

Their structural division into three parts for being assigned the three tattvas, namely atma, vidya and Siva and their associates.

Conceptualization in the eight directions of the eight forms (astamurtis) of Vrsabha – related respectively to the Earth, fire, sacrificer, sun, water, wind, moon and Ethereal space.

After separately worshipping bull in the three locations of banner, kumbha and fire, they are then united mantrically by sampata homa (uniting the bull in the banner, fire and kumbha) nadi – sandhana and purnahuti to ensure that it is the same individual atma that pervades in all of them.⁶

WORSHIP IN FIRE

A Siva fire is created on the ground or in the fire – pit. At its centre bull is invoked. Offerings of samit (fuel sticks) ajya (ghee) and caru (cooked rice) are offered to it along with the recitation of the above-mentioned Vrsabha gayatri, and mantras for the tattvas and tattvesvaras, murtis and murtisvaras of Vrsabha.⁷

SAMPATA HOMA (UNITING THE VRSABHA IN THE BANNER, FIRE AND KUMBHA)

The acarya (priest) takes the santi kumbha kept near the fire and goes near the banner, and sprinkles on it has sanctified water from the kumbha with Vrsamulantra. He touches the bottom, middle and top of the kumbha respectively with the bottom, middle and top of the Kusa-grass, thus marking off the three tattvas, the kusa grass is tied with one and to the banner by string (nadi – sandhana) to indicate the identification of kumbha and Vrsabha.⁸

After the purification and identification of the Vrsa in three locations (adhikaranas) thus, naivedya is offered, along with recitations of vedhas, strotras and programmers of music and dance.⁹

PRELIMINARY RITES

On the day at the auspicious time the worship of the Vrsabha in the banner, in the central and eight other kumbhas and in the fire is performed a fresh with Vrsagayatri and Vrsamula mantras.

PROCESSION

The banner with astraraja (as trident) or with the lord, is taken round the concerned area to the accompaniment of dance and music and brought back to the Dhvaja – stambha (with symbolism of individual parts).¹⁰

TYPING OF ROPETO THE BANNER AND VRSABHA – PRATISTHA

After the above worship of Dhvaja – stambha, the banner cloth with small bells around is tied with the rope along with the recitation of Vrsa – gayatri.

Again the identity between the figure of Vrsa drawn in the banner and the Vrsa mantrically created in the kumbha is reiterated by taking the puja (mantra) symbolically from the latter imagining Vrsa's form. This is imposed in the heart of Vrsa in the pata. Kumbha water is sprinkled on it.¹¹

BHERI – PUJA

Although music and musical instruments play an important role in all functions in a temple, and specially on the occasion of mohotsavas, the Bheri is particularly and integrally connected with the Dhvajarahana. In fact the preliminary rites to Dhvajarahana include the Bheri being placed for worship along with the banner and Astra – raja on the sthandila.

The drum is naturally considered in this content as an embodiment of multi – divine powers. Agamic verse assigning particular divinities to the different part of Bheri is found in all the Agamas and paddhatis.

Firstly, sanctified water and panca – gavya are sprinkled on the drum and a variegated cloth is put on it. Then in the centre, right and left of the bheri Sambhu, Visnu and Brahma are respectively worshipped.

After the respective imposition (nyasa), flowers, unguents, haivedya are offered to the drum. The priest meditates on it as of the form of Bindu and strikes on it three times with Darbha. Following the priest the instrument player offers flowers and start playing the Nandi-Tala.

ASTRA – RAJA (TRIDENT) WORSHIP

Before going to the details about beating the drum it is necessary to know about the workshop to be offered to Astra – raja in the form of trident (Trisula). He is a chief component throughout the Mahotsava, whether it is in the Yagasata procession of images or any ritual during the festival. In all these items the Astra – raja occupies a pre – eminent position, as he is first thought about and the initial worship is always for him.¹²

BHERI – TADAHA (DRUM – BEAT)

After establishing formally the various gods in the different part of the Trident by the nyasas, there is a reconfirmation of the same fact by beating on the Drum and calling forth the gods in the form of beautifully structured Curnika in prose or verse.

The drum is used not only to address the different gods in all the worlds with a request that they may honour the particular Dhvajarohana function but also to safeguard the diverse categories of living beings in all the worlds.

After worshipping the Astraraja and Bheri, the priest announces the performance of the Dhvajarohana in the particular temple presided over by Siva and Sakti. He adds that it is the special wish and command of the Lord that all the gods and mortals should be present not only at the Dhvajarohana but also stay there till the completion of the festival.

RECITATION OF CURNIKA

The priest calls forth in beautifully composed poems and prose lines all the gods, divinities, mountains, lords of the quarters, ocean and host of various species in all the worlds.¹³ It is clear that the address to diverse divinities by the recitation of Curnika is an integral item in the Dhvajarohana.

UPACARAS AND PUSPANJALI

The gods of Vighnesvarar, Siva and others round in a procession within or outside of the temple and bringing them back before the main shrine.

Then the priest offers the series of upacaras like flight of lamps, incense, camphor along with puspanjali.

At the decorated mandapa on the right of the Dhvaja – stambha, the Gods are placed on the proper seats and positions. It is at this point of time that the priest along with his associates stands on the south of the Dhvaja – stambha, and recites curnikas in prose and verse, in praise of gods, along with drum – beat, vocal instrumental music, and dance.¹⁴

RAISING THE FLAG

Now all the arrangements are completed with the invitation (ahvana) and invocation (avahana) of all divinities to be present and the stage is set for the actual Dhvajarohana. The musical ensemble contributing to the auspicious music, and the priest reciting the Vrsamutantra, the banner is raised to the high Yastiphalaka and fixed there tightly.¹⁵

The extra rope, Darbha – string are bound in the clock – wise direction on the Dhvaja-danda, the staff in then covered with a cloth.

After the flag raising, abhiseka is performed to the bottom of the danda with the waters from the central Vrsabhakumbha. The eight petals in the lotus – seat of the danda are sprinkled with the waters from the eight Vidyaswara kumbhas. Unguents, naivedya are offered once againto complete the worship of the Dhvajarohana.

CONCLUSION

Viewed in this perspective the present study on the Dhvajarohana is to be considered purposeful in revealing the unique of ritualistic patterns of Hindu temples in form, ideas and mode of visualisation. However, it is only from the Agamic text that we are able to understand how the structural elements and ritual merge and infuse an aura of divinity the pervades the temple, its activities and the environs.

FOOTNOTES

01. Ajitagama – kriyapada, Vol. 1, ed N. R. Bhatt, Institute of Indology, Pondichery 1964, 4; 27 – 76.
02. Kandiah C. V., Mattakkalappu Saivakkovilgal – Part I and II Dept. of Hindu Religious & Cultural Affairs, Colombo – 07, 1997, P. 17.
03. Kriyakramadyotika, in Grantha Sript Chidambaram 1927, p. 6.
04. Ibid. P. 9.
05. Saiva Bhusanam, compiled in Grantha with Tamil meaning by Sri Panchakshara Gurukkal, Kumbhakonam, 1925, P. 135.
06. Ibid, P. 229.
07. Kamikagama (Uttara), Granthscript and Tamil meaning, Mayilai Alagappa Mudaliar, 1908, 6; 25 – 27.
08. Kriyakramadyotika, P. 11.
09. Mahorava Vilakkam (Tamil), Accuveli Kumaswamy Gurukkal, Madras 1958, P. 8.
10. Kamikagama (Uttara), 55; 29 – 32.
11. Ibid 55, 79 – 80.
12. Kriyakramadyotika, P. 16.
13. Ibid, P. 17.
14. Ibid, P. 67.
15. Kamikagam (Uttara) 55; 81 – 88.

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