



History

PUJAS AND FESTIVALS OF SRI NARUMBUNATHAR GOMATHI AMMAL TEMPLE: AN OVERVIEW

Dr.R.Selvaraju

Assistant Professor of History Manonmaniam Sundaranar University Tirunelveli-12

ABSTRACT The rituals are the methodology for calling the omnipresent to confine itself in the 'grabha gratha' for the benefit of the creature. India, particularly South India has been the sacred land of spirituality from hoary past with its unique credit of the regular monthly as well as annual performance of the maximum number of socio-religious fairs and festivals besides the daily Pujas. The Universally omnipresent God is welcomed to be present in the icon by means of the prayers. The pujas and festivals are very important in Hindu religious culture. Thus, the present paper explains the pujas and festivals of Sri Narumbunathar Gomathi Ammal temple in Tirunelveli District of Tamil Nadu.

KEYWORDS : Festivals, Pujas, cultural traits.

Introduction

India, particularly South India has been the sacred land of spirituality from hoary past with its unique credit of the regular monthly as well as annual performance of the maximum number of socio-religious fairs and festivals besides the daily pujas. The popular and ceremonial Hinduism is a panorama of grand fasts, feasts, festivals and pilgrimages. Tamil Nadu is a land of temples. It is regarded as the religious and cultural centers. The system of worship in a Siva temple is governed by the Agamas. Agamas are originated with Tamil culture from ninth century A.D. The Agamas prescribed idol worship in all its details. It has developed an elaborate ritual in the matter of daily worship as well as annual festivals in the temples. The word puja is derived from pucey, which means the flower ritual to god. The pujas are classified into the Athmartha pujas and the parathuva pujas. The pujas of south Indian temples are generally classified into three categories, nithiam nithiam, and kamiam.

Location of the temple

Tirupudaimarudur, in the present Tirunelveli district in Tamil Nadu is a small village located in picturesque surroundings on the banks of the river Tamraparani very near where it joins with Kadana River. It is at a distance of about forty six Kilometer from Tirunelveli and seven kilometers from Viravanallur. It is bounded on the north by the historic place called Mukkudal, on the south by Athazhanallur, on the west by Tamiraparani River and on the east by the Then Thiruppuvanam and Arikesavanallur.

Pujas

Puja' means a ritual worship with oblations and floral offerings to the accompaniment of chanting of mantras. It is the core-ritual of the temple worship it has a powerful sensual impact on the devotees. This is enhanced by the sound of musical instrument combined with the ringing of bells and the chanting of the sacred texts. Scented smoke emerging from the burning of incense and camphor, mingled with the heavy perfume of sandal wood, jasmine and roses further entrance the sensual impact. The Universally omnipresent God is welcomed to be present in the icon by means of the prayers. He is visualized as the king of kings, or the ruler of cosmos, ready to accept the offerings and prayers of his subjects present there, listed to their grievances and to bestow his blessing on them then and there. All the royal paraphernalia meant for a king is shown to the God is the 'garbhagratha'.

Nithiya puja is the day to day ceremony connected with the worship. Daily offerings are necessary to preserve the sanctity of the shrine. Nithiya pujas are five kinds of pujas, viz abhisekha, Arichana, Tubhadeepa, Naivaithika, Namaskaras. Puja is conducted only on auspicious occasions is called Naimithiyam. The pujas which were conducted only for the individual are known as kamiam. Generally, pujas are performed twelve times a day. But in the Narumpunathar temple Nithiya pujas are performed in the morning, evening and night.

S.No	Daily Pujas	Timing
1	Thiruvanantal	5.30 a.m to 6.00 a.m
2	Udhaya Marthandam	7.00a.m to 7.30 a.m
3	Vizhapposai	7.30 a.m to 8.00 a.m
4	Kalai Sandhi	8.00 a.m to 8.30 a.m
5	Uchchikalalam	10.30 a.m to 11.00 a.m
6	Sayaratchai	6.00 p.m to 6.30 p.m
7	Arthasamam	7.45 p.m to 8.00 p.m

Daily these seven times of pujas are performed to Narumpunathar and Gomathi Amman. These pujas conducted with tubha deepa offering of flowers and naivaithika made up of rice are offered to the deities. Nitya pujas are performed with music natheswaram tavil music and bells. Recitation of sacred hymns to the deities changed according to the festivals celebrated in the temples. The festivals in this temple are conducted on the basis of Nimitika Puja (occasional puja). The festivals conducted in the temples are not compulsory but they add prestige, wealth and attraction of devotees, pious people to the temples. The festivals throw light on the basis customs and manners of Hindu religion. In addition to these festivals and the other festivals are celebrated in this temple. They are panguni-uttiram, vaikasi-visakam, thirukarthigai, kanthasasti, thriuvathirai and Thaipooosam. Thaipooosam festival is celebrated 10 days for every year in a grant manner.

Festivals

If pujas are daily rituals, festivals are annual. Every Hindu temple in south India there are two icons for the deity. One is made of stone and fixed in the grabhagraha and the other is made of Panchaloha (an alloy of five metals consisting of gold, silver, copper, tin and brass). The Panchaloha idol is called Utsavar which means the icon meant for festival. This icon will be taken in procession on certain important days. This procession may be confined to the prakaras inside the temple or may be taken outside the temple, once a year.

The Hindu festivals are designed by great sages of old. There were several festivals recurring at stated times during the course of the year. There were occasions of public rejoicing and merriment and they served to relieve the people of the humdrum monotony of everyday life. Many of the festivals associated with religion. The festivals in this temple are conducted on the basis of Nimitika Puja (occasional puja). The festivals conducted in the temples are not compulsory but they add prestige, wealth and attraction of devotees, pious people to the temples. The festivals throw light on the basis customs and manners of Hindu religion. In addition to these festivals and the other festivals are celebrated in this temple. They are panguni-uttiram, vaikasi-visakam, thirukarthigai, kanthasasti, thriuvathirai and Thaipooosam. Thaipooosam festival is celebrated 10 days for every year in a grant manner.

Panguni Uttiram Festival

Another important festival in this temple is the Panguni Uttiram festival. It falls on the full-moon day in the Tamil month of Panguni (March-April) and is celebrated for ten days in the Barani star day. The moon is then in the asterism Uttira (Beta Leonis). Hence the day is considered to be favourable for the worship of Siva and consequently is dedicated for that purpose. It is the belief of the Hindus that the people who observe this Vratha are blessed with all boons, provided the observance is whole-hearted and sincere. Panguni uttiram day is supposed to be the turning point of the season from that of cold to one of hot or in other words the season changes from winter to summer.

Every day Narumpunathar and Gomathi are taken in procession with devotional hymns and decorations on various vehicles. On seventh day of the festival, the icon of Narumpunathar is decorated on Rudra shape and is taken in procession around the temple. This day is very much significance throughout Tirupudaimaruthur and the neighbouring

villages. Amman and Narumpunather are combinedly taken in procession around the holy tank called Teppotsava, the festival of float for eleven times on the night of the 10th day of Panguni festival.

The main entrance of the temple faces a rather large tank, square in shape and having on all sides symmetrically laid steps of granite, red laterite rectangular slabs leading down. There is a perfect geometrical symmetry in the four sides' and the steps. In the centre of the tank is an islet-like structure which is more an elevated covered platform in granite red laterite slabs.

The belief probably is that the deity having concluded his ceremonial perambulation with all the attendant paraphernalia on land, must have his aquatic sojourn before he returns to the sanctum of the temple to come out only for the next festival. The float is a large raft, on the day fixed for Theppotsavam the image of the deity, elaborately and exquisitely decorated is placed on the raft which is drawn around the water in the tank to the accompaniment of loud chant of Vedic, mantras, hymns and prayers.

The float is moved to the mandapam in the middle of the tank. The image of the deity is lifted to a special dais erected in the mandapam and worship in elaborate customary style is then offered to the deity. After the worship, the image is brought back to the temple. The huge congregations of pilgrims watch the Theppotsavam festival. It is believed that the idea behind the Theppam festival is that an opportunity to be presented to the aquatic beings also to worship the deity at least once a year.

Skandhasasti Festival

In every year in the Tamil month of Aippasi, particularly the days of Sasti, there conducted a special festival with pomp and show to Lord Muruga for six days. The observance is to propitiate Lord Subramanya, in his aspect of Kameswara for having overcome and destroyed the Asura called Surapadma, and his followers. This ceremony is called Surasamharam held on the sixth day of the festival. The ceremonial holy marriage to Lord Muruga is being conducted on the next day of Surasamharam.

Navaratri Festival

Each year two Navaratri festivals are celebrated in the temple. They are Sharada Navaratri and Vasanta Navaratri. That is the period when the goddess Gomathi in her benign form is worshipped. But somehow, the two festivals have been celebrated more faithfully owing to factors unknown. During the celebration Yama sports a scowling face and to protect one self, one has to offer worship to the goddess Gomathi. This is both a festival and an observance. The goddess assumed a diabolical form and killed the 'Asuras'. She came to this earth on a 'Navami' day. Strong worship is carried out at least on the last three days of the festival and traditionalists on those days give cash and kind to the poor and needy.

Karthigai Deepam

Karthigai Deepam festival is celebrated on the full-moon day in the month of Kartika (October-November) when the moon is in conjunction with the asterism Krittigai (Pleiades). Though, the observance of the Vrata is to propitiate the five elements, greater importance is attached to the propitiation of Agni (fire) and all the houses are profusely lighted and illuminated after sunset, for this purpose. The peculiar custom of burning heaps of dry leaves, twigs, etc going by the name of Chokkappanai in front of the temple deserves its rational explanation. The custom appears to have originated from the incidents recorded in the myth wherein Siva is said to have burnt the chariots of certain Asuras who were harassing the sages and others on this earth.

Thiruvathirai

Thiruvathirai festival of Margali is being celebrated every year. On that day swami and ambal are decorated with costly jewels dress placed in an Unjal in the unjal mandapam. After that deeparatha is being performed to the god. On the fourth day Lord Narumpunathar brought in Bull mount. On the tenth day Aruthira Dharshanam is celebrated.

Thai Pooam

Thaipooa Thiruvila is celebrated for ten days in this temple. Pathir Deepavali is celebrated on Thai Monday thirayothashi and ends in Amavasai day. In three days ten thousands deepas are lightening. Every six years this pathira deepa villa celebrated as Laksha deevila.

Car Festival

In the Narumpunather temple, preparation for the car festival commences since the day of dvajrohana itself. On that day the high priests perform the Kalnattu (pillar planting) ceremony by planting a pillar on the pedestal of the car. It not only serves to arouse the festival spirit but also ensures a festival for the car. The preparations for getting ready the car begin with this. The carved plinth of the car is cleared of dust and washed with a mixture of castor oil and buttermilk to get the cars neat and tidy. Wooden pillars are implanted on the pedestals. From above the pillar the bamboo frame work of the super structure is mounted.

Conclusion

The rituals are the methodology for calling the omnipresent to confine itself in the 'grabhagratha' for the benefit of the creature. The puja consists of sixteen 'Hospitalities' (Shodasopachara). They are Invocation of the deity (avahana), offering a seat to the deity (asana), offering water for washing the seat of the deity (padayan), offering water for washing the hands and body of the deity (argyam), offering water for rinsing the mouth (achamana), Bathing (abhisheka), dressing or offering a garment (vastra), putting on the sacred thread (upavita), sprinkling with perfumes (gandhan), adoring with flowers (archanas), offering food (neivedya), burning incense (dhupa), waving the oil lamp (dipam), waving camphor flame (diparadana), prostrating (namaskar) and circumambulation (Pradakshana). However at the end of the pujas the assembled devotees express their personal affection in various ways. Some communicate mentally in silence. Some whisper, some cry aloud, some sing the hymns Devaram, Tiruvakam etc. In short the whole process of puja creates a communication between the God and the worshiper.

References

1. Kothandaraman P 1980, India Kaligal (Tamil), Madras, p. 93.
2. Majumdar R C, 1954 (ed.), the Classical Age, Bombay, p. 330.
3. Sreenivasan C R 1974-75, 'Saptamatrikas' Journal of the Oriental Institute, Vol. XXXIV, New Delhi, p. 432.
4. Soundararajan K V Main and Parivara Shrines 1960, Transactions of the Archaeological Society of South India, New Delhi, p. 92.
5. Dass H C Saptamatrikas, 1977 in Orissa, Indian History Congress 38th Session, Calcutta.
6. Natana Kasinathan, Thaymar Eluvar Valipatu, 1977-78 (Tamil), Madras, p. 25
7. Douvean Dubreuil, 1978, Iconography of Southern India, New Delhi, p. 26.
8. Gupta M., Surya 1977, the Sun God, New Delhi, p. 11.
9. Sreenivasan P R 1963, Evolution of some Iconographic Concepts, Madras, p. 40.
10. Sivaramamurti C 1964, Royal Conquests and Cultural Migrations in South India and the Deccan, Calcutta, p. 15.