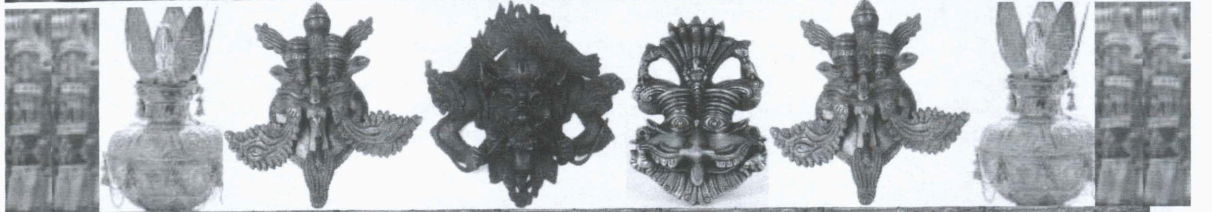
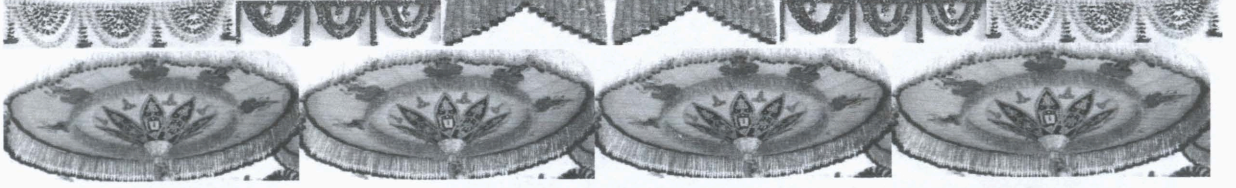


Path to Dharma

தர்ம நெறி (Dharma Neri)

87



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Author - B.S.Sarma

March

2015

மார்ச் (மாசி/தை)



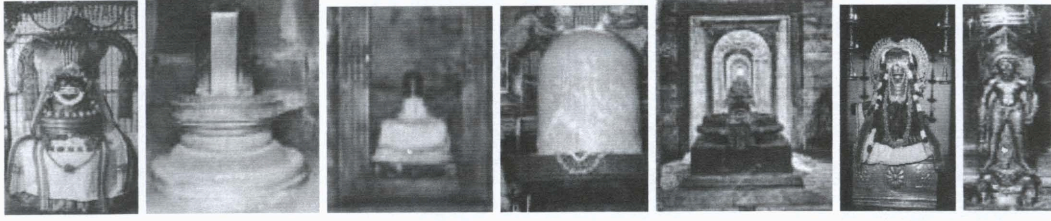
Editorial.

The monthly publication 'Path to Darma', by KshethraVinayakaTemple, Sri Munneswaram, Chilaw, Sri Lanka, is presenting the 87th number this month. The main imperative endeavor of this monthly magazine is to pass on the vision associated to Hindu dharma basically by replies to the issues put forward by the anxious readers. The comments and analysis of the readers are appreciated.

B.S. ivaramakrishnaSarma,

KshethraVinayakaTemple, SriMunneswaram, Chilaw, Sri Lanka. March, 2015

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சிவபிரான்

ஸ்ரீ காஞ்சி காமகோடி பீடாதிபதி
ஐகத்குரு ஸ்ரீ சங்கராசார்ய ஸ்வாமிகள்
ஸ்ரீ மடம், காஞ்சிபுரம்

சிவம் என்பதற்கு மங்களம் என்பது பொருள். தான் மங்களஸ்வரூபியாயிருந்து சிந்திக்கும் ஆன்மாக்களுக்கும், மங்களத்தை விளைவிப்பவர் சிவபிரான்.

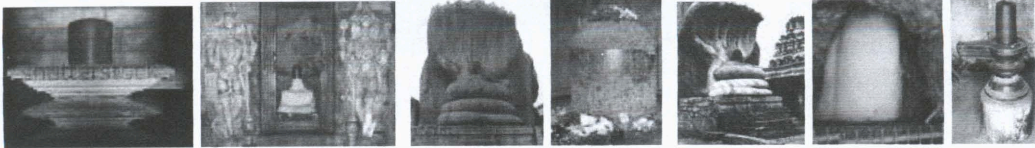
'சிவாய நம வென்று சிந்தித்திருப்பார்க்கு
'கருத்துற்றுப் பார்த்துக் கலங்காமல்
உள்ளத்திருத்திச் சிவனை நினை.'

என்பது ஓளவைப் பிராட்டியின் வாக்கு.

இச்சிவபிரான் உண்மையில் உருவமற்றவராயினும் பக்தர்களுக்கு அருள்புரிவதற்காக லிங்கரூபத்தை எடுத்துக் கொண்டார். முதலில் லிங்க ஸ்வரூபியா ஆவிர் பவித்ததுமாக, கிருஷ்ண சதுர்த்தசியில் என்று நாரத ஸம்ஹிதை முதலிய புராணங்களில் சொல்லப்பட்டிருக்கின்றது. "சிவராத்திரி" என்று பெயர் பெற்ற அன்றைய தினத்தில் உபவாஸமிருந்து இரவு பூர்த்தியாக வெளி விஷயங்களில் ஈடுபாடு இல்லாமல் சிவபெருமானை பூஜிப்பவர்களுக்கு மோம் ஈறாக விரும்பிய பயன்கள் கைகூடும் என்றும் விளக்கப்பட்டிருக்கின்றது.

ஆஸ்திகர்கள் இந்த சாஸ்திரீய உண்மையை உணர்ந்து எப்பொழுதும், முக்கியமாக சிவராத்திரியில் சிவபிரானை பூஜித்து எல்லா மங்களங்களையும் அடைவார்களாக.

नामूलं स्त्रिव्यं किञ्चिन्नपिङ्गमुच्यते



சிவராத்திரி

ஸ்ரீ சிருங்கேரி சாரதா பீடாதிபதி,
ஐகத்குரு ஸ்ரீ சங்கராசார்ய ஸ்வாமிகள்,
சிருங்கேரி மடம், மைசூர்.

“சிவன்” என்னும் பதத்திற்கு மங்களகரமானவர் எனப் பொருள். அதாவது கேட்கும் வரங்களை கொடுக்கிறவர். ஐஸ்வர்யத்தைக் கொடுப்பவராதலால், ஈஸ்வரன் எனப்படுகிறார். அன்பே சிவன் என்பார்கள். விஷங்களைக் கக்கும் சர்ப்பங்களிலும் அன்பு கொண்டு, அவைகளையே ஆபரணமாகவும் கொண்டுள்ளார். இவ்விதமான சிவபெருமானை, மாதா மாதம் சிவராத்திரியன்று, சாயங்காலம் வழிபடுவது சால நன்று. மாதா மாதம் வழிபட இயலாதவர்கள், வருடம் ஒருமுறை, அதாவது மாசி மாதம் அமாவாசைக்கு முந்தின சதுர்த்தசி சிவராத்திரியன்றாவது, அவசியம் வழிபடுதல் வேண்டும். இதை இந்தியாவிலும், இலங்கையிலும் ஜாதி வித்தியாசமின்றி மன்னியில் எல்லா இந்துக் களும் வழிபடுகிறார்கள். இவ்விதம் செய்வதற்கு ஒரு சிறுகதையும் இருக்கிறது. “ஒரு வேடன் வேட்டையாடிக் களைத்து வரும் போது, ஒரு புலிதென்பட்டது. அதற்குப் பயந்து ஒரு மரத்தில் ஏறினான். புலியும் அந்த மரத்தின் அடியிலேயே இருந்தது. வேடன், தான் தூங்கி விட்டால் கீழே விழுந்து புலிக்குப் பலியாகுவேன் என்ற பயத்தால் நித்திரை செய்யாது ஒவ்வொரு இலையாக எடுத்துக் கீழே போட்டு வந்தான். அவன் இருந்த மரம் ஒரு வில்வ மரம். அதன் கீழ், வில்வங்கள் விழுந்த இடத்தில் ஒரு சிவலிங்கமுமிருந்தது. மறுநாட் காலை இவன் அந்த மரத்தை விட்டு இறங்கிய போது புலியும் ஓடிவிட்டது. அந்த லிங்கத்தின் பேரில் வில்வங்கள் விழுந்ததற்காக, இவனை அறியாமலே செல்வம் உண்டாயிற்று. சுகவாழ்வு வாழ்ந்தான். ஆகையால் சிரத்தையுடன் சிவராத்திரியன்று சிவபெருமானை வழிபடுபவர்களுக்கு சகல செளக்கியங்களும் ஏற்படும் என்பதில் சந்தேகமில்லை.

சிவராத்திரியன்று இரவு சிவனைப் பூஜிப்பதும் அவர் நாம- சங்கீர்த்தனம் செவதும் சால நன்று.

-ஸ்ரீ



Important Phases of Hinduism

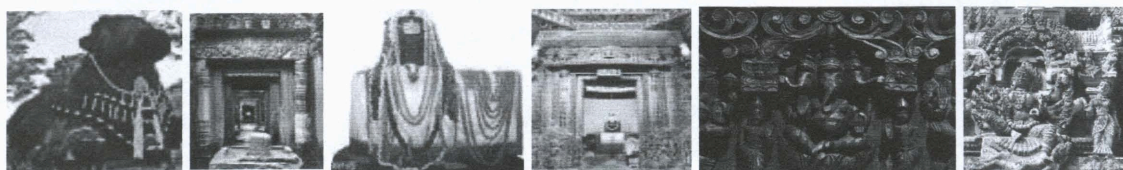
G. Sundaramoorthy M.A.

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To all of us the word Hinduism is a well-known word. We also know the meaning of the word as referring to the religion practised by all the Hindus of the world. But if any one asks us to give an exact meaning of the word Hinduism, it does not appear to be easy to define it precisely. The reason is that Hinduism is not a religion that was established by any teacher, at any point of time or at any given place. It may be possible to trace the origin of the most of the religions of the world, but to do the same with reference to Hinduism, it is difficult.

Till about thirty or forty years ago ail historians traced the origin of Hinduism to the Vedic age. But as soon as the civilization of the Indus valley was brought to light, the same historians trace it to *Indus valley civilization*. Therefore, it would not be a surprise that some other ancient civilization was found and the origin of Hinduism goes back to further past. In the present state of our

knowledge, the Indus valley civilization represents the earliest phase of Hinduism. We are unable to know fully about the religious conditions of that age as we are unable to decipher the Indus valley script's. If the scholars succeed in understanding the scripts, we may be able to know quite a lot of Hinduism of that age.



The next important stage of Hinduism begins with the age of the Rigveda. During this age the great sages of the age came out with their pouring love and affection over the Gods. This age represents the friendly feeling of humanity with the gods. During this age men had direct contact with the gods. The sages had personal relationship with all of them.

The next age, the Brahmanic age, is marked with the characteristic feature of the sacrifices. It was during this age men conceived the idea of sacrifices and brought them to the forefront. Although the age of the Rigveda knows about the sacrifices, only during the Brahmanic age the sacrifices came to be called the all-embracing cult.

The next development of the religion is to be found in the Atharva Veda. This Veda represents mostly the feeling of the masses as to what was their Hinduism during that age.

The following age which is called the Upanishadic age shows how the Hindus attained perfection in their contemplation and speculation. The philosophical side of Hinduism is to be found during this age.

The age of the Sutras represents Hinduism mostly as practised in the homes of the Hindus. The domestic aspect of Hinduism is brought forth by the Sutra texts.

The Epic Age tells us how the earlier Hinduism was developing gradually to popular Hinduism. During the epic age what we find is the gradual extinction of the rigid and classical vedic religion and the slow assumption of the popular Hinduism.

What comes next is called the Puranic age. Strictly speaking when we utter the word Hinduism we really mean the religion as found in the Puranas. It was the puranas that gave a clear picture of real Hinduism. Without the puranas it is very difficult to conceive the picture of Hinduism.

During the post-puranic age Hinduism underwent some radical changes because of the changes that affected political, social and geographical spheres of the Indians. It was during this age Hinduism may be said to have developed sectarian feelings and philosophies.

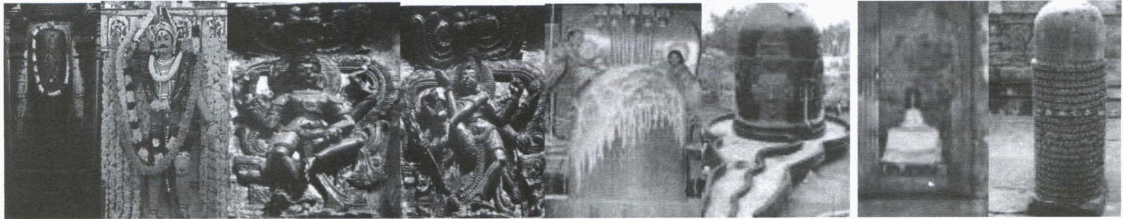
Due to the sectarian division which secured a place in Hinduism during the post-puranic age. Hinduism developed many unwanted elements within it. Therefore, it was necessary that many great reformers were born in order to rectify the inner defects of Hinduism. Many great reformers were born during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to do this work. And the present age is enjoying the benefits which these great personalities brought about in Hinduism.



Gods and Goddesses of Hindus?

Swami Tilak Bharat

With its vast expanse BHARAT, the homeland of Hindus, is studded with innumerable temples of various Gods and Goddesses. It may perhaps not be exaggeration to say that every morning witnesses the coming up of a new temple. Hindus and their temples are inseparable. A Hindu can live without food and clothes but cannot live without temples. Wherever he goes, the temples of his Gods and Goddesses also go with him. The magnificent temples of antiquity in Ceylon, Burma Thailand, Malaysia, Cambodia, Indonesia and other eastern countries, and the new temples in U.S.A, England, Canada and other western countries are persistently telling the story of Hindus unflinching faith in their gods and goddesses.



The monotheists all over the world find enough material in it, of course unwittingly, to laugh at the devout Hindus. In their eyes it is a great crime and also sin to have faith in many gods and goddesses, and it cannot be committed with impunity. The rage of god they feel will certainly fall on them.

But every sensible Hindu knows he is neither a polytheist nor doing any wrong in worshipping so many gods and goddesses with so many names and forms. Though he propitiates a number of gods and goddesses, a Hindu is convinced that his prayers are answered by ONE who is Omnipresent, Omniscient and Omnipotent and also beyond any name, form or attribute. In his ears ever ring the immortal words of Bhagawan Krishna. Bhagawan says:

“A man of desires prays a god for the
fulfilment of his desires and those
desires are certainly fulfilled by Me t
hrough that particular god.”

— Gita VII 23.

It is very easy to utter the words like ‘nameless’, ‘formless’ and ‘attributeless.’ But it is most difficult to grasp them. Even one out of millions I fear knows what really these words connote. Until and unless, one’s mind has come to be free of all thoughts there is no possibility of one’s being in the apprehension of these terms. In fact you cannot propitiate a nameless, formless and attributeless god. Of course you can dissolve your mind in the Nameless, Formless and Attributeless.

All of us are living in the cages of our thoughts and viewing Ultimate Truth or God through the windows of our desires; as our desires so the name, form and attribute of our god. As we cannot have the view of the entire sky through our small windows, so we cannot have the view of the Absolute Truth in its entirety through our desires. Our conception of God is bound to be affected by our thoughts and desires. A desireless man need not propitiate any god, but a man of desires is bound to pray a god of his own conception. The god is nameless, formless and attributeless, but our god- God of our conception- is having innumerable names, forms and attributes. Truly, each and every man is having his own DEVATA, or god. In the world of ours the mental and intellectual personalities of no two men can be identical; every

man is having his own mind, unique in its character, quite different from others. As a god or goddess, of Hindu conception represents the innermost personality of his or her devotee, the Hindus RISHIS, the perfect masters of human psychology, have accepted thirty-three crores as the number of the gods and goddesses. We have every right to presume that at the time when the number of the gods and goddesses was ascertained by our RISHIS, the number of the Hindus was thirty-three crores - thirty-three crores of Hindus, thirty-three crores of (their gods and goddesses; one god for one person. And since we usually find every man an admixture of so many tendencies, the permutations and combinations of the gods and goddesses were also quite natural.



There is no use of fighting with the deep rooted tendencies in human beings. Accept them as the base and raise the edifice of SADHAN A, spiritual training, on it as high as you like. It is the fact of all facts that a man interested in wealth can worship but the Lord of Wealth; a man engaged in war, the Lord of War; a lover of knowledge, the Lord of Knowledge; and so on. You cannot make a lover of wealth a lover of war or a lover of knowledge. We, therefore, find people worshipping Laxmi - the Goddess of Wealth, Bhavani - the Goddess of Power; Saraswathi -the Goddess of Knowledge; and soon. Nobody has compelled the people to worship this god or that goddess; it is their own tendencies that have impelled them to worship their particular gods or goddesses. Sometimes we find son's god different from father's, wife's god different from husband's, brother's god different from sister's. There is no place for any type of regimentation in the field of SADHANA. And every Hindu must feel himself most happy and fortunate that lie, in the field of SADHANA, enjoys complete freedom, which has often been denied to the followers of other religions.

Hunger is ONE but taste differs from man to man. There is no reason for anybody to find fault with a person because he takes dishes of his own taste. Similarly God is ONE but the attitude towards God differs from devotee to devotee. And, nobody has a right to criticize a devotee only for the simple reason that he has his own attitude towards God. A great devotee rightly says:

According to their various tastes, people adopt various paths, straight and circuitous. But all of them, O Lord, end in you, as all the rivers end in one ocean.

Our attitudes towards things plays a great role in all spheres of life. Names and forms are the result of our attitude. See, to one single sound of 'A' are given how many names and forms. Though in all the scripts of Bharatiya origin it is pronounced as 'a' yet its form in writing differs from script to script,; e.g. "'A" in Tamil, "w" in Sinhalese, and soon. In the scripts of non- Bharatiya origin it is not only written in different ways but also pronounced in different ways, e.g. 'ac' in Roman 'alif' in Arabic, 'alpha' in Greek and soon. If numerous names and forms of one single sound 'A' do not prevent us from grasping it, how numerous names and forms of God I am at a loss to understand would prevent us from realizing God. Water is called 'Tannir' in Tamil, 'Vellam' in Malayalam, 'Jalam' in Sanskrit, 'Wathura' in Sinhalese and 'Aqua' in Latin. So many names for one means of quenching thirst. But these names do not change the nature of water. It quenches the thirst of that who calls it 'Tannir' and of that who calls it 'Wathura' both equally. We must not give overdue importance to the names and forms; we must try to reach the Ultimate Truth which is represented by all the names and forms. It looks very silly and childish when we

begin to fight for the names and forms of our conception. I call to my mind a funny incident which took place somewhere in India.

A man from Persia who did not know the local language, visited a village, and asked a householder for water. The householder offered him water, say. "Please have 'JALAM', 'JALAM' is a synonym of water. As he did not know this fact the poor Persian thought something other than water was being offered to him, and hence left the place in resentment, saying, "I don't want JALAM. I want water!" How ignorantly of him! Should he have not seen the water itself!

It is how our understanding goes. We stick to the words but ignore the Truth. There is no wrong with the plurality of God's names and forms; wrong is with our understanding. We do not want to give up our fighting nature; Whenever and wherever we get a slightest opportunity we come to our true colours and find all justifications for raising controversies in one name or the other. Even they, who take pride in calling themselves Monotheists, do not refrain from shedding the blood of other monotheists, and that too in the name of religion. The most of the credit of the blood shedding in History goes to the fanaticism of the so-called Monotheists.

We Hindus are severely criticized for our idol-worshipping. But before criticizing us, the critics had better understand the meaning of idol-worship. Every Hindu knows that the idol he worships is not God, it is but the idol of God. An idol is simply a symbol of God who is Omnipresent, Omniscient and Omnipotent. At the time of adoring 'SIVA-LINGAM' - a piece of stone round in shape—no Hindu, for instance, praises its colour or size, hardness or softness; he with his closed eyes meditates on Parama Siva who is beyond any human understanding. Lingam means symbol, and because it reminds us of Parama Siva it is called SIVA-LINGAM. In fact it tells us of Infinite Truth which can be, if at all, represented by a circle alone.



Symbolization of certain abstruse facts is quite current even with the men of highest intellect. A mathematician marks a point, even though he knows well that a point which consists of no length, breadth and magnitude, can never be marked. Mark is not point. Of course, point is present somewhere in the mark. You will have to use your highest imagination to apprehend it. When even a mathematician cannot do without 'mark' — the symbol of 'point', why should people laugh at a simple devotee who worships an idol - the symbol of highest Truth?

Before the installation of an idol in any temple the "PRANA-PRATISHTHA" is done. PRANA-PRATISHTHA means 'establishing of life in the idol.' People in general are instructed with the help of scriptural canons that after the PRANA-PRATISHTHA ceremony the particular idol does not remain a piece or figure of stone: it becomes one with our life to indicate to us that highest Truth which is present within us and also without us. When a sexy painting excites us, certainly there is no carnality in the painting, it is in us. Our carnality gets excited after seeing the painting. Likewise, God is not in the idol.

He is in us. After seeing an idol He is roused to bestow upon us Perfect Peace and Happiness.

Maha Sivaratri Vrata and its Significance

Vedagama Bhushanam K. Balasundarakkurukkal B.A. (Hons)

President, Vedagama Sai Siddhanta Sabha, Mavittapuram

MAHA SIVARATRI (the great night of Siva) is a very popular festival among the Sanatauists (followers of the six Vedic religions) from the Himalayas up to Dondra Head. This night is observed wherever Mahadeva is adored.

Four Kinds of Sivaratri

In the Siva-rahasya-khanda of the Skanda Purana four kinds of Sivaratri are mentioned.

- (1) A Monday which synchronises with the New Moon is known as NITYA-SIVARATRI.
- (2) The day preceding the new moon every month is known as MASA-SIVARATRI.
- (3) MAGHA-SIVARATRI which falls on the 14th day of the dark half of Magha. For observing this certain austerities are laid down from the first day of the waxing moon up to the day of SIVARATRI.
- (4) The MAHA-SIVARATRI which falls on the day which precedes the New Moon in the month of MAGHA.

Generally on such days which are held sacred to Siva, the observance of a fast followed by a worship of the Lord during the YAMAS (Four quarters of the night) is enjoined.

The Meaning of the Component Term

We shall briefly study the spiritual, Allegorical and symbolical significance of the Maha Siva-Ratri Vrata. In order to understand its inner secret, it is necessary that we should analyse the compound word SIVA-RATRI-VRATA into three component parts, i.e. SIVA, RATRI and VRATA.

The Meaning of Siva

To understand rightly and fully the real and correct meaning of SHIVA is very difficult, except with the Grace of God Shiva himself. In short, to understand him is synonymous with visualising Him. In fact to make an enquiry of HIM we must equip ourselves with the rudimentary knowledge of the meaning of the word SIVA.

Sete (Jagat Sarvam) yasmin sa Sivak'-Sambur viharavahitah.

i.e. The changeless Being in whom all the world exists (rests) is SHIVA.

He is the destroyer of all sins and sufferings and therefore a refuge and a haven of rest for all those who are weary and laden with the burdens of life.

Jsanah Sarvavidyanam Jsvavah Sarvabhutanam.

He is the fountain-head and store-house, of all Learning and Ruler of the whole universe. The YAJUR-VEDA Sings of HIM as SAMBHU, RUDRA, SIVA, SIVA-TARA, SAMKHARA and soforth.

The term SHIVA is indicative of prosperity and fortune (KALYANA) It is synonymous with Mangala, Subha, Bhadra etc. This in turn is expressive of deliverance (MUKTI -VACAKA) from mundane bondage. When one is deeply immersed in sorrow, the mere utterance of the terms SIVA will ward off all ills, The Brahma-Vaivarta Purana says thus.

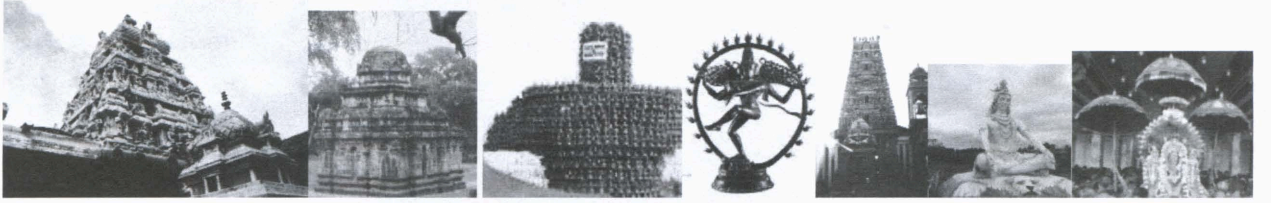
Papaghne vartate sisca, vasca multiprade tatha Papaghne mokshado nrnam, sivastene prakiritah.

“The syllable si is indicative of the removal of sins, while va emancipation from worldly bliss”- Brahma Khanda Ch. VI. Also it is said:

Siveti Ca Sivam nama, Yasya vaci pravartate Kotijanmarcitam papam, tasya nasyati niscitam.

“By the utterance of the word SHIVA with devotion it is quite certain that all sins accrued by a being in several births are liquidated.”

By virtue of the functions He performs i.e. destruction of sins and conferment of Beatitude - He is known as SHIVA.



The Significance of RATRI

Now let us consider what ‘RATRI’ means. It is derived from the root ra-dane (to give) and means that which gives “peace and happiness.” This is clear from the ‘Ratri-Sukta’ of the Rg. Veda Souihita (X. 127.7) Ratri (Night) brings peace and rest. It revives and rejuvenates those whom the day’s labours have exhausted. Thus it is rightly derived from ra (to give.) It means ‘joy-giver.’ This Sukta in praise of Goddess Durga, Siva’s Sakti. Thus the compound term ‘Siva-Ratri’ means that which is a giver of Bliss and which is associated with Siva.

Students of symbology know that in the allegorical sense these words have a significance, a beauty and sublimity of their own. The word RATRI does not mean physical night: it symbolises the withdrawing by the devotee, on the ladder of spiritual progress, of all his senses his mind and his intellect. The same sense is expressed in the Kathopanishad too.

Lord Krishna in his Gita says:

Ya nisam sarvabhutanam, tasyam jagarti samyami yasyam jagarti bhutani, sa nisa pasyats munch.

The idea behind the vigil prescribed is not one of physical awakesness but of our keeping vigilant watch over our misleading mind and straying senses.

VRATA and its Significance

Lastly comes the word VRATA which is associated with ‘UPAVASA’ (i.e. fasting). Here too people generally believe that physical fasting is all that is meant and required. But this is wrong. PUAVASA in Sankrit really means the same thing as Pratyahara, in Yoga-Sastra. It means that by turning our

senses and mind away from their external sense-word tendency and directing them towards the supreme soul within, we perform UPAVASA. In other words UPAVASA means dwelling spiritually and intellectually Godward. Thus UPAVASA is not mere physical fasting but the mental turning of ourselves towards God.

Time and its Significance

This VRATA is observed on the Krishna-Caturdasi-Ratri (the night of the fourteenth day of the dark fortnight). The meaning of AMAVASYA will give us the clue as to why it is prescribed on the Caturdasi night. It is composed of the word AMA, the root VAS (to dwell) and another suffix. It indicates that day (Tithi) when the dwelling of AMA takes place, i.e. when the sun and the moon dwell together. This is the grammatical and astronomical significance of Amavasya.

On the spiritual plane the Sun and the Moon symbolise the Universal Soul and the individual soul respectively. It means the Samathi Yoga stage when one-ness of God between the individual soul and the whole universe is attained. The reason why this particular night is prescribed for the VRATA is that it is the night when JIVA has withdrawn himself into the. Lord and is not yet completely absorbed and merged. This is the auspicious moment (Subha-Muhurtha) for Sivaprasana which will lead us to one-ness with Siva.

Rules and Practices of Siva-Ratri-Vrata

Isana-Samhita prescribes Siva-Ratri-Vrata for all classes of society and indicates destruction of all sins and conferment of final bliss.

In the Skanda-Purana the Lord says, "I am not pleased by the offering of sacred waters, vastra, dhupa, worship or even by flowers as by complete fasting on this day (Siva-ratri).

Jswara - Samhita says:

"Be he a Saiva, Vaishnava, or the worshipper of any other deity all the fruits of his worship become null and void if he ignores SIVARATRI. The Lord is to be worshipped at each of the four quarters of the night with Abhisheka etc. !

According to the Samvatsara-Pradeepa in the first quarter one should perform the Abhisheka of SIVA with milk, in the second with curd, in the third with ghee, and in the last with honey.

THREE FUNDAMENTALS

The three fundamentals of Siva-Ratri are (1) UPAVASA, (2) JAGARANA and (3) ARCHANA i.e. fasting, night long vigil and worship at every YAMA

According to the Siva - Rahasya the Niyamas for the pooja include getting up early in the morning due bathing, observing fast besides japa and worship. The linga mada of sand, is said to be most versatile. It should be worshipped with the ordinary poojas with RUDRI or Siva-Mantra.

The SKANDA further says,

"Siva is worshipped as Isana in the first lap, as Aghora in the second lap as Vamadeva the third lap and Sadyojatha in the fourth.

The Fruits of the VRATA

The fruits of the observance of his vrata are variously mentioned. The Skanda Purana says as follows: "The seas may dry up; the lofty Himalayas may shrink in size or both the seas and mountains may change their positions, but the worship of SIVA on the SIVA-RATRI will remain constant. Any of my devotees who observe a fast on Sivaratri obtains for himself a very high position."

The Siva-Purana says thus "A person who remains awake without sleep on Siva's Night will eventually hold an equal position with SIVA even though he does not offer worships."

Paraphernalia of Siva pooja etc

The Linga-Purana says of the paraphernalia of Siva pooja thus,

"Worship of Maha-deva without wearing the sacred ash in three lines and the Rudraksha will bear no fruit."

According to Bhavishya Purana, Linga can be made of sand, the sacred ash, cow-dung, copper, brass, etc. These endow long life, wooden linga confers wealth. Spathika linga gives all desired objects.

In the worship of Siva bale-leaves are important. The Skanda-Purana says, "There is nothing by which Samkaraka is more pleased than by Bilva-leaves which confer all desires and destroys poverty."

Bilva should be offered with the back of it touching the linga (for it is said that Lakshmi resides at the back of the Bilva leaf).

Sahasra-nama-archana is necessary as well as Arghya at the end of the pooja. This in turn is followed by Pradakshina and Namaskara.

The Devi-Purana describes Pradakshina as follows:

"One should with one pointed mind go round Siva thrice in pradakshina first clockwise and return anti-clock-wise without crossing the drain of Abhisheka water."

Siva's NIRMALA (flower that has been offered to Siva) should be worn devotedly on the head. One who does so is cleansed of all sins.

Accounts Connected with Siva - Ratri

There are different accounts connected with the origin of Sivaratri, in the Puranas. According to one account in the Sankara Samhita, the group of gods known as Rudras (Manifestation of Siva) were awakened one night at the instance of Siva at Madhyarjuna - Kshettoa. They adored Siva during the four Yamas. The Lord being pleased manifested Himself before them and asked what they wanted. They said thus, "Oh Lord of Grace! Let those persons who worship thee on this night be bestowed with all the merits that accrue by the observance of Siva-ratri."

The second account is as follows. Daksha as a result of his enmity with Rudra lost all his power and position. When he approached Brahma, the latter said, "O child, this bewilderment as a result of Avidya was not experienced by you alone. I too had a similar experience. I approached that auspicious Lord and He released me from all distress, Therefore it behoves you to offer worship to the Lord of the celestials. On the advice of Brahma, Daksha observed Siva-ratri with devotion by installing a Siva Linga at Benares in his own name and he regained his former position.

A third account is the well-known combat between Brahma and Vishnu as to who was the superior architect of the Universe. After a long doawn out battle they were advised by sage Narada of the advent of Lord Shiva in the form of a radiant beam. They in turn started to find the top and bottom of the Lingam-which resembled a pillar of cosmic fire, Both failed in their attempts of finding ends of the fiery pillar and offered prayers to Lord Siva. That night synchronised with Sivaratri.

Lastly the story of the fowler is very common. A hunter at Kasi goes into the forest a hunting and he falls asleep under a tree owing to sheer physical exhaustion. When he wakes up it is night fall, and he is unable to return to his abode. Terrible darkness envelopes all around. The forest night resounds with the roaring of lions and other quadrupeds. For safety he ascends a bilwa tree, which seems to him safer than the firm earth.

Fortunately for him five happy coincidences combine for his happiness. They are (1) that it is Maha-Siva-ratri-night (2) that it is the Bilva tree which he has climbed (3) that an ancient Siva-Linga is just below him (4) that on account of his having come out early at dawn and stayed outall the time he has not touched a single morsel of food and (5) that it being sisirarthu (dewy season) the Bilwa leaves which are wetted by the seasonal dew fall continually all the night through on the Siva-Linga beneath.

To be brief the fowler has unwittingly fulfilled all the requirements of the Maha-Siva-ratri-Vrata, viz. the fasting, the all night-vigil and the worship with Bilva leaves. In the end he was blessed with grace by Lord Shankara. He was purged of all his innumerable sins.

CONCLUSION

Lastly we shall conclude our article with a stanza from Saivagama which every adorer of Siva endowed with intuitive perception chants at the close of his prayer.

Sivo data Sivo bhokta, Sivah Saramidam jagat Sivo yajati yajmisca, Yah Sivah so hamevatu.

“This Shiva is the giver and it is Shiva that is the enjoyer. It is Shiva that extends Himself in the entire universe. It is Shiva that performs the sacrifices. For that matter I am that Shiva alone.”

AUM TAT SAT



Maha Sivaratri

(B.Sivaramakrishna Sarma)

The great night of Lord Siva is celebrated on the fourteenth day of the waning moon of the month of Maasi (February-March). Skaandha puranam describes about four Sivarathris. The first one is *nitya Siivaratri* (daily Sivaratri - every night). The second one is the Masa Sivaratri which is observed on the Krishna paxa chaturdasi (fourteenth moon day on the moons diminishing phase). The third one is the *Maga prathamadi sivaratri* which is observed for the thirteen days starting from prathama titi in the month Maga (Masi) and on the chaturdasi night the Lord is worshiped throughout the night. The fourth one is observed on the Masi (Maga) month Krishna paxa chaturdasi. This is the one observed in a widespread manner. It is also called Maha Sivaratri.

Of all the festivals that are dedicated and deemed to be holy to Almighty, the Maha Sivaratri festival is the most auspicious. Sivaratri festival dedicates the entire twenty-four hours of the day and night for the worship of Lord Siva. In the evening devotees generally go to a nearby temple and observe religious rituals. They remain awake without sleeping throughout that night. The devotees worship Siva the whole night, by chanting "AUM Nama Sivaya" or singing hymns in praise of Lord Siva, such as Rudram, Chamakam, and the *Shiva Mahimna Stotra* of Pushpadanta or Ravana's *Siva Tandava Sthotra* are sung with great fervor and devotion. In many temples singing in eulogy of Lord Siva and listening to religious discourses interpreting the legends associated with the festival is very common on that day.



According to belief Lord Siva consumed the deity poison which emanated when the ocean of milk was churned by the Devas and Asuras, and this saved the universe. The worship that was offered to Siva on that night is being continued annually. The observance of Maha Sivaratri begins with the fasting during the day, and worshipping, Almighty during the great night. Maha Sivaratri rituals that takes place in a Siva temple includes pujas, abishekams (Holy bath), archanas (offering flowers by chanting religious hymns), encircling lighted lamps (deepa alankaras) etc. In the rituals, leaves of a forest tree Bilva (Aegle marmelos) are traditionally used in the services.

Significance of Sivaratri

- Kannappa Nayanar sacrificed his eyes and donated to Lord Siva. This incident occurred on Shivrathri day.
- Arjuna procured Pasupabatha ashram on this holy day.
- Markandeya was rescued by Lord Shiva on this holy day.
- Parvathi was given half-portion of Lord of the Lords on this holy day.
- Beema's arrogance, ego was destroyed and attained knowledge on this holy day.

During the 'abishekam' the deity is anointed with materials like cow's milk, curd, ghee during the first 'yama' (first three hours of that night), with 'panchamirtha' (the five varieties of fruits) during the second 'yama' (second three hours of that night), with honey during the third 'yama' (third three hours of that night), and perfumed religious water during the fourth 'yama' (last three hours of that night). Milk, honey, fruits, curd and ghee are symbolic of the five internal faculties which sustain the jiva namely mind (manas), intellect (buddhi), subconscious mind (chiththa), ego (ahankara), and emotion (hridhaya). The materials used for holy bath (abisheka) namely, milk, curd, ghee, honey, fruits sandal paste and kumkumam produce a high negative ion concentration on the idol (murthy) after the abishekams (Holy bath). The energy created by the vibrations with the high concentrated negative ion are absorbed through nerve ending of the neuro sense organs inhaled by the devotees present during the puja ceremony in the sanctum sanctorum.

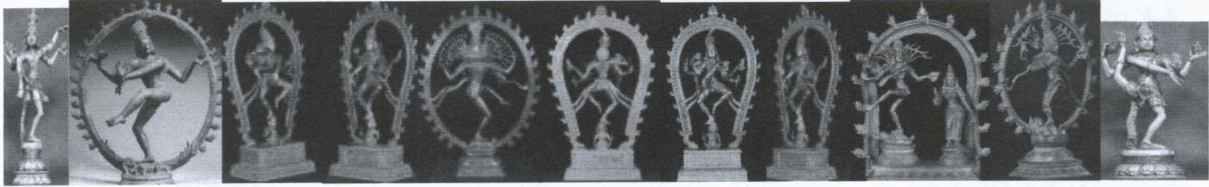
The Lingotbhava puja and abhisheka (holy bath) rituals which takes place during midnight yama are the most important aspect of the Sivaratri festival. The Lingotbhava murthy (form of idol) is seen in the niche in the external side of the western direction of the sanctum sanctorium of a Siva temples. This form of Lord Siva is seen to be depicted as emerging out of the Siva linga with the apex and the bottom of the form seen missing. That is the top portion of the head and the bottom portion of the legs is curved off, from the 'Chandrasekara murtham'. Lord Brahma is seen seated on swan in flight at the top and Lord Vishnu seated on a boar burrowing at the bottom of the Lingotbhava murthy of Lord Siva. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity in the Lingotbhava murthy shows the combination of Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva which deflects the conception of the creator, preserver and destroyer all are one and the same.

When we expect God to shower upon us the boon of supreme bliss, He naturally expects us to become worthy recipients of the boon. He expects us to be prepared, to sacrifice what is most dear to us. One of

the dearest requirements for man is 'sleep', which is very essential for life. On the Sivaratri day if we are ready with a determined mind to sacrifice that dear object of us, which is sleep that we enjoy with great pleasure, then we can call ourselves to be fit to receive boons from god. The main idea is to prepare us to sacrifice things most dear to us. In order to prove ourselves to be good receivers, we are awake throughout the night and the following day. We must not fall asleep on the following day.

Mythology of Maha sivaratri

Once when everything in all the worlds got condensed into Lord Siva, in that darkness of nothing present, the mother Parvati worshipped Lord Siva in the Agamic way with great dedication. Lord Siva delighted by the prayer blessed Her. She asked for the do well to of all the creatures that in future whoever worships the Lord on the Sivaratri day with devotion; they should be blessed and should be given the ultimate liberation. The Pashupati granted that showing way for all of us to get blessed easily.



When Brahma and Vishnu fought between themselves as "who is the supreme", Lord Siva appeared before them as a pillar of fire. They were not able to find the origin and end of that pillar. This day is now being celebrated as Thirukkaarthikai festival. Then Brahma and Vishnu repented for their mistake and prayed to Lord Siva for forgiving their sin worshiping the Siva lingam which is the form of the flame. In the night of Sivarathri day Lord Siva appeared before them and blessed them. Devotees pray to the God throughout the night of Siva rathri by performing Abisheka, chanting and other holy deeds. Every month in 'Krishna Paksha chathurdhasi' (fourteenth moonday) is called Masa Sivarathri. The one that comes in the month of "Masi" (mid February to mid March) is called Maha Sivarathri. This is considered as the most important vrata by the devotees.

The Linga from in which Lord Siva revealed Himself on Maha Sivaratiri is the Sivalinga which is considered the symbol of the formless all pervading Divine spirit which is discernible in all operations of the phenomenal universe. Linga is the sign of rhythmic creation, maintenance and destruction of the universe which expresses itself in different forms and periodically returns to its primal performal unity before being reborn.

There is story regarding keeping awake during the night of the Sivaratri. In the Shanti Parva of the *Mahabharata*, Bheeshma, whilst laying on the bed of arrows and discoursing on Dharma, refers to the observance of Maha Sivaratri by king Chitrabhanu. In the past King Chitrabhanu of the Ikshvaku Empire, who ruled over the whole of Jambudvipa, was observing a fast with his wife, on a Maha Sivaratri day. The learned sage Ashtavakra came on a stopover to the court of the king. The sage inquired, the king Chitrabhanu why he was fasting on that day, for which king told the sage that he had the gift of power of remembering the incidents of his earlier birth (peculiar power of recollecting Poorva Janma). The king explained the sage, that in his previous birth he was a hunter in Kasi (Varanasi). His name was Suswara. And his livelihood was to kill and sell birds and animals. The story goes as follows;

Once at Kasi a hunter went to the forest early in the morning to hunt. On that day he was roaming along the forest in search of animals. He had shot a deer in evening on that day, but he had no time to take it home. He was overtaken by the darkness of night and he was unable to return home. The night at the thick forest resounds with the roaring sounds of lions and other quadrupeds. He climbed on to a tree for safety. It happened that the tree he climbed was a bael tree. (Bilwa tree-Aegle marmelos). He bundled up the animal that he had killed and tied it to a branch of the tree. As he was tormented by hunger and thirst, he kept awake throughout the night due to fear of deadly wild animals. He shed profuse tears when he thought of his poor wife and children who were starving and anxiously waiting for his return. He engaged himself in plucking the *bael* (Aegle marmelos) leaves and dropping them down onto the ground to pass away the time that night. When the day dawned he got down from the tree and saw a black solid column like granite stone like structure under the tree and then he returned home and sold the deer. He bought

some food for himself and for his family. He was about to break his fast when a stranger came to him, begging for food. He welcomed the stranger with his pleasant melodious voice that he naturally had, and served the food to the stranger first, and later then took his food.

At the time of death, he saw two messengers of Lord Siva. They were sent down to conduct his soul to the abode of Lord Siva. He learnt that for the first time of the great merit that he had earned by the unconscious worship of Lord Siva during the night of Sivaratri. They told him that there was a Sivalingam at the bottom of the tree. The leaves that he dropped fell on the Lingam. His tears which he had shed out of pure sorrow for his family fell onto that Sivalingam and washed it, and he had fasted all day and all night. Thus he had unconsciously worshiped the Lord.



He lived in the abode of the Lord and enjoyed divine bliss for long ages. He is now reborn as Chitrabhanu. Fortunately for him it was a Maha Sivaratri night, the tree he climbed on was a Bilwa tree, there was an ancient Sivalingam just below him, since he did not get any pray he was without any meals or water from the morning, He shed profuse tears, thinking of his poor wife and children who were starving and anxiously awaiting for his return had fallen drop by drop on to the Sivalingam, as religious bath (Abhishekam). He, to keep himself awake started plucking one leaf at time and putting it down which without his knowledge fell on the Sivalinga just below him. The hunter though unwittingly fulfilled all the requirements of Maha Sivaratri Viratham he was blessed with the Almighty.

Spiritual Significance of the Ritual

It is an allegory. The wild animals that the hunter fought with are envy, anger, greed, emotion, infatuation, passion, jealousy and hatred. The jungle is the fourfold mind, consisting of the subconscious mind, the intellect, the ego and the conscious mind. It is in the mind that these 'wild animals' roam about freely. They must be conquered or killed. The hunter was pursuing them. A real Yogi conquers these evil tendencies. So the hunter would have been a yogi. The name of the hunter was Suswara. The word 'Suswara', gives the meaning of melodious. The hunter had a pleasant melodious voice.

If a person practices Yama and Niyama and is ever conquering his evil tendencies, that person will develop definite external marks which show the features of a Yogi. The first marks are lightness of the body, health, steadiness, clearness of countenance and a pleasant voice.

This stage has been spoken of in detail in the *Swetaswatara Upanishad*. The hunter or the yogi had for many years practiced yoga and had reached the first stage. So he was named Suswara. His birthplace was Varanasi. The yogis mention the Ajna Chakra by the name Varanasi. This is the point midway between the eyebrows. It is regarded as the meeting place of the three nerve currents (Nadis), namely, the Ida, Pingala and the Sushumna. A confident aspirant is instructed to concentrate on that particular point. That helps him to conquer his desires and evil qualities like are envy, anger, greed, emotion, infatuation, passion, jealousy and hatred and so on. It is there that he gets a vision of the divine light within.

His getting on to the bael (Aegle marmelos) tree is extremely noteworthy. The *bael* tree has three leaves on one stalk. The tree represents the spinal column. The leaves are threefold. The leaf symbolize the Ida, Pingala and Sushumna Nadis, which are the regions for the activity of the moon, the sun and fire respectively, These may be considered as the three eyes of Siva.

The climbing on to the bael tree is meant to represent the ascension of the Kundalini Shakti, the serpentine power, from the lowest nerve center called the Muladhara to the Ajna Chakra. That is the work of the Yogi.

The Yogi was in the waking state when he began his meditation. He bundled up the animal that he had killed and, tying them on a branch of the tree, he rested on the branch of that tree. That means he had fully conquered his thoughts and rendered them inactive. He had gone through the steps of Yama, Niyama, Pratyahara, etc.



He was practicing concentration and meditation while being on the tree. When he felt sleepy, it means that he was about to lose consciousness and go into deep sleep. So he would have been strong-minded himself to keep fully awake.

His wife and children were none other than the world. One who seeks the Grace of God must become an embodiment of love. He must have an all-embracing compassion. His shedding of tears is symbolical of his universal love. In Yoga, one cannot have illumination without Divine Grace. Without practicing universal love, one cannot win that Grace. One must distinguish one's own Self everywhere. The preliminary stage is to identify one's own mind with the minds of all created beings. That is fellow-feeling or sympathy. Then one must rise above the limitations of the mind and merge it in the Self. That happens only in the stage of Samadhi, and never before that stage or earlier.

The activity of plucking and dropping the bael leaves was only to show that he had no extraneous thoughts. He was not even conscious of what he was doing. All his activity was confined to the three Ida, Pingala and the Sushumna Nadis. The leaves of bael (*Aegle marmelos*) tree represent the three Nadis. He was in fact in the second state, namely, the dream state, before he passed into the deep sleep state.

Keeping vigil the whole night means that he passed through the deep sleep state successfully. The dawning of day symbolizes the entrance into the Fourth state called 'Turiya' (super consciousness). His coming down and seeing the Lingam means that in the Turiya state he saw the Siva Lingam or the mark of Siva in the form of the inner lights. In other words, he had the vision of the Lord. That was an indication to him that he would realize the supreme, eternal abode of Lord Siva in course of time.

The sight of the lights is only one step, albeit a difficult one. He goes home and feeds a stranger. A stranger is a person who has shown his sight before. The stranger is the hunter himself, transformed into a new personality.

The food was the likes and dislikes which he had killed the previous night. But he did not consume the whole of it. A little still remained. That was why he had to be reborn as king Chitrabhanu. Going to the world of Siva (Salokya) is not enough to prevent this. There are other stages besides Salokya. These are Samipya, Sarupya and finally Sayujya.

