

The Six varieties of Beras - As per Sri Pancharatra Agama with special reference to Mannargudi Sri Rajagopala Swami Temple

Dr.N.Kannan, Sri S.Prasanna,

Professor & Head, Research Scholar,

Department of Oriental Studies & Research,

SASTRA Deemed to be University, Thajavur, Tamilnadu.

Abstract. *Śrī Pāñcarātra Āgama* (श्रीपाञ्चरात्र आगम) is the religious text describing practical and theoretical concepts following Vaishnavism. Although it is believed that there are several *Vaiṣṇava āgamas*, the "*Śrī Pāñcarātra Āgama* (श्रीपाञ्चरात्र आगम)" is thought to be the most authoritative by many scholars, which branches into vivid and varied branches. This paper deals with the shrines where six forms of Lord Vishnu (*Shad-Bera*) receives all the worship.

Keywords. *Śrī Pāñcarātra Āgama* (श्रीपाञ्चरात्र आगम), *Sha-bera*, *Mannargudi Temple*.

INTRODUCTION:

The famous *Pāñcarātra* texts like '*Śrī Praśna Saṃhitā* (श्रीप्रश्नसंहिता) or '*Pādma Saṃhitā* (पाद्मसंहिता)' recognize six major varieties of idols, each being called by the name *Bera* (बेर). The daily rituals of worship and offerings as per the most ancient *Śrī Pāñcarātra Āgama* (श्रीपाञ्चरात्र आगम) are performed to all these Six idols (षड्बेर). Since the presiding deity known as '*Dhruva Bera* (ध्रुवबेर:) in the sanctum sanctorum is stationary, it is impossible for the devotee to offer all the services like taking it in a precession or laying it in bed etc. Hence the *Śrī Pāñcarātra Āgama* (श्रीपाञ्चरात्र आगम) has allowed six kinds of deities (षड्बेर:) for this purpose. An attempt has been made in this paper to delineate this aspect based on *Śrī Praśna Saṃhitā* (श्रीप्रश्नसंहिता).

Names and definitions of shad beras

A six-idol system (षड्बेर:) of the *Śrī Pāñcarātra Āgama* (श्रीपाञ्चरात्र आगम) is followed in *Sri Rajagopala Swami* temple in *Mannargudi*, *Tiruvarur* District, Tamilnadu, India.

मूलम् (Text) -

कर्माचा चोत्सवाचा च बल्यचा च तथापरे।
स्नानतीर्थोभये स्याताम् अपरा शयनार्थिका॥ (श्रीप्रश्न संहिता - 14.2)

Transliteration -

Karmārcā cotsavārcā ca balyarcā ca tathāpare।
Snānāṛthobhaye syā tāṃ aparā śayanāṛthikā ॥ (Śrī Praśna Saṃhitā - 14.2)

The six idols are named as below:

1. *Karmārcā* (कर्माचा)
2. *Utsavārcā* (उत्सवाचा)
3. *Bali-arcā* (बलि-अचा)
4. *Tīrthārcā* (तीर्थाचा)
5. *Snapanārcā* (स्नपनाचा)
6. *Śayanārcā* (शयनाचा)

***Karmārcā* (कर्माचा)**

The first idol receiving all worship after that of main idol (*Dhruva bera* - ध्रुवबेर:) is called *Karmārcā* (कर्माचा). It is placed exactly beneath the centre position of the *Vimāna*, known as *Brahmsthānam* (ब्रह्मस्थानम्)

कर्माचा स्थापयेत् ब्राह्मे। (पाद्मसंहिता 1.28.47)

Karmārcāṃ sthāpayet brāhme (pādmasaṃhitā 1.28.47)

***Utsavārcā* (उत्सवाचा)**

During festivals when the main shrine begins to attract people from all over the neighboring places, the need for a *Utsavārcā* (उत्सवाचा) is strongly felt. The *Utsavārcā* (उत्सवाचा) made of Gold, Silver or bronze is the recipient of all daily worship similar to *Utsavārcā* (उत्सवाचा). It is placed in the sanctum sanctorum by the side of *Karmārcā* (कर्माचा) in the front portion of *Dhruva bera*.

मूलम् -

गर्भमन्दिरम् आसाद्य उत्सवाचा समर्च्य च।।
यानमारोप्य तद्देवं यागमण्डपम् आनयेत्। (श्रीप्रश्नसंहिता - 34.2,3)

Transliteration -

Garbhmandiram āsādyā utsavārcāṃ samarcya ca..

Yānamāropya taddevaṃ yāgamaṇḍapam ānayet. (Śīpraśnasamhitā - 34.2,3)

Explanation -

After the daily worship of *Utsavārcā* (उत्सवार्चा) in the sanctum sanctorum it may be taken in procession on various *Vāhanas* like *Garuda*, *Hamsa*, Horse, Elephant or Chariot etc., during festivals.

Bali-arcā (बलि-अर्चा)

It is installed as the supervising deity for offering oblations to the secondary Gods in the temple. Remarkably, in *Sri Rajagopala Swami Temple of Mannargudi*, there is a separate *Bali-arcā* (बलि-अर्चा) known as *Dvārakā Nāyikā* placed by the side of the main Goddess *Sri Sengamala vallī*. She is considered to supervise the offerings to the secondary Goddesses of the temple.

मूलम् -

बलिबिम्बं समभ्यर्च्य बल्यन्नानि निवेदयेत्।

नीराजनं समर्प्याथ शिबिकायां नयेद् विभुम्॥ (श्रीप्रश्नसंहिता 35.1)

Transliteration -

Balibimbam samabhyarcya balyannāni nivedayet.

Nīrājanaṃ samarpyātha śibikāyāṃ nayed vibhum.. (Śī Praśna Saṃhitā 35.1)

Explanation -

After performing the daily rituals of *Bali-arcā* (बलि-अर्चा) systematically, it must be carried on a palanquin to supervise the offerings to the other secondary Gods of the temple.

Tirthārcā (तीर्थार्चा)

Tirthārcā (तीर्थार्चा) is installed in *Vaishnava* temple for the main purpose of *Tirthavari* (अवभृथस्नानम्) festival.

मूलम् -

उत्सवावभृथार्थाय बिम्बेऽस्मिन् सन्निधिं कुरु।

इति मूलात् तीर्थबिम्बे शक्तिमावाह्य मन्त्रवित्॥

तीर्थबिम्बेन सहितं तीर्थस्थानं नयेद्भरिम्॥ (श्रीप्रश्नसंहिता - 36.124 & 126)

Transliteration -

Utsavāvabhṛthārcāya bimbe'smin sannidhiṃ kuru।

Iti mūlāt tīrthabimbe śaktimāvāhya mantravit॥

Tīrthabimbena sahitaṃ tīrthasthānaṃ nayedddharim॥ (Śī Praśna Saṃhitā - 36.124 & 126)

Explanation - *Tirthārcā* (तीर्थार्चा) will be taken in procession along with *Utsavārcā* (उत्सवार्चा) at the end of a festival celebrated for days together to the holy river or holy ponds (पुष्करिणी) associated with that particular temple.

Snapanārcā (स्नपनार्चा)

The *Snapanārcā* (स्नपनार्चा) or *Snapanabera* is installed in a temple to receive the *Abhishekam* (or ablution) rituals in lieu of the *Dhruvabera* or main deity.

मूलम् -

स्नानकालस्त्वयं प्राप्तः तवेच्छा यदि वर्तते।

अभ्यञ्जयित्वा देवेश सुस्नानं कारयाम्यहम्॥ (श्रीप्रश्नसंहिता - 28.250)

Translation -

Snānakālastvayaṃ prāptaḥ tavecchā yadi vartate.

Abhyañjayitvā deveśa susnānaṃ kārayāmyaham.. (Śī Praśna Saṃhitā - 28.250)

Explanation - The priest should invoke the Grace of the main deity on the *Snapanārcā* (स्नपनार्चा) for *Abhishekam* using several things like Oil, Milk, Curd, Ghee, Turmeric powder, Sandal powder, Tender coconut water etc.

Snapanārcā (स्नपनार्चा)

After worshipping the five beras namely *Karmārcā* (कर्मार्चा), *Utsavārcā* (उत्सवार्चा), *Bali-arcā* (बलि-अर्चा), *Tirthārcā* (तीर्थार्चा) and *Snapanārcā* (स्नपनार्चा) for the whole day, before closing the temple *Sayanarcha* (शयनार्चा) receives special Puja and the deity of the temple is supposed to go to sleep for rest, to bestow all prosperities to the devotees enthusiastically for the next day.

मूलम् -

भगवन् भोगनिद्रायाः कालोऽयं समुपागतः।

शयनं भोगिपर्यङ्कम् अलङ्कुरु जगत्पते॥

इति सम्प्रार्थ्य तद्विम्बं शय्यायां विनिवेशयेत्। (श्रीप्रश्नसंहिता - 29.120 - 121)

Translation -

Bhagavan bhoganidrāyāḥ kālo'yaṃ samupāgataḥ.

Śayanaṃ bhogiparyāṅkam alaṅkuru jagatpate..

Iti samprārthya tadbimban śayyāyāṃ viniveśayet. (Śī Praśna Saṃhitā - 29.120 - 121)

Explanation - The priest should pray to the main deity to be present in the *Snapanārcā* (स्नपनार्चा) for taking rest during night.

CONCLUSION

The attempt is only a ripple in the great ocean of Śrī Pāñcarātra Āgama (श्रीपाञ्चरात्र आगम) which has branched into 108 Samhitas, dealing with all aspects of worship in Sri Vishnu temples elaborately and systematically, with crystal clarity to bestow 'Perennial Bliss' to the devotees.

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