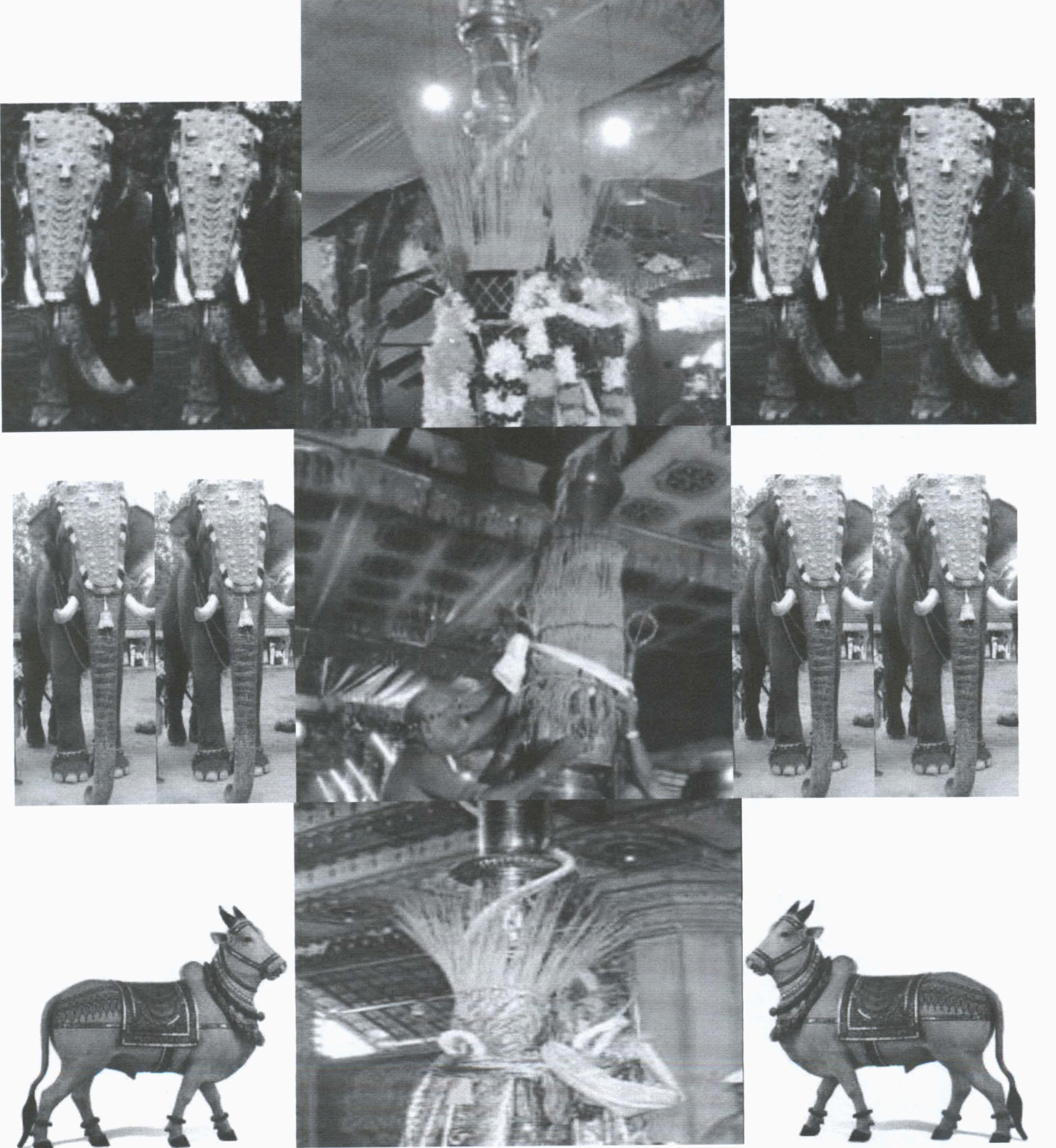


Path to Dharma

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Author - B.S.Sarma

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Editorial

'Path to Darma' the monthly magazine, published by Kshethra Vinayaka Temple, Sri Munneswaram, Chilaw, Sri Lanka, is presenting the 60th issue this month. The foremost intention of this magazine is to converse the perceptions linked to Hinduism and its ceremonial rituals, customs and dharma, to the anxious readers. The elucidation and investigation from the readers are appreciated.

B.Sivaramakrishna Sarma,

Kshethra Vinayaka Temple, Sri Munneswaram, Chilaw, Sri Lanka., December, 2012

The significance of Dwaja-sthambam in a temple

Uthsavas (festivals)

The most significant feature of the temple worship is the uthsava (festival) which plays an integral part of the worship temple and its rituals. Duration the period of the uthsavas (festivals) all the devotees, irrespective of their status in the community, join and participate willingly with enthusiasm in the religious activities and rights.

The term Uthsava (festival) means an occasion of celebration and exuberance. Uthsava in a temple is an occasion that engenders bliss and excitement which is shown by the term '*utsuthe harsham*' in Sanskrit. Uthsava is also known as Kshana (great moment), *Uddharsha* (excitement) and *Mahah* (auspicious occasion) according to Amara Kosha.

The word Uthsava, according to;

1. Uttara karanagama (4.1) "Ut" refers to wisdom and "sava" to what ushers in wellbeing (*savah kalyana kaaranam*).
2. Purushottama Samhita (32.20) explains that "Ut" is what is excellent (*uthkrishtha vachanam*) and "sava" is *yajnya* (homa/sacrifice).
3. Naradiya Samhita (18) and Isvara Samhita (10.3) say that "ut" means obstacle or impediment (*vighnah*) and "sava" is their elimination (*udgatha*). Hence, Uthsava is that ritual which eliminates obstacles.
4. Aniruddha Samhita (20.1) and Padma Samhita (2.10) enlighten that "sava" is wretchedness and "ut" is the act of tiding over that sadness. Uthsava is a circumstance to celebrate. Uthsavas also renew the sanctity of the deities worshipped.

Classification of Uthsavas

The Agama Shastras regard Uthsavas as occasions of great significance and of immense value. Uthsavas are classified according to;

- A. the nature of the Utsava,
 - B. the rituals involved,
 - C. the mode of commencement,
 - D. day of commencement,
 - E. day of termination and the duration of the Uthsava.
- A. Classification of Uthsavas according to their nature:**
- i. **Satvika** : Services delivered as predestined obligation with no aspiration are termed Satvika. These responsibilities are basically the *Nitya sevās* (Uthsava conducted on a daily basis). These services include, the festivals performed on specific auspicious days or carried out at weekly, fortnightly or monthly bimonthly.
 - ii. **Rajasa**: These are *Naimithika* (infrequent) Uthsavas conducted as purification measures due to an eclipse ;or damage to the temple because of some reasons or fire; damage caused to the image in the sanctum etc.

iii. **Misra:** These are performed with a desire as the festivals to commemorate the temple building or for fulfillment of any other desire.

B. Classification of Uthsavas according to the rituals involved:

Karnagama (24,424-5) classifies Uthsavas according to the rituals involved into four types namely;

- i. **Sakalya:** This type of uthsava comprises all the prescribed rituals, without ignoring any ritual.
- ii. **Pavana:** This type of uthsava comprises of rituals purifying the idol or the temple mandapas (halls) and other premises of the temple excepting hoisting the temple flag (pathaka).
- iii. **Shanta:** This type of uthsava comprises of rituals for the peace and harmony in the communities and country. This uthsava has Homa ceremony in the morning, Bali (offering of food) at noon, Veethi ula Uthsava (procession) in evening.
- iv. **Mangala:** This type of uthsava comprises of rituals for any auspicious reasons.

C. Classification of Uthsavas according to the rituals that commence the festivals of Uthsava :

Parameshwara Samhita (16, 28-29) and *Naradiya Samhita* (18, 7-8) which are Agama manuscripts that deals with the rules of the ceremonies of rituals, classify them in to three categories according to the rituals that inaugurate the festivals (utsava_arambha).

1. **Ankurarana:** to commence by offering the sprout is to search for happiness and prosperity. Seeds of nine grains namely;

- i. rice,
- ii. gingelly,
- iii. millet,
- iv. tail-pepper,
- v. black-gram,
- vi. mustard,
- vii. *mudga*, a bean
- viii. *samba*, a legume
- ix. *kaulatta* (*dolichos uniflorus*)

are sown in twelve earthen pots filled with mud ceremonially collected and placed on a certain specified period called *mandala*. Offerings are scattered in eight directions invoking their presiding deities to protect the sprouts. This ceremony is carried out during night, as moon is regarded the lord of plants.

2. **Bheri_tadana:** to instigate the utsava by beating the holy drum, for the delight of the *Devas*. Uthsava begins with drum beating ceremony, signifying invitation to the celestial beings to partake in the festival.

3. **Dwajarahana:** is the religious ritual to commence the utsava by hoisting the relevant flag, on the flag post (*duwajasthamba*) that brings happiness to all beings. The flag usually carries the figure of Garuda the carrier of Vishnu; or of Nandi Bull the vehicle of Siva; or that of a god. The figures are painted ritualistically and the flag is hoisted in the temple.

D. Classification of Uthsavas according to counting down from the day of Thirtha Snana:

Thirtha Snana (*Avabhrta Snana*), the ceremonial sacred bath of the icons of the temple in the river or pond (theertha kerney), marking the conclusion of the festival is a significant event in the festival. Often, the day of Thirtha Snana is first determined and the date of commencement of the Uthsava is then worked out which are given in an elaborate manner in, *Purushottama Samhita*, 23 and in *Purva-karanagama*, 141).

F. Classification of Uthsavas according to the duration:

Agama manuscripts namely, Raurava kriya (18-8-9); Chandra jnana (21); Ajitagama (27, 2-7); Diptagama (83) and Purva_karana-agama (141, 2-3) classify the Uthsavas according to their duration. The Uthsavas are conducted for different purposes to different set of gods; hence each of these Uthsava named differently as follows;

- i. **Seeking prosperity (*vridhhi*)- to please Brahma**
One day Uthsava is *Sambhava*.
Three day Uthsava is Muktha – to please Shiva
- ii. **Seeking success (*Vijaya*) – to please Lakshmi**
A five-day Uthsava is *Brahma*
A seven-day Uthsava is *Arsha*;
- iii. **For happiness (*Saukhya*)–to please Vishnu**
A nine-day Uthsava is *Sakta*
A twelve-day Uthsava is *Saura* or *Paitrka*
A thirteen-day Uthsava is *Kaumara*
A fourteen- day Uthsava is *Savitrya*; and
A fifteen-day Uthsava is *Chandra*.

Diptagama text considers the last three (from 13 to 15 days) as *uttama* (superior); the middle three (from 7 to 12 days) as *madhyama* “middling in merit” and the first three (from 1 to 5 days) as” *kanyaasa* “inferior.

In the case of the fifteen-day-Uthsavas, the proceedings begin with *Ankurarpana* (sprout offering). According to Vishvaksena Samhita (27, 12-16) the other rituals and events that follow the *Ankurarpana* on other days, in a sequence, are as follows;

- i. *Dwajarahana* (flag hoisting);
- ii. *Shudda Snana* (purifying bath) or *Bheri – tadana* (drum beating);
- iii. *Sthapana* (installation of idols);
- iv. Homa (fire obligations);
- v. *Bali_pradana* (food offerings);
- vi. *Churnotsava* or *mahothsava* or *Rathayatra* (procession of the idol in a decorated chariot);
- vii. *Tirtha snana* or *Avabharta Snana* (carrying the idols in procession for a ceremonial bath, to a tank ,pond,sea or river);
- viii. *Pushpayaga* (flower offerings);
- ix. *Dakshina Sampradana* (offering of gifts and money to the officiating priests and officials and others);
- x. *Dwaja avarohana* (taking down the flag ceremonially and concludes the Utsava).

Brahmothsava

The Brahmothsava is the most significant uthsava and generally a majestic event in a temple. The range and majesty of the Brahmothsava is an indicator of a temple for its fame, affluence, reputation and prestige.

Agama texts show five types of Brahmothsava.

- i. A one-day Brahmothsava (Brahma) intended to enhance the spiritual power of the temple (*Brahma tejo vridhhi*).

- ii. A three-day Brahmotsava (*Saiva*) to eradicate obstacles that bother the devotees (*Vighna nashana*).
- iii. A five-day Brahmotsava (*Aindra*) to prevent occurrence of famine and drought (*durbiksha nashana*).
- iv. A four- day Brahmotsava (*Arsha* or *manusha*) to secure prosperity for the people, ruler and the state (*Rajya vardhaka, lakshmi priti kara*). This is sometimes stretched to seven days.
And,
- v. A nine -day Brahmotsava (*Daivika*) praying for protection and happiness of the people (*Sarva rakshithartha.Praja sukhavaha*).

'dwajasthambam' (flag post of deity's endearing power)

In Sanskrit *dwaja* means whatever is raised, hence it has the suggestion of hope, desire, pride and will. Anything that elevates a man to higher level of perceptiveness, understanding and activity is *dwaja*.

Dwajasthambam (Flagstaff/ kodimaram) literally means "flag pole" This is located between the Rajagopuram and the Sanctum sanctorum (garbagruha) in a temple. Dwajasthambam is made of teak wood, coated with brass (an alloy) or Copper (Cu) sheet and with or without gold (Au) or silver (Ag) coating. Associated with Dwajasthamba is the 'Bali Peetam' which is located between the Dwajasthambam and the Rajagopuram, and it is the seat of offerings. Dwajasthambam is also known as Medhrasthaneshu.

The dwajastham is the backbone of the temple. There is a hope that the adjoining buildings should not raise their building above level to the dwajasthambam. As per agama shashtra the dwajasthambam straightened structure.

The Ancient scriptures mention that the temple is not only a home of God but strikingly the form of God Himself, which could be deduced by comparing the structure of the temple to God as perceived in human form. Here, the Girba-Griha (mulasthanam or womb chamber) is regarded as to be the head, Mahamandapa the stomach and Gopuram the feet of God. the Dwajasthambam plays an important role during brahmotsava festival

Viswakarmyam Vastu Shastra narrates thus:

"Garba Gruha Sirahapoktam antaraalam Galamthatha
Ardha Mandapam Hridayasthanam Kuchasthanam
Mandapomahan Medhrasthaneshu Dwajasthambam
Praakaram Janjuangeecha Gopuram Paadayosketha
Paadasya Angula Pokthaha Gopuram Sthupasthatha
Yevam Devaalayam angamuchyathe"

The height of the dwajasthambam varies depending on the height of the main deity in the Sanctum sanctorum. Dwajasthambam comprises of different parts in the descending order. 'veerakandam', 'padmam', 'kumbam', 'lasunam', 'venda', 'para' followed by 'dhandu' (small perpendicular pole flowing towards left from flag post's second 'venda'), and 'pattam'. 'ashtadhigpalas' are installed at this 'pattam', the emblem of the deity rests on the top of 'veerakandam.' 'pattam', is followed by 'padmam' 'galam', again 'pattam', then 'vedika', 'kapotham', 'kumudam' and 'jagathi.' Posterior to this 'lasunam', many 'vendas' and 'paras' and incorporate to achieve the desired height of the dwajasthambam. The dwaja-sthambam denotes the *kundalini-sakthi*. The base of dwajasthambam is considered as the *moolaadhara* and its apex the *sahasraara*. The wooden log coated with a metal (dwaja) represents the vertebral column and spinal cord of the human body. Also the coverings of dwaja by copper, bell-metal etc. are symbolic of the other bones and ribs around the vertebral column.

The **vaahana** at the top of the dwaja represents the *sahasraara chakra* through which, it is held, the ultimate consciousness leaves. The common confidence is that the deity is seated on the *vaahana*

and hence the **dwaja** is worshipped. Worshipping of **dwaja** itself equivalent to worshipping the main idol in the Sanctum sanctorum of the temple. A cloth flag with figure of Nandhi for Siva temple, figure of Garuda for Vishnu is hoisted during the temple festival Brahmastavam.

The **Pancharathra** a manuscript dealing with rituals of the temple, insists that a temple without a Dwajasthambam (Flagstaff/ kodimaram would be unproductive. Dwajasthambam furnishes the details regarding the all the information of the main idol in the Sanctum sanctorum

The **Sivasarvaswa** ,a manuscript dealing with temple rituals, informs that it is an indication of the insignia of the deity of the vehicle of the icon that is inside the sanctum. The ceremoniously installed dwajasthambam with its flag hoisted as per the prescribed rituals, would enable Gods and Manes to shower happiness and prosperity.

The Agama Shastras relate that the structure of the temple is a mini cosmos. The main entrance of the temple should face Easter direction. The perfect temple should have only one entrance, at Ardha-Mandapa, and at Garba-Griha (moolasthan) facing Eastwards. There must be the following structures for a temple with special reference to Dwajasthamba .

- i. A Shikara directly above the Garbha-Griha.
- ii. A Towering structure called the Rajagopuram (pyramid in pattern) on the Eastern side at the entrance to the Temple.
- iii. A Dwajasthamba (pillar) in line with the main shrine immediately after the Rajagopuram.
- iv. Near the Dwajasthamba is a lotus shaped pedestal for offerings, called the Balipecta.
- v. A Maha Mandapa (a large hall) for assembly of devotees.
- vi. The passage through the Mandapa leads to the “Garba-Griha” (womb chamber) where the Main Deity is installed.
- vii. There is a circumbulating passage or “Pradakshira Patha” consisting of an enclosed corridor around the Garba Griha and Mandapa.

The **Panjaratra Agama** describes the different parts of Dwajasthambam and residing devatas, according, to this script the different parts from top to bottom are as follows;

Yashti - Indra

Rajju - Anandan

Dwajam - Vihakesanan

Valayam - Vasuki

Bhedika - Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra

Mani - Lakshmi

Mala - Saraswathi

Padma Madhyam - East (Garuda), South (Pakshirajan), West (Suparnan), North (Vinatasutan)

Pradamavaranam - Sankam, Chakram, Musalam, Katkam, Gadha, Sarngam, Padmam, Vajram

Dwitiyavaranam - Lokabalakas

Mekalai - Mandalatrayam

Dhandakre – Vinatasudam

