VAIKHĀNASAS DAILY WORSHIP
According to the handbooks of Atri, Bhṛgu, Kāśyapa, and Marici

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INTRODUCTION

The Vaikhānasas are a group of South Indian Viṣṇuite Brahmans who are traditionally engaged in conducting worship in temples. Various temples in Tamilnād and Andhra Pradesh had (or have) their worship organized according to the Vaikhānasa method and with officiants belonging to the Vaikhānasa sect.¹

The fact is noteworthy that the Vaikhānasa sect can trace its origin up to a period in which the Vedic religion of sacrifice still occupied the main position in Brāhmanic circles of India. Thus it is not surprising that the traditions of the sect show a great number of ancient (often, Vedic) elements, persistently preserved also in later periods when other ideas and cult methods had arisen. This is not to say, however, that the Vaikhānasas had not the bulk of their philosophy and ritual in common with other Viṣṇuite, and sometimes also Śivaite, circles.²

The present study attempts to provide a survey of the central aspect of Vaikhānasa tradition: the daily worship of Viṣṇu in the temple.

The Vaikhānasa temple cult is explained in the first place by the hand-


² The philosophical ideas of the Vaikhānasas in the main resemble those of the Śrīvaīṣṇavas (R. Pārthasarathi Bhattacharya, in the Introduction to Bhṛgu, Kriyādhīkāra). The ritual of the Śrīvaīṣṇavas also shows many points of resemblance. See the description by K. Rangachari, The Śrī Vaishnava Brahmanas (Madras, 1931). An accurate description of South Indian Śaiva ritual is found in the work of C. G. Diehl, Instrument and Purpose (Lund, 1956). Two other important studies in the field are: R. V. Joshi, Le rituel de la dévotion Kṛṣṇa (Pondichéry, 1959), and Fausta Nowotny, “Das Pūjāvidhiniśuṇapa des Trimalla”, Indo-Iranian Journal, Vol. I (1957), pp. 109-154. — It should be emphasized here that the present study only aims at a comparative presentation of the ritual of the Vaikhānasas, and thus is limited.
books written, according to tradition, by the four seers Atri, Bhṛgu, Kāśyapa, and Marici. These handbooks, which may date back about a millennium or more, all give a detailed description of daily worship to be performed by the arcaka or temple priest. But these are not the only literary sources for the subject-matter. Firstly, a more simple, shorter, and certainly older description of domestic worship is found in the Vaikhānasa Gṛhyasūtra 4,12. To this chapter, several scholars have directed their attention. By a mutual comparison the dependence of the four handbooks on the method given in this chapter becomes clear. On the other hand, room should be left for the possibility that temple worship in a manner similar to that described in the four handbooks existed already in the time of the Vaikhānasa Gṛhyasūtra. The chapter in this Sūtra, then, could have been epitomized from it and given a place in this Vedic text, because the house worship of images was accepted earlier by orthodox Brahmins than the temple worship. For house worship, the Atri Saṃhitā (one of the four handbooks), ch. 81, gives a description very similar to that in the Vaikhānasa Gṛhyasūtra. Thus the domestic worship enjoined by the Sūtra remained in vogue for a long time afterwards.

After the period of these handbooks (Saṃhitās) named after the four seers, later authorities writing sometimes under their own names sometimes under the name of one of the four seers, but always professing themselves to belong to the tradition of one of the four Saṃhitās, continued to write on the subject. They changed the sequence of the details of the ritual, systematized and introduced new elements. These innovations are laid down in monographs and commentaries like the Arcanākhanda and the Arcanāśūrasamgraha; they are the basis for daily worship in Vaikhānasa temples as performed up till the present day. They might be compared with the Śivaite paddhatis of Aghoraśivācārya, Somaśambhu and others; perhaps they have originated in the same period or from the same period on (I express myself very carefully).

In the following pages, I shall mainly restrict myself to the above-mentioned Saṃhitās of the four seers, and try to give a systematic, comparative study of their rules about temple worship.

These Saṃhitās are chiefly represented by the following texts (with the abbreviations used in this study):

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8 E.g., Marici, Vimbānārcaṇakālpa, ch. 97.