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14th WSC : 4th sect. Āgamas and Tantras

Abstract

Temple festivals (*utsava*) according to *Dīptāgama*

For devotees the temple annual festival is the main event of the religious life of their community. Such festival, which lasts several days, follows a complex pattern which is often dealt with in technical texts concerning temple ritual. Like several other Śaivasiddhānta treatises, the *Dīptāgama* contains a detailed description of that important set of ceremonies, which is to be found in the third and last volume of the critical edition of that work just published in the French Institute of Pondicherry Series.

In that description one finds the main stages of the temple festival: inaugural rites and installation of the various divine forms which rule over the ceremonies (Bull drawn on the flag, Śiva Lord of sacrifice, the Trident, etc.), daily ritual sessions (homage paid to divinities, oblations, processions and the like), bath in the Tīrtha with connected functions and, lastly, closing rites (lowering of the flag, *caṇḍayāga*, etc.). At first sight, the general pattern thus proposed is a very usual one; however, it appears that it is marked by several distinctive features which may explain why that description of the temple festival seems to be a reference up to 18th century at least.

In our paper we shall deal especially with the “promenade” (*yātrā*): the composition of the procession procures several hints about bronze statues which are carried on, as well as about the various group of Śaivas following them. Looking at such details it is possible to associate *Dīptāgama* with some precise parallel āgamic texts and thus to help determining a kind of family tree of that literature. Another result of our study of the temple festival as described in the *Dīptāgama* is to show that some characteristics of that festival may have changed as the time goes: thus, the important Tīrtha ceremony appears to have been dropped in favour of the cart festival, which is far more spectacular and, nowadays, gathers the faithful by the thousands. Lastly, through the example of this popular religious event, we shall try to see how the *Dīptāgama* deals in its own way with usual religious practices and what may be its place in the religious history of Tamil area.