

Ignatius Hirudayam
Aikiya Alayam, Madras

AGAMIC TRADITION OF WORSHIP

1. The Agamic Literature

The word Agama means "coming near", "approaching",¹ a traditional doctrine or precept, collection of such doctrines, sacred book, anything handed down and fixed by tradition.² The term Agama is used in contradistinction to *nigama*. *Nigama* is used to denote the tradition or spiritual teaching which claims to have originated from the Vedas, whereas Agama refers broadly to the *avaidika* or non-Vedic doctrines and practices of Hinduism. The Jain Agamas collectively constitute the Jain canon.³

"The Agamas", wrote Pundit D. Savarirayapillai, "are the oldest products of the Dravidian literature" and they contain the experience, beliefs and practices of the pre-Vedic, non-Aryan religion of India as it fanned out under various influences including Vedic, into a plethora of religions and sects. The very antiquity of the Agamas entitled them to sanctity equal to, if not more than, that of the Vedas. V.V. Ramanan and W.H. Schomerus placed the Agamas before the first Buddhist Council, i.e. 480 B.C.⁴ But the *Saiva*, *Vaishnava* and *Sakta Agamas*, being codifications of the beliefs and practices of these sects, written in post-classical Sanskrit, may safely be assigned to the second half of the first millennium of the Christian era. The *Kāmikāgama* among the *Sivagamas* is perhaps the oldest. The *Uttara-Kāmikāgama* prescribes the celebration of the impalement of the Jainas at the instance of Tiru Jnana Sambandhar on the 7th day of the *mahotsava*

of Siva. Since Tiru Jnana Sambandhar lived in the middle of the 7th century, the *Uttara-Kāmikāgama* ought to be assigned a later date. The Agamas prescribe the recital of the Dravida Vedas, which for the Saivite are the 12 *Tirumurai* and for the Vaishnavite the 4000 *Divya Prabandham*. Hence the codification of prescriptions and systematization of the philosophical doctrines scattered in the Saivite and Vaishnavite *bhakti* and mystical canonical literature must have taken place after most of that literature was composed. Most of the Agamas available at present may therefore be safely assigned to the period between the 9th and 12th centuries A.D. But the prescriptions found in these Agamas are much older than their codifications and perhaps existed from time immemorial as their name suggests. We consider here only the Saivite and Vaishnavite Agamas and omit the Sakta Agamas.

Both Saivite and Vaishnavite Agamas claim an authority superior to that of the Vedas and legends have been created to establish their claim. But the great *acharyas* in Saivism, e.g. Tirumular, and in Vaishnavism, e.g. Vedanta Desikar, have asserted that the Vedas and the Agamas form an integral whole. There is no claim to the eternity of the Agamas as in the Vedic Mimamsa school. In fact the *Sāmkhya Karika* of Isvarakrishna defines Agama as "divine revelation or valid testimony... incontrovertible (knowledge derived from) verbal testimony". This sounds like Scholastic testimony.

Saivites mention 28 Agamas and 207 Upagamas (subsidiary works), and assign them to various Saivite sects, which disappeared long ago. So perhaps most of these texts have been irretrievably lost. The best known and most used Agamas of the Saivites are the *Kāmika*, *Kāraṇa*, *Raurava* and *Mrgendra agamas*. We have about a dozen printed Agamas available, some of them like the *Kāraṇa* and *Kāmika*, translated into Tamil. A few others have been edited and commented on in French.⁵ We have also secondary sources, which are more used than the Agamas by the priests. These are the *Somasambhupaddhati* and *Siddhantasārāvali* by Trilocana Sivacharyar, *Kriyakramadyoti*, *Sivalaya Nitya Puja Vidhi* and *Purvam Diksha Vidhi*, etc., by Aghora Sivacharyar. There are, in addition, quite a few popular renderings of the contents of these works by Sivasri Tatpurusha Desikar of Deva-

1. Cf. *Atharva Veda* VI. 81, 2; XIX. 35-3.

2. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*.

3. Cf. Benjamin Walker, *Hindu World: An Encyclopaedia Survey of Hinduism*, Vol. I (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1968).

4. Cf. *Saiva Siddhanta*, I. No. 3, p. 201.

5. For example *Ajitagama*, etc., published by De L'Institut Français D'Indologie, Pondicherry.

kottai and others. The other Agamas and Agamic traditional works are still to be recovered from the families of the ancient priesthood.

The Thenkalai Vaishnavites follow what are called *Vaikhānasa Agamas*. They are said to be four but none of them is available in print. The Vada-kalai Vaishnavas base their life and worship on the Agamas, which they call *Pancharatra Sambitas*. They are said to be 108, but only a few are available in print. Daniel A. Smith quotes some 36 of these Agamas in his *Vaishnava Iconography*. One of the most influential Pancharatra texts currently available is the *Padma Sambita*. The *Parama Sambita* is the only authentic Pancharatra text fully translated into English. Besides the *Vishnu Sambita*, which is often quoted, three works, namely, the *Sātvata Sambita*, *Banshakara Sambita* and *Jayāgya Sambita* are published together under the title *Ratnatrayam*. Finally *Makutagamam*, which has recently been published, gives information about things common to Vaishnavism and Saivism.

Ideally, each of these Agamas is supposed to contain four parts (*pādās*), viz., *chariya*, *kriya*, *yoga* and *jnāna pādās*. The first regulates the pre-liturgical and para-liturgical activities of believers. The *kriya pādā*, which concerns us here, prescribes all the details of liturgical cults, both private and public, as well as the sacramentals (corresponding to what *Grihya Sutras* etc., did in Vedic religions). The *yoga pādā* teaches the techniques of meditation. But its esoteric part—Laya Yoga or Kundalini Yoga—gives the model for the layout of the temple and its architecture. The *jnāna pādā* gives the credal position of the sect to which it belongs and elaborates its theology. In the construction of the temples, both Saivites and Vaishnavites follow the prescriptions of the *Vaikhānasa Agamas*. This seems to prevail only in the South, especially in Tamil Nadu. For instance, the temple with seven *avarnas* or compound walls with seven *prakaras* or perambulatories in between them is regarded as ideal, (*Uttamottama*). The temple with only one *avaraṇa* and one *prakara* is called the lowest (*adbama*). And the others are rated in between them. There are only three *Uttamottama* temples in Tamil Nadu, the most famous being the Vishnu Temple at Srirangam island near Tiruchirapalli. As mentioned above, the Agamas prescribe the recital of the Dravida Vedas in public worship along with the Sanskrit Vedas and with the *mantras* peculiar to each sect.

2. Agamic Worship

The whole of the Agamic Spirituality may be said to consist in the worship of the Deity dwelling in the worshipper, sustaining his being, guiding his life and, finally, gathering him up to itself. The fantasies of the Puranas created seven heavens above and seven hells below. The metaphysical and psychological speculations of the philosophers distinguished in the structure of the human being sheaths (*kosas*), five or seven, one subtler than the other. And mystic theologians identified the worlds (*lokas*) above with the *kosas* inside, so that what is fancied as the flight into the *bhu—bhuvā—svah—mahar jano—tapo* and *satya lokas* is in point of fact an exploration into the inner space of *annamaya, pranamaya, manomaya, vijñānamaya* and *ānandamaya kosas*. Since God's presence is more interior than the most interior part of ourselves, spiritual life and worship is but the process of interiorisation and intensification of our consciousness till it discovers in the *vaikunta* or *kailasa* of the core of its being the Divine presence and identifies itself with it. This has to be experienced through the five stages of consciousness: *jagrat* or waking state, *svapna* or dream state, *sushupti* or deep dreamless sleep, *turiya* or the 4th state and *turiyatita*, i.e. transcending all the previous states.

This process has necessitated the projection of the layout and structure of the Vaishnava and Saiva temples in the South. The seven psychosomatic plexuses or centres (*chakras*) believed in by Laya Yoga or Kundalini Yoga have determined the placement of the several aspects and manifestations of the Deity (*murtis*) worshipped in the temple. The *mulādāra*, *svadhisthāna* and *manipūraka chakras* correspond to the altar of holocaust (*bali-pita*), flag staff (*dvajastambha*) and the carrier (*vahana*) of the Deity, which are placed in front of the entrance of the Hall of the Faithful (*maha mantapa*). The *anahata chakra* near the heart corresponds to the shrine of the Goddess, and the *vishuddhi chakra* to the idols at the entrance of the *ardha mantapa*.

The *ajna chakra* corresponds to the Formless Form or Linga in the Central Shrine (*garbhagriha* or *mulasthana*). The thousand-petalled (*sahasrara*) *chakra*, which is believed to be over the head, corresponds to the *vimana* over the *mulasthana*. In Vaishnava temples the Sakti aspect of the Deity is installed as the Goddess by the side of the fixed idol of the deity within the *mulasthana* itself. The *vimana* over the *mulasthana* depicts on the four sides the four formations (*viyuhās*) of Vishnu.

Besides this horizontal disposition of the *murthis* in the temple, the following sacred chattels are buried one over the other exactly under where the immovable icon (*dhruvabera*) of the *garbhagriha* is established:

1. *Ādhārasila* or support stone, which is a square block of granite or other hard stone of definite dimensions. It is said, by some, to represent the *mūlādhara chakra* of the body. 2. Over it is placed the pot of deposit (*nidhikumbha*). It is said to stand for the *swadhishtana chakra*. It is a pot-like device in stone or copper. 3. Over the *nidhikumbha* is placed the lotus bud (*padma*) and it is said to represent the *manipūra chakra*. 4. *Kurma* (tortoise) made in stone is placed over the *nidhikumbha* and is said to represent the *anāhata chakra*. 5. An open lotus and *Kurma* (tortoise) in silver are placed on the *Kurma* and it is said to represent the *vishuddha chakra*. 6. An open lotus and *Kurma* in gold are placed over the silver ones representing the *ajna chakra*. 7. Over these stands a *yoganāli*, which is a hollow tube, and it is said to represent the spinal cord (*sushumna*). 8. Over these seven items stands, at the level of the floor of the *garbhagriha*, the *napumsakasila* in stone to act as the support for the *pita*, which in its turn, will hold the *vigraha* or *linga*. The first six articles are ceremonially fixed successively, with appropriate *mantras*. This is known as *shadadhara-pratishtha* (six supports) by the Tantrin. L.A. Ravi Varma⁶ affirms that the arrangement depicts the *kshetra* temple itself as the *kshetra* (body) of the *yogin*. The actual idol placed where the *sahasrārapadma* is located. Thus a perfect yogic representation is given to the *pratishtha vigraha*. But Swaminatha Gurukul and others give different explanations of these articles.

3. Rituals of the Saivites (*Saiva Anushtāna*)

A devout Saivite rises from sleep in the *Brahma muhurtam*, i.e., 90 minutes ($3\frac{3}{4}$ *naligai*) before sunrise and sits in comfortable posture (*rusirasana*, or *sukhasana*) facing the east or north, applies the sacred ashes on his forehead and makes his meditation (*vaikarai dhyana*) on Siva. Then he goes through his morning

6. L.A. Ravi Varma. *Cultural Heritage of India*, Haridas Bhattacharyya, ed. (Calcutta: The Ramakrishna Mission, 1956).

routine according to the rules given in the Āgamas, ending in a bath in a river, waterfall, tank or well. During his bath he recites the *Bhairava prarthana*.⁷ Then, if he is a Brahmin, he performs his priestly prayer (*vaidika sandhya vandana*) and then the Saivite *sandhya*. We are told that *vaidika sandhya* may be omitted but never the *Saivite sandhya*. *Saivite sandhya* is to be performed four times a day: at sunrise, at midday, at sunset and at midnight. It includes the *marjanam* or *suddhi* by blessing the water and sprinkling oneself with it and another mode of inner purification known as *ahamarshana*. *Pranāyāma* and *surya gayatri japa* follow. Next comes *sadāsiva dhyana* with the *Siva gayatri japa*: *Om tan mabesaya vidmahe Vak visuddhāya dhīmahi tan nas Sivah pracodayat*, recited ten times meditatively. Five oblations of water (*darpanas*) are offered. The evening prayer (*sandhya vandana*) ends with offering of water for sipping (*acamana*) and giving a form to the deity (*sakalīkaraṇa*).

There are three forms of Saivite worship, viz. prayer (*japa*) including *mantra japa*, *homa* and *puja* proper. Every Saivite uses the *Saivite Tirumurai* for his recital (*pārāyana*) as the discipline to grow in his way of devotion. Some of the stanzas of the *Tirumurai* can lead a person into the most profound meditation. *Tirumurai pārāyana* leads naturally to the *japa yoga sadhana*: *tad japah tad arthabbavana*.⁸ There are three stages of prayer common to many sects but made much use of in Saivism: *Vācika* or *vaikarī*, where the hymn is pronounced in a clear distinct and loud manner, to be heard and understood by all present. The *upamsu* (low), where words are pronounced distinctly but in a low tone, so that only the person repeating them hears them. Only the lips move. The *mānasa* (mental prayer), where there is no movement of the vocal organs or of the lips, but there is only the continuous meditation on the meaning of the hymn syllable by syllable, word by word. One first visualizes a form, and this leads one to a meditation of the Formless till, finally, the divine light takes possession of one. Those Saivites who have received the special training may perform the *Siva puja* and the *agni karya* or *homa*. The *homa* is a Vedic rite adapted to Agamic requirements.

7. Cf. Somasambhupaddhati. Part I. *Kānigāgama Kriyapada*.

8. *Yoga Sutra* 1. 28.

4. *Worship of Siva (Siva puja)*

The origin of the term *puja* is still unexplained in Sanskrit, while some of the Dravidian scholars derive it from the Dravidian way of worshipping the Deity with offerings and anointings of a non-bloody type. The Aryan or Vedic rite of *homa*, of Indo-Iranian origin, was an animal sacrifice in a fire pit. This animal rite of nomadic tribes gradually gave place to the old indigenous agricultural peoples' mode of bloodless offerings.

Today *puja* is of two kinds: the *atmartha puja* and *parartha puja*. The *atmartha puja* is performed by the householder seated meditatively in his room for worship at home and meant for his spiritual benefit. *Karanagama (Nityarcana Vidhi)*, however, defines *atmartha puja* as performed by the salvation of all souls.⁹ *Parartha puja* is performed by the temple priests in the temple at set times and is meant for the temporal benefit of the village or the surrounding region. The spiritually mature are said to be above involvement in temple worship. Those who can afford to fulfil all the prescriptions of the Agamas have to perform eight acts of worship per day, with an offering of eight flowers, each accompanied by an invocation. Some derive the name *puja* from this act: *pu+ceital* (in Tamil), act of flower worship. The first *puja* at home is offered after the first *samdhya* (meeting of night and day, dawn), the last with the evening *samdhya*, the central and most solemn *puja* being at the midday *samdhya* (meeting of forenoon and afternoon).

5. *Worship for all souls (atmartha puja)*

The *atmartha puja* consists of a number of ceremonies with prescribed gestures (*mudras*) followed by prescribed hymns. But the arrangement and order varies from Agama to Agama and tradition to tradition, giving rise to different rites. The main ceremonies are the following:

1. *Bhumi Suddhi*: purification of the place of worship and sprinkling of water and uttering of the *astra-mantra*.
2. Veneration (vandana) of *Ganapati or Vignesvara and Guru*: "Om Mahaganapataya namah; Om Sivaguruve namah."

9. *Nityarcana Vidhi*: No. 9

3. *Asana* : The worshipper sits on a plank, carpet or other approved seat and pronounces the *Asana mantra*: "*adbhara-sakti kamalasanya namah*."¹⁰ This is followed by *samkalpa*, formulation of the intention.

4. *Jala Suddhi* : This includes the following items:

nirikshana : looking at the water with *divya-mudra*, and meditating on how Siva purifies it by the fire of his third eye.

prokshana : sprinkling of the water.

tādāna : the tapping of the pot of water.

apyukshana : covering the water pot with *kavaca mantra*.

talatrāya : tapping on the hand.

digbhandana : to protect oneself from malefic influences.

agniprakara : an imaginary wall of fire to ward off evil forces. It is done with *astra-mantra*.¹¹

avakundanam : covering oneself with *dhenu-mudra* and *kavaca mantra*.

astra sandhyopasana : Worship of sandhya Devi.

acamanam: sipping of water from the hollow of the palm with the hymn: "*Om ham atmatatvaya namah; Om him vidyatatvaya namah; Om hum Sivatatvaya namah*." It is followed by the prescribed manner of wiping the lips. 5. *anga sparsa*: touching the twelve parts of the body and consecrating them with holy gesture (*divya-mudra*) reciting the *mamānta mantra*, "*Om hrđyāya namah*."

6. *karasuddhi*: purification of hands. 7. *vibhūtisuddhi*: purification of the Ashes by means of the *Kalā mantras*. 8. *amalasnāna*: besmearing oneself with the ashes. 9. *bhasmasnāna*: marking three lines with the ashes on the forehead, breast, arms etc. 10. *mantrasnāna*: by reciting *kavaca mantra*. 11. *mānasasnāna* by means of *acamana* etc., to remove the impurities. 12. *prānāyāma*: In the rite of breathing the worshipper meditates using prescribed hymns that his spiritual body be cleansed of all dross and converted into the Lord himself. "First the *jiva* is brought up the *sushumna* and transferred to the feet of the Lord in the *sabāsvara padma*. While the *prānāyāma* continues with the sounding of the *vayu bija* (sound), 'yam' the dross of the spiritual body is believed to be dried up; then with the *agni bija*, 'ram' the dross is burnt

10. *Somasambhupaddhati* gives the diagram for the *sapāvivāra Puja*.

11. "Victorious Agni we set Thee, a Sage, around us as a fort", *Atharva Veda*, VII:7.

up; then with 'vam' the drossless body is bathed in ambrosia and with 'lam' a purified body is regenerated now, free of all dross and comparable to the spirit of the Lord himself. This meditation of the cleansing is known as *bhutasuddhi*.¹²

After all these purificatory rites comes the *ātma-prāna-pratishtha* with the *ajapa* hymn or *mānasana* hymn and soham *bhavana* along with various recitals (*pārāyanās*). The worshipper visualizes the deity as his God of special love (*ishtha devatha*), seated in his *manipuraka chakra* (the region of the coeliac plexus of modern anatomy). To strengthen this meditation he performs the *sakalīkarana* (sakala=form; karana=make); the ceremony of giving a form to the formless deity. This is done by means of various placing or installing (*nyasas*): placing the Deity in the different parts of the fingers (*kara nyasa*), installing Siva in the hands held in *padma mudra* and meditating; *shadanga nyasa* or placing Siva in the six parts of the body such as the heart, the tuft and the head. (This *shadanga* is for the protection of the body and to kill desire, anger etc.) touching different parts of the entire body, (*mātrika nyasa*) is now visualized as being united with Siva.

If the worship is open to others, the *achārya* transfers the deity (*devata*) from his *manipura* to the idol (*vigraha*: to grasp firmly) or to the *linga* or to the *kumbha* or to the lighted lamp before him. And after the public worship the devata is returned to the *manipura* of the *sadhaka* or *acharya*, by what is known as *udvāsana*. The puja proper consist of the five forms of worship (*panchopasara*) to the idol. Some texts explain the *panchopasara* as consisting of:

1. *āvahana*: invocation or welcome; 2. *sthapana*: placing on the Asanam prepared for the Lord; 3. *sannidhīkarana*: bringing near or approaching; 4. *puja*: worshipping or adoration proper, and,

12. L.A. Ravi Varma in his article "Rituals of Worship" in the *Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. IV, pp. 450-451, gives the above details and adds "Today these preliminaries are done as a mere formality" (footnote 26). Elanji Chocklingam in his *Alayangalin Utporul*, Vols I & II, blames all the floods, drought, plagues and other natural calamities that afflict the Indian population on those consecrated priests who perform Puja without the needed mental concentration. Ravi Varma, however, adds, "The original intention was different. These ought to be done in the strict yogic way and by trained yogins the purificatory ritual is real and meaningful. Even to non-yogins, if done with faith, these preliminaries have great value as auto-suggestions and a high degree of spiritual purity can thereby be achieved": *op. cit.* p. 451.

5. *visarjana*: worshipful seeing off at the end of the puja.

The *panchopasara* sometimes becomes *dasopasara* (10) forms or *shodopasara* (16) forms. But usually five forms of worship constitutes a part of the *puja* proper given as No. 4 above (worshipping or adoration proper) and consists of offering of the five elements of the world (*darpana*) to signify the return of all things to the deity. The details are:

The ritual act (Upacara)	Elements (Tattva)	Sound (Bija)	Sound Materials used	Meaning
<i>Padya</i>	<i>Ap</i>	Vam	water:	adherence (<i>sneha</i>) denotes the relation of servant to the Master.
<i>Gandha</i>	<i>prthvi</i>	Lam	sandal etc:	trust (<i>visvāsa</i>) of a faithful friend.
<i>Pushpa</i>	<i>Akasa</i>	Ham	Flowers:	adoration (<i>summāna</i>) of the deity as the highest good.
<i>Dhūpa</i>	<i>Vāyu</i>	Yam	Incense:	intense love (<i>bhakti</i>).
<i>Dipa</i>	<i>Tejas</i>	Ram	Light:	knowledge (<i>ināna</i>) of the relation to the deity.
<i>Naivedya</i>	<i>Jiva</i>	Vam	Food (<i>agape</i>):	realization of the relationship with the deity in union (<i>adatmyabhodha</i>)

This worship has also developed into *dasopasara* and *shodopasara* as mentioned above. The *puja* ends with *sadasiva dhyana*, *Siva gayatri japa*, *pradakshina* (circumambulation) and *pranām* (prostration).

6. *Worship for temporal benefit (parartha puja)*

The *puja* performed in the temple for the welfare of all living beings in the area is *parārtha puja*. This is done by invoking the deity in the *garbhagriha* and ceremonially manifesting the *pancakrtya* i.e., creation, preservation, involution, obscuration and salvation, believed to be performed by the five deities (*pancamurties*) i.e. Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra, Maheswara and Sadasiva and shown as one symbol in the Nataraja-representation. According to the Agamas, seven *pujas* per day have to be performed in the temple: (1) *ushakala puja*, at dawn i.e. at 5 a.m.

(2) *kālai sandhi puja* morning puja (6 a.m.), (3) *upasadhi puja*: forenoon puja (9 a.m.), (4) *uchchi-k-kāla puja*: midday, (5) *sāyunkāla puja*: evening puja (6 p.m.), (6) *pradoshakāla puja* (8 p.m.) and (7) *ardhajāma puja* (10 p.m.). Very few temples, however, have seven pujas per day.

At the end of the *ardhajāma puja*, the idol used for worship in the *garbhagriha* is brought ceremonially to the Devi's shrine and placed to the right of the idol of the Devi and a puja is performed and then a veil is drawn and the shrine is locked. This signifies the incomprehensible identity of Sakti and Siva in their transcendent state. The *mahamantapa* is locked and the seal is left in the Kshetrabala's shrine after a puja to that idol, signifying that divine providence, preservation and protection surrounds us continuously. Then the temple is locked and the priest (*acharya*) goes home for his night's rest.

The next day he wakes up at about 4 a.m., performs his rituals (*anushtanas*) of the morning ceremonially and after bath vests himself in a white silk cloth (*dhoti*) and white silk *angavastra* and, wearing the sacred thread, proceeds to the temple. He performs the *sakalikarana*, consisting of *kara nyāsa* and *anga nyāsa* as mentioned in the *athmartha puja*, and protects himself with the *digbhandana* and *agni prakara*. He performs *prānāyāna* and the *bhutasuddhi* as mentioned in the *athmartha puja*. *Sivahastabhavana* and *antaryagna* are then performed: these are meditations on the trident of Siva as a symbol of power and grace and an interior act of sacrifice. Then he proceeds to the shrine of the Kshetrabala and after worshipping him takes the seal and opens the *mahamantapa*, sees to the cleaning of the *mantapa* and *garbhagriha*, removes the *nirmalias*, i.e. the offerings of the previous day's puja and offers them to Chandigesa on the northern side of the *garbhagriha*. He sees that the water for *padya*, liquid for *arghya*, *pancagavya*, *pancāmṛta* and other requisites for the puja and the *abhisheka* are prepared properly. Then he starts with cleansing the ground (*sthala suddhi*; *bhumi suddhi*) by sprinkling it with *arghya* water; purifying the puja requisites (*dravya suddhi*) by sprinkling the water on them and worshipping Sun (Surya puja or Surya dhyana). We understand that worship of Sun is not done nowadays. But the *Karanāgama* says that the worship that does not begin with Surya puja is worthless.

Then he does the Ganesa puja or the Dvāra puja at the door of the *mahamantapa* and reaches the *garbhagriha*, where he per-

forms the *linga suddhi*, *mantra suddhi* and *ādhārasakti puja*. Various *asanas* or thrones are mentally prepared by puja for the coming down (avahana) of the Lord: main throne (*simbasana*) for his anointing (*abhisheka*), lotus seat (*padmasana*) for offerings (*archana*), spotless throne (*vimalasana*) for gifts (*naivedya*) and a broad stage (*anantasana*) for the music and dance for praise (*stotra*). Anointing is performed on the *lingam*, followed by *panchopasara*, which consists of:

1. Washing (*padya*) of the feet of the Lord, with water prepared ceremonially with flowers etc.
2. Offering of water for sipping (*acamana*) before and after the ceremonies; this water is prepared ceremonially with sandal, white mustard etc.
3. Scented water (*arghya*) prepared with gingili seed, paddy, milk etc., sprinkled on the head in the beginning of the Puja.
4. Gift (*naivedyam*) consisting of various offerings of food, spices etc.
5. Incense (*dhupa*) and waving of light (*dipa arati*): The *dipa arati* itself in some temples consists of waving with sixteen different lamps.

After the ritualistic *panchopasara* comes *japa*, *mantra japa* and meditation proper. The greatest *mantra* for the Saivite is the five-lettered *mantra*, (*panchakshara*), which consists of the *Sthula panchakshara* of the beginners, viz., Na-ma-si-va-ya, and the *sukshma panchakshara* of the spiritually mature viz., Si-va-ya-namah. The cult ends with circumambulation (*pradakshina*) around the icon, and prostration. After the puja, *archana* is performed for individuals and groups of worshippers, who bring in their offerings, and *prasāda* is distributed.

7. Rituals of the Vaishnavites

Sri Rāmānuja is said to have written nine works beginning with the *Sri Bashya*. The eighth work is *Ratnatraya*, which teaches the doctrine and practice of surrender (*Vaishnava saranagati*). His last work is said to be *Nityagrandha*, which summarises the Agamic prescriptions of the Vaishnavite's daily religious duties ending in the liturgical worship called *tiru ārādhana* (corresponding to puja). A faithful Vaishnavite is expected to wake up from night's rest at 4.30 a.m. i.e. one *muhurtam* before sunrise. He ought to pronounce seven times the sacred name of 'Hari' in his very first waking breath, if he belongs to the Vadakalai sect (*sampradaya*) and then recite the prescribed hymn (*sloka*s) and resolve to redeem the time still left for him to live. Then he rises

from bed. If he belongs to the Thenkalai sect (*sampradaya*) he repeats 'Harir Harih Harir Harih' i.e. four times 'Hari', in his first breath. Then he rises from bed, washes, performs sipping of water and *prānāyāma*. Then he repeats the prescribed prayers (*slokas* or bhakti stanzas). He has to meditate on the five fold state of Vishnu, viz., *para* state, *vyuha* state, *vibhava* state, *antaryami* state and *archavatara* state.

All Vaishnavites have common rules prescribed for morning cleansings ending with *ācamanam* and *prānāyāma*. The morning bath is performed according to the separate rules of Vadakalai and Thenkalai ways of worship (*sampradaya*). After bathing, the rules for the marking of the forehead and eleven other parts of the body are common to both groups or sects (*kalais*), but the marks are of different shape. One has to meditate that he is carrying the marks of the feet of the Lord and his *Sakti* on his *body* while reciting the twelve names of Vishnu. Meditation on the line of teachers (*guruparambara dhyana*) differs in the two sects; so also the offering of water (*darpana*) to the Devas and Rishis. Prayer at fixed hours (*samdhya vandana*), which follows, is vedic and common to both sects, it is done three times a day: morning (*kalai samdhya*), midday (*mādhyahniha samdhya*) and evening (*sāyum samdhya*). It differs according to the Veda to which one's family belongs.

a. Divine Worship (Tiru Ārādhana)

After the *samdhya vandana*, the household worship called *tiru ārādhana* is performed. The worshipper is reminded that a heart purified so as to be free from greed and lust, a tongue free from lies and small talk, a body that hurts no one,—these three are the indispensable prerequisites for an acceptable *tiru ārādhana*. The eight flowers most acceptable to Vishnu are indeed: 1) non-violence (*ahimsa*), 2) control of the senses, 3) mercy towards all living creatures (*daya*), 4) patience, 5) control of the mind, 6) meditation on the sacred names of the Lord, 7) Knowledge (*jnana*) that discerns good from evil and the acceptable from the unacceptable, and last but not least, 8) truth (*satya*). If these fundamentals are kept in mind a practising Vaishnavite can attain a holy life by means of daily *tiru ārādhana*. People are corrupt because their worship is corrupt. This is true for all religions. The preparation for the worship includes gathering the Tulsi ceremonially with the recital of the proper prayers (*slokas*).

b. Worship of the Vadakalai sect (*vadakalai sampradaya*)

The Sri Vaishnavas of the Vadakalai sect perform the daily household worship (*tiru ārādhana*) as follows:

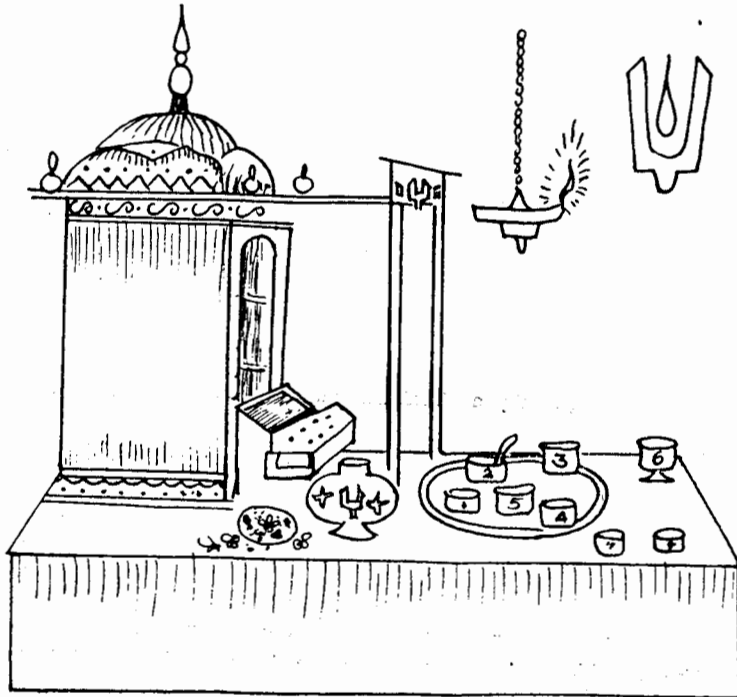
1. Full prostration (*sāshtānga prānam*).
2. Opening of the Koil Azhwar and exposition of the objects of worship. The Koil Azhwar is a wooden tabernacle in which the idol of the manifestation of Vishnu (*ishtha devata*) or the Formless Form called *salagrama*¹³ is kept behind closed doors. These objects of worship are brought out and exposed before the door of the tabernacle. The Vaishnavites, besides the other forms of presence of Vishnu in the world, believe in special presence (*archavatara*) of deity in the object of worship during the period of worship, for the purpose of receiving worship.
3. Prostration with five limbs (*panchanga pranam*) of the body touching the ground.
4. Recital of the basic hymn (*mula mantra*) 'OM' along with the eight-lettered hymn (*ashtakshara mantra*) ten or twentyeight times.
5. The sacred vessels are arranged according to the rite of the Vadakalai sect (*sampradaya*) for: i) sprinkling on the head (*arghyam*), ii) water for the feet (*padyam*), iii) water for sipping (*acamaniam*), iv) water for shower (*snaniam*), v) water for all purposes (*sarvarthoyam*). There are also the following articles to be arranged: Vessel to receive the waters after each ceremony (*pratigraba vessel*), Vessel for invoking the waters of the sacred rivers (*tiruk-kaveri*), bell, plate with flowers, Tulsi, *Kumkum*, sandal etc., and plate for collecting bath water (*abbisheka*).
6. Filling these vessels, reciting the proper hymns (*mantras*).
7. Vaishnavite worship treats the Lord more anthropomorphically than the Saivite and the items, therefore, are more. But the meditation that accompanies the recitation of various *mantras* make the ceremonies meaningful.

13. "Salgrma is generally a flinted ammonite shell which is river-worn and thus rounded and beautifully polished.... Each one of these has a hole through which are visible several interior spiral grooves resembling the representation of the discus (*chakra*) of Vishnu...The Salagrama is, in consequence, looked upon as a representative of Vishnu...Salagramas may be of the following colours: brownish black, green, white, red, blue, dark brown, jet black, yellow or multi-coloured...Even pieces of the auspicious salagramas might be worshipped...Salagramas are worshipped by Vaishnavas and also by persons of the Vaidic Saiva persuasion: but the Agamic Saivas and the Vira-Saivas do not worship them. They worship the Bana Lingas, which mostly consist of quartz and are egg-shaped pebbles."

The worshipper, by his meditation and invocation, creates six successive thrones for the Lord and invites Him to occupy them to receive his worship as follows: 1. The Lord is invoked to be present on the thrones of prayer (*mantrasana*) to receive the initial worship of *arghya*, *padya* and *acamaniya*. These rites are repeated in each one of the following thrones (*asanas*). 2. The Lord is requested to come to the bath-throne (*snānāsana*) to receive the sacred bath (*abbisheka*). 3. The *Salagrama* is wiped with incense-smear cloth and placed again inside the tabernacle, and the Lord is invoked to come to the *alankarasana* and the idol is given new clothes, ornaments, sandal, flowers, *dhupa*, *dipa*, all these accompanied by Vedic or *bhakti* chants and the ringing of the bell. 4. Offering flower (*mantra pushpam*), reciting "Om Vasudevaya namah" etc. and offering Tulsi and then invoking the Lord on the dining table (*bhojyasana*) and offering the food (*prasada*) accompanied with prescribed gestures (*mudras*) and

The Household tabernacle called Koil Azhwar according to:

The Thenkalai Sampradaya

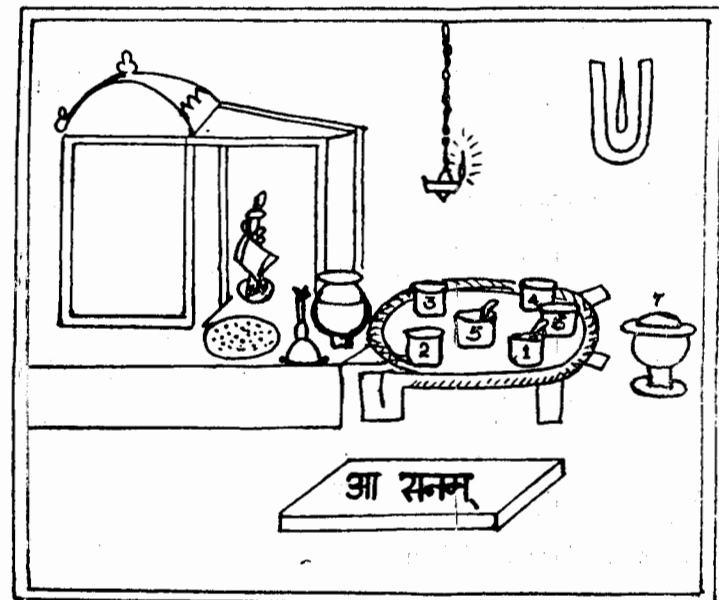


prayers (*mantras*)¹⁴. 5. The Lord is invoked on *punar mantrasana* to accept fruits, which have been sprinkled with *arghya* water. Lighted camphor is waved in *arati*. 6. And, finally, He is asked to take the *bharyangasana* to receive the worship of circumambulation and the adoration of full prostration (*sashtanga pranām*) and to forgive any defect that might have occurred during this worship and to hear Vedic and *bhakti* chants. Lastly, after *acamaniya*, the bath (*abbisheka*) liquid is sipped.

c. Worship of the Thenkalai Sect (*Thenkalai sampradaya*)

The prayers (*slokas*) recited while gathering Tulsi is proper to the sect. The way of arranging the sacred vessels also differs from that of Vadakalai, as also the chants that accompany the rite. The sectarian mark is distinct. (See accompanying diagram). The rest are the same as above.

The Vadakalai Sampradaya



¹⁴ A faithful Vaishnavite ought never to partake of any food which has not been offered to the Lord in the *tiru aradhana*. After meals a leaf of the sacred Tulsi must be eaten. When there is lack of time, at least the *arghya*, *padya* and *acamaniya* must be performed before eating.

8. Vaishnavites' Temple Worship (*Parartha Puja*)

No codified prescriptions of the Vaishnavite temple worship corresponding to the Saivite rituals (*paratha puja vidhi*) are available.¹⁵ In their absence only a summary of the general prescriptions can be given. What is not peculiar to the Vadakalai or Thenkalai sects are common to all Vaishnavite worship.

The Temple *tiru aradhana* is only a more solemn celebration of the household worship described above. While household (*atmartha puja*) worship is performed in the sitting (*asana*) pose of meditative worship, temple worship is called service (*sevai*) and is performed standing before the idol in the standing, seated or reclining pose. It is said to consist of 16 items of worship (*sbodopasara*): 1. meditation (*dhyana*) 2. epiclesis (*avahana*) calling on the Lord to come and reside in the idol and receive the worship; this is done by proper prayers (*mantras*) and gestures (*mudras*); 3. offering of the throne to the Lord: *mantrasana, snanasana* etc., 4. washing (*padya*) of the feet symbolized by presenting the *padya* water near the feet and pouring it out; 5. sprinkling (*arghya*), to denote hospitality by sprinkling the head with scented water; 6. ablution (*snana*), 7. offering of the sacred thread (*yajnopavita*). 8. giving of garments (*vastram*), 9. offering of sandal paste (*gandha*); 10. offering of flowers (*pushpa*); 11. waving of incense (*dhupa*); 12. waving of lights (*dipa*); 13. offering of food (*naivedya*), 14. objects for leisurely chewing (*tambula, pansupari*), 15. waving of lighted camphor (*karpoora nirarjana*), 16. Circumambulation (*pradakshina*), and prostration, (*namaskara*).

At the end of the worship the faithful are blessed by the symbol (*paduka*) of the footwear of the Lord being placed on their heads. There have been periods of conflict between Siva and Vishnu worshippers and also between the Vadakalai and Thenkalai worshippers of Vishnu. There have been also periods of irenic ecumenism among them. At present, in the Great Temple at Chidambaram, all people gathered in the Hall of the Faithful can worship Siva turning to the golden-roofed sanctuary and worship and receive the blessings of Vishnu by turning just to the left.

9. CONCLUSION

In all these Agamic forms of worship a non-Hindu is able to discern, appreciate and admire several items that evoke an echo

15. *Panchratra Prathishta Vidhi*, however, is available.

in his heart and make him desire to integrate them in his own worship. Yet, some of them cannot be easily integrated into one form of worship addressed to the acknowledged One Ultimate Reality. However, here the declaration of the Second Vatican Council strikes us forcibly: "The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions. She looks with sincere respect upon those ways of conduct and life, those rules and teachings, which, though differing in many particulars from what she holds and sets forth, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens every man."¹⁶

16. Walter M. Abbott, ed., *Documents of Vatican Second*, "Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions". (New York: The America press, 1966), p. 662, no. 2, para 5; also footnote no. 11.