

Temple Festival- Vajramakuta Utsava of Melkote
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Introduction

In the Hindu society there are festivals ordained for the individuals or society as a whole and also exclusive temple festivals that are obligatory to local residents. These temple festivals help in uniting the people of their respective localities. Moreover pilgrimages to the temples during such festivities served as a means of helping people, especially women folk and children to come out of monotonous life.

The 'Vairamuḍi Utsava' an Annual celebration at Melkote attracts pilgrims from all over the world. Melkote, situated in Mandya District, Karnataka is of great importance historically. The temple of Melkote is said to have been renovated by King Vishnuvardhana (reigning period 1100-1152 A.D.) at the instance of Śrī Rāmānuja.

Melkote is referred by many names in the Purāṇas as – Yādavagiri, Yaduśaila, Yādavagiri, Nārāyaṇagiri, Nārāyaṇapura, Vaikuṅṭhavardhana, Bhūvaikuṅṭha, Gomanta and Yatiśaila. This place is said to be closely associated with the Yādava kings of the hoary past and later with the rulers of Mysore belonging to Yaduvamśa only.

This place attracts large crowd for its annual festival the 'Vajramakuṭa Utsava' which is a part of the ten day annual festival. 'The crown of Diamonds' which is brought presently (earlier from the Mysore Palace) from the lockers of the Bank, once in a year with great pomp and in a procession to adorn the Local Deity of Melkote - Celuva Nārāyaṇa, marks the highlight of the Festivity. The 'crown of diamonds' was being guarded till recently in a separate apartment in the palace of Mysore and brought to the temple on the day of the celebration.

Purāṇas like *Matsya* and *Nārada* refer to the Vajramakuṭa Utsava an annual celebration. The *Matsya Purāṇa*(Kṣetrakhaṇḍa V.50-51) describes the crown thus:

इन्द्रनीलसहस्राढ्यं गोमेधकशताञ्चितम्।

पद्मरागमहानीलमुक्ताजालविराजितम्।

पुष्यरागप्रवालाढ्यं दिव्यकाञ्चननिर्मितम् ॥

It is believed that this festival commenced in the Kṛtayuga by Brahmā and the day is also recorded as Navami tithi of the dark fortnight in the *Matsya Purāṇa* (Kṣetrakhaṇḍa.VII.33) as the *Phālguna* month (March to April):

फाल्गुनस्यामले पक्षे नवम्यामथ कर्कटे।

आरभन्नुत्सवं ब्रह्मा दशरात्रं समागताः ॥

The ten day Festival - Brahmotsava

The ten day festival is a celebration of the wedding of Śrī Sampat Kumārasvāmy (popularly known as Cheluva Nārāyaṇa)and Śrī Kalyāṇī Tāyār. The Kalyāṇa Utsava is performed (before the commencement of the Brahmotsava) and the next day the Lord ascends the Śamara Vāhana, the flag is hoisted with the Bheritāḍana marking the beginning of the ten day festival.

The initial ritual of Bheritāḍana is for invoking the gods led by Indra who alight by the aerial car and reach the place. These Gods stay till the last day, the day of *Avabhṛtasnāna* or the *Tīrthavāri* in the Kalyāṇi pond.

The deity is brought in procession on the second day in the Śeṣa Vāhana and on the third day in the Candra Vāhana.

The fourth day is the famous 'Vairamuḍi Utsava' which starts around 10p.m. and lasts till 3.00 a.m.

History of the Diamond Crown

The history of the Crown of Diamonds adorning the Lord is detailed in the *Vajramakutivilasa Campu* of Alasinghabhatta (18th-19th C.A.D). It is said that the crown was worn by Aniruddha in the Kṛtayuga. Virocana, son of Prahlada, at the advise of his counsel of ministers wanted to avenge the defeat of the Daityas and stole it from the Kṣirasāgara and kept it in the Pātāloka. (p.38.v. 121cd, p.43):

सोऽयं हिरण्यहर्ता शिक्ष्यः प्रभुणा त्वयाद्य दितिजेन्द्र ॥

... अस्य किरीटमपहार्यमिति निश्चित्य ... निरीक्ष्यमाणः समयं कदाचन हटादपहत्य

भगवतः किरीटं स्वयं नक्ररूपमङ्गीकृत्य समुद्रान्तः प्रविष्टः क्षणमात्रेण पातालमनीनयत्।

A great commotion arose in the Vaikuṅṭha and Garuḍa is said to have brought back this crown from Pātālaloka by his bravery(v.167):

निर्भिद्य पेटिकास्सर्वास्त्रोटीपुटविघट्टनैः।

दृष्ट्वा किरीटमनघं हृष्टोऽभूद्विनतासुतः ॥

When Garuda was on his way to Vaikuṅṭha a divine voice is said to have guided him to adorn the Lord of Gomanta(Melkote) with the crown (v.169, 170)

आदाय वैनतेयो मकुटं बलिसद्मनो विनिर्गत्य।

गच्छन्नभस्सरण्यां खं चुम्बनं ददर्श गोमन्तम् ॥

तत्र काचिदशरीरिणी वाणी समुत्थिता

उत्सृज्य नागभोगं क्षीरार्णवतोऽहमागतो मधुराम्।

अद्यास्ति पर्वतेऽस्मिन्वीरोसि खग प्रयच्छ मकुटं मे ॥

It is also described that Lord Kṛṣṇa had offered the original crown to Ramapriya (another name of Cheluva Nārāyaṇa, since he was worshipped by Rāma) the Lord of Melkote and later Kṛṣṇa too came to reside in the holy hill (vv. 185,187):

अथ कृष्णो निजमकुटं प्रददौ रामप्रियाय देवाय।

यदुशेखराभिलषितः प्राप्तो मधुरां य एव साकेतात् ॥

निजमूलस्य विभोस्तद्दर्शयितुं किं किरीटमतुलाभम्।

रामप्रियाद्रिमेतं सम्प्राप्यासौ विराजते सततम् ॥

Fourth Day festival – The Vairamuḍi

On this day of the Festival the Lord Sampat kumāra(Cheluva Nārāyaṇa) is said to come to the outer Maṅṭapa and is worshipped by the devotees. He is then led to the shrine of Rāmānuja where he is offered various snacks. The famous Puliogare which attracts even the attention of Indra and other Gods, is offered to the Lord and distributed as prasada is also humorously depicted in the *Campu* (vv.191-2):

तिलजीरकादि पूणैस्क्रिपणानां दलैश्च संमिश्रम्।

समरीचि सर्षपपाद्यद्रामठसारैश्च वासितं बहुशः ॥

किञ्चिल्लवणोपेतं लिकुटरसार्द्रं सतैलघृतसिक्तम्।

बिम्बान्नमेतदतुलं कं चापल्येन योजयेन्न जनम् ॥

The Divyaprabandha Goṣṭhi is a retinue of Bhāgavatas expert in the Tamil Vedas who accompany the Lord through out. Nārada tells Indra that if he yearned to taste the Puliogare he could very well join the Bhāgavatas. But Indra realizes that he would not be permitted for his ignorance in *Divyaprabandham* and Nārada adds that in that case he would be eliminated even in the list of *Mumukṣus* or those seeking liberation(p.63, v194):

किं नाधीतोऽयं दिव्यप्रबन्धो भवता। तर्हि बद्धगोष्ठी प्रवेशोऽसि। न ते

मुमुक्षुगोष्ठ्यामवकाशस्सिद्धति। यतः -

स प्रबन्धस्य मोक्षेच्छा जायते जगतीतले।

अप्रबन्धस्य ते शक्र मुमुक्षुत्वं कथं भवेत् ॥

After the distribution of the *prasāda* to all devotees the Lord is then adorned with the crown brought by the King which is under his protection/ custody and is led in the royal path (v.191):

राजाधीनं मकुटं द्विजराजोयं वहन्निजाधीनम्।

बहिरद्य राजवीथ्यां बहुभिस्सैन्यव्रजैस्सहायाति।

The fact, that the crown was under Royal protection of the Mysore kings who are the descendants of the Yaduvamśa is also recorded (v.200-01):

यदुभूधरेन्द्रवंश्यो यदुभूभृत्पतिपदाब्जसंसक्तः।

श्रीकृष्णनामधेयः कर्णाटमहीधराधिपो जयति॥

तदधीनं मकुटमिदं बहुधा परिपाल्यते हितेनेव।

यत्कूटस्थः कृष्णस्तत्रायच्छद्रमाप्रियायास्मै॥

Then the Lord is led to the shrine of Vedānta Deśika where Garuda also arrives with the crown and the Lord is adorned with it after the *abhiṣeka*. The priests adorn the Lord with the crown with their eyes tied for it is tradition that the crown be seen only when it adorns the Lord's head (p.66):

. . . ततो मन्दिरान्तः समागते मकुठकरे पक्षीश्वरे अभिषिक्ते च पञ्चामृतैः
कोटिसूर्यप्रतिभटे वज्रमकुटे संनद्धेष्वनिरुद्धकिरीटदर्शनबद्धश्रद्धेषु समस्तपरिवारेषु . . .

Even today when the crown is brought from Mandya to Melkote it is witnessed that Lord Garuda flies over the crown reiterating the facts recorded by the Purāṇas.

Then the Lord is taken to the Puṣpa Maṅṭapa in the fore front where many cultural dances are performed before him, all the paraphernalia is held

by the priests, the Brāhmaṇas reciting the Vedas and *Divya prabandha*; musicians accompany the Lord in the procession(vv. 218a, 2222, 228-9):

द्विपञ्चाशदेते द्विजाश्वामरं ते चलत्तलवृत्तञ्चलामञ्चकान्तं . . .

द्विजवरनिकरा एते वेदात्मानं द्विजं पुरस्कृत्य।

अनुगच्छन्त्यनुसरनं कुर्वन्तस्तत्पदक्रमस्यैवम्॥

एते किल परमैकान्तिशिरोमणयोऽध्यापकाः सुप्रबन्धानुसन्धानगानैः।

गन्धर्वपुङ्गवान् धिक्कुर्वन्तेऽपि गन्धर्वान् पुरस्कुर्वन्त्यमी द्विजाः॥

मार्दङ्गिकावैणविकाश्च वैणिकाः

कुशीलवाः काम्बविकाश्च कोविदाः।

किरीटसेवापरतन्त्रचेतसोऽप्यहो

न मुञ्चन्ति लयस्वरादिकम्॥

Thus the whole night is lit by the light of the crown and before dawn it is packed and the Lord returns to his usual place.

Thus the fourth day festival of the Diamond crown gets adjourned pompously to the next year.

The festivals of the remaining days

The fifth day is when the Lord visits the various maṭṭhas and samsthānas receiving obeisance and the Nandavana of Shaṭhakopa –the founder of Ahobila mutt and in the night mounts the Garuḍa.

Sixth day is marked with the Gajendra Mokṣa episode where in the Lord is on the Elephant. The spectacular Chariot ride is on the seventh day following which is Āṅḍal kalyāṇa on the eighth day being Panguni Uttaram. On the ninth day is the float festival in the Kalyanatirtha followed by the swing or Ḍolotsava after which the Lord mounts the horse and is led to Tirumangai Ālvar sannidhi who is blessed with Aṣṭāksarī by the Lord himself.

On the tenth day is the abhiṣeka for the Mūlavar , yāgasāla is closed and the flag is lowered marking the close of the annual festival.

Conclusion

Thus it is evident, that the people are reminded every year of the various Puranic lores like Gajendra mokṣa and others are ; the spirit of Bhakti in them, gets strengthened.

The traditions and customs are held intact by the annual visit of the Lord to the Mutts and the shrines of Deśika, Rāmānuja and other prominent saints.

The society as a whole participates and the spirit of unity is instilled. Various cultural arts are supported and encouraged during these festivals. The culture, tradition and customs of regions specially and one country at large are kept alive and intact by the temple festivals .

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