

Tantra Literature of Kerala- Special Reference to *Māṭṛsadbhāva*

Muralikrishnan M.V.
Research Scholar
Dept. Of Vedanta
S.S.U.S. Kalady
mvmuralikrishnan@gmail.com

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Corresponding Author*

Muralikrishnan M.V.

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Abstract: Kerala has an enormous tradition on Tantra literature and also has different kinds of ritual peculiarities between Brahmanical and non-Brahmanical rituals. Most of the Tantra ritual manuals of Kerala focus the temple rituals and concomitant subjects too. Philosophical discussions are not much can be seen in Kerala Tantra manuals. There are many texts on Kerala Tantra that remain in manuscripts from. The *Māṭṛsadbhāva* is one among them, which discuss the ritual of Goddess Bhadrakālī/ Camuṇḍā along with Sapta-māṭṛs, Śiva and Kṣetrapāla. The text is believed as the first Śākta text from Kerala. The text has twenty-eight chapters, begins from *ācāryalakṣaṇa* to ends in *jīrṇodhāra*. The text has a strong connection with South Indian *Brahmayāmala* and the author of *Māṭṛsadbhāva* refer to *Brahmayāmala* many times. The present study is focusing on the special features of Tantra literature of Kerala and a special discussion on *Māṭṛsadbhāva* along with *Brahmayāmala* and *Śeṣasamuccaya*.

Keywords: Māṭṛsadbhāva, Brahmayāmala, Kerala Tantra, Māṭṛs, Śākta worship

Introduction

The textual tradition of Tantra in India generally divided into three; they are *Āgamas*, *Samhitas*, and *Tantras*. Śaiva Tantra texts are known as *Āgamas*; Vaiṣṇava Tantra texts are known as *Samhitas* and Śākta texts are *Tantras*. Śākta texts are also known as *Nigamas*. It says that God Śiva having told to Pārvati about the Tantra known as *Āgamas* and the Goddess Parvati having told to Śiva is known as *Nigamas*. There are many numbers of texts that are available in these three divisions. *Śaivāgamas* are mostly seen in the *Saiddhāntika* tradition of Tamil Nadu. The *Samhita* texts are divided into two and they are *Pāñcarātra* and *Vaikhānasa*. In these three traditions of texts, many numbers are still in manuscript form and they are waiting to come in the light of the academic world.

Kerala Tantra

Kerala has a vast literature on Tantra, especially in temple rituals. Kerala Tantra literature is mainly focusing on temple related rituals and subjects. Compared to other Tantric texts from different regions of India, Kerala Tantric literature not much focused on philosophical discussions. But still,

there are some commentaries on Kerala Tantra, especially Commentaries on *Tantrasamuccaya* called *Vimarśini* by Śaṅkara, *Vivaraṇa* by the disciple of CennasNārāyaṇanNambūtirippāṭu and commentaries on *Viṣṇusamhita* have narrated some element on philosophical discussions¹.

Kerala Tantra is a mixture of different traditions such as *Śaiva*, *Vaiṣṇava*, *Śākta*, Vaidika, *Smārta*, *Paurāṇika* and so on. The influences of these traditions are highly rooted in Kerala Tantra. Dr. Ajithan observes that the Kerala tradition of Tantra can be said mainly as an offshoot of the *Saidhāntika- Pāñcarātra* traditions. It also contains elements of beliefs and practices of several other traditions like *smārta* and *Paurāṇika*.

The textual tradition of Kerala Tantra

The textual tradition of Kerala Tantra or Kerala Tantra literature generally divided as two. Those are known as pre-*Tantrasamuccaya* texts and post-*Tantrasamuccaya* texts. This is a general division implemented by some scholars to distinguish the textual style and subject orientation style². CennāsNārāyaṇanNampūtirippāṭu is the author of *Tantrasamuccaya*. The reason for these two divisions is, from the emergence of *Tantrasamuccaya*, it produced a prodigious change in Kerala Tantra literature; the popularity of this text and the two commentaries on *Tantrasamuccaya*, the literature style and methodology on Tantra texts of Kerala Tantra manuals are totally changed. As the name indicates, *Tantrasamuccaya* is a compilation of many pre-*Tantrasamuccaya* texts and *Saidhāntika-Pāñcarātra* texts³. By compiling all these, the author of *Tantrasamuccaya* has propounded a new style of Tantra literature.

Most of the pre-*Tantrasamuccaya* texts were focused on the rituals of a single deity, but in *Tantrasamuccaya*, the author described the rituals of seven deities and produced within fewer verses in 12 chapters⁴. The pre-*Tantrasamuccaya* texts such as *Prayogamañjari*, *Viṣṇusamhita*, *Īśānaśivagurudevapaddhati*, *Māṭṛsadbhāva* have more chapters and more verses used to convey the subjects. After the emergence of *Tantrasamuccaya*, post texts have adopted the style and method of *Tantrasamuccaya*. That might be the reason for the prominence of *Tantrasamuccaya* and it became an authoritative text among Kerala Tantra literature. The text has established the dominance of NampūtiriBrāhmins for the authority of doing temple rituals. The 5th verse from the first chapter of *Tantrasamuccaya* describes the qualities of an *ācārya*.

Viprahkulinahkṛtasamkriyaughah.
Svadhīta vedāgamatattvavettā.
varṇāśramācāraparodhidīkṣo.
dakṣastapasvīgururāstikostu.⁵

This verse clearly indicates the authority of Nampūtiri Brahmin to do the rituals in the temples. This might be another reason for the popularity of this text. Till now most of the temple in Kerala are following *Tantrasamuccaya* as an authoritative text.

¹The discussion on philosophical elements means, these commentaries deliberate the yogic prāṇāyama-s, pañcabhūtakaḷpana, philosophical thoughts on installation and jīṃdhāra puja tattva and so on.

²The chapter divisions, order of the subjects, comprises the whole textual knowledge in less verses are the methodologies were used to write *Tantrasamuccaya*.

³Compilation of pre-*Tantrasamuccaya* texts such as *Prayogamañjari*, *Viṣṇusamhita* and *Īśānaśivagudevapaddhati* and *Āgamic/Saidhāntika* and *Pāñcarātra* are the core of *Tantrasamuccaya*.

⁴The ritual of Viṣṇu, Śiva, Durgā, Śaṅkaranārāyaṇa, Subrahmaṇya, Gaṇapati and Śāsta are the seven deities.

⁵*Tantrasamuccaya*, 1stch, 5th verse

Māṭṛsadbhāva

Māṭṛsadbhāva is an unpublished text by an author who was not been identified so far. This one is a pre-*Tantrasamuccaya* text and the text, which must have been written before the 15th century. It is a Kerala Tantric ritual manual dealing with the worship of Goddess Bhadrakālī (also known as Rurujit) along with *Sapta-māṭṛs* or Seven mothers. The text is believed to be the first Śākta worship text from Kerala. The text is a summary of Southern *Brahmayāmala* texts and it systematizes and organizes the *Yāmala* cult of mothers in twenty-eight chapters. The text includes the topics such as *ācāryavaraṇa*, *bhūparigraha*, *prāsādalakṣaṇa*, *pratimālakṣaṇa*, *dīkṣā*, *bījāṅkurārpaṇa*, *adhivāsa*, *pratiṣṭhā*, *ātmanyāsa*, *bhasmasnāna*, *nityapūja*, purānic story of Goddess, *utsava*, *bali*, *prāyaścitta*, *mudrā-s*, and *jīrṇodhāra*⁶.

Brahmayāmala Tantra

The text *Māṭṛsadbhāva* was written based on the South Indian version of *Brahmayālatantra*. In *Māṭṛsadbhāva*, the second verse in the first chapter mentions that the text *Māṭṛsadbhāva* was written having considered *Yāmala tantras*⁷. The first verse in the fifth chapter of *Māṭṛsadbhāva* clearly says the description of *pratimā-s* is adopted from *Brahmayāmalatantra*⁸.

There are around five versions of *Brahmayāmalatantras* are discovered in India⁹. The first one is the most famous North Indian version of *Brahmayāmala*. That discusses the Yogini cult of worship. There are a few 64 yogini temples in India and this version of *Brahmayāmalatantra* belongs to that cult. Dr. Shaman Hatley and Dr. Csaba Kiss edited some chapters of The Northern version of *Brahmayāmalatantra*. Still, the editions are going on.

The second version is South Indian versions of *Brahmayāmalatantra*. There are two versions of South Indian *Brahmayāmalatantra* texts that are available in manuscript form. Though Shaman Hatley in his thesis on *Brahmayāmala*, a pre-night century work written in northern India, mentioned that there exist two texts of southern versions of the *Brahmayāmala*¹⁰, it is only in the recent years, these southern texts of the *Yāmala* got much attention among the scholars. In one of his contributions, Sanderson relates the Northern *Yāmala* texts with the Southern *Yāmala* texts thus:

These [southern texts] claim to be part of the *Brahmayāmala* and indeed are derived from it to the extent that they share its core pantheon and a number of other formal features, but they differ from it radically in that they prescribe a regular cult of Cāmuṇḍā/Bhadrakālī and the seven Mothers be conducted before the fixed idols in temples by non-brahmin priests of the *Pāraśava* caste for the protection of the state and its subjects and the enhancement of royal power¹¹.

Among the two Southern *Yāmala* texts, while one is known through a single manuscript that is available in the French Institute, Pondicherry, another manuscript is known from the Trivandrum

⁶The first chapter of Mā.Sad mentions what are the subjects going to discuss and

⁷*Yāmalānisamālocyasvasāmarthyānurūpataḥ.*

*jagaddhitāyacāsmābhikriyatesārasaṅgrahaḥ.*Mā.Sad, 1st ch, 2nd verse

⁸*athakavīrīṃpratimāṃpravakṣyāmisamāsataḥ.*

*Brahmayāmalatantraṣuyathoktamparameṣṭhinā.*Mā.Sad, 5th ch, 1st verse

⁹Hatley, Shaman, *The Brahmayāmalatantra and Early Śaiva cult of Yoginīs*, 2007, p.3-5

¹⁰ Ibid, pp.3-5

¹¹Sanderson, Alexis; *The Śaiva Literature*, 2014, pp.40-41

Manuscript Library. Both these texts describe the rituals of Mothers and in these texts that we see Bhadrakālī coming to the fore as the principal focus and these two Southern *Yāmala* texts might have been the source manuals for writing *Māṭṛsadbhāva*.

It is also worthy to note here that, the two Tamil inscriptions of the Kolāramma temple in Karnataka, that contain the indications of rituals to be performed that are discussed in the *Brahmayāmala* text available in the IFP library¹². This detailed inscription accords precisely with the text of the Southern *Brahmayāmala*. This shows the historical evidence to the extent that these texts were not only known and studied but were used as ritual manuals.

According to the Southern *Brahmayāmala* texts, the priests of a Bhadrakālī temple must be non-brahmins, known as *pāraśava*¹³. But the *Māṭṛsadbhāva* do not mention non-brahmin priests carrying out the worship of Bhadrakālī and this makes it clear that the *Māṭṛsadbhāva* was written for the rituals to be performed by an orthodox Kerala Brahmins and this point needs a further study on its social aspects too.

As Sanderson observes, these [southern *Brahmayāmala* texts] claim to be part of the Northern *Brahmayāmala* and indeed are derived from it to the extent that they share its core pantheon and a number of other formal features; but they differ from it radically in that they prescribe a regular cult of Cāmuṇḍā/Bhadrakālī and the seven Mothers be conducted before the fixed idols in temples by non-brahmin priests of the *Pāraśava* caste for the protection of the state and its subjects and the enhancement of royal power¹⁴. Both these Southern *Brahmayāmala* texts are discussing the ritual of Sapta-māṭṛs and Bhadrakālī.

Sapta-māṭṛs- The worship of Sapta-māṭṛs is a pan-Indian concept and it has spread all over India, including Buddhist culture¹⁵. Sapta-māṭṛs are Brahmāṇī, Māheśvarī, Kaumārī, Vaiṣṇavī, Vārāhī, Indrāṇī and Cāmuṇḍī. The seven mothers have different attributes and different vāhanas.

Brahmāṇī- She has four faces and a body bright as gold. She carries attributes such as *śūla*, *akṣamāla*, *abhaya* and *varada* pose. She is seated upon a red lotus and her *vāhana* is haṃsa (swan). She wears a *pitambara* (yellow) garment.

Māheśvarī- She is the female manifestation of Maheśvara. Mahesvari has four arms; two of which are in the *abhaya* and *varada* Poses while the remaining two hands carry *śūla* and *akṣamāla*. Her *vāhana* is Bull.

Kaumārī- She is the female manifestation of Subrahmanya who is known as Kumara. Kaumārī has four hands, *śakti*, *kukkuṭa*, *abhaya* and *varada* poses. Her *vāhana*, is Peacock, which is also the emblem on her banner.

Vaiṣṇavī- Vaiṣṇavī holds *cakra*, *śaṅkha*, *abhaya*, and *varada* as attributes. She wears a yellow garment. On her head is a *kirīṭa-makuṭa*.

Vārāhī-Varahī has the face of a boar and she wields *hala* and *śakti*. Her *vāhana*, as well as the emblem on her banner, is an elephant.

Indrāṇī- The figure of Indrāṇī has three eyes and four arms; she carries *vajra*, *śakti*, *varada* and *abhaya* as attributes. Her *vāhana* as well as the emblem of her banner is an elephant.

Cāmuṇḍā- The Goddess Cāmuṇḍā has four arms and three eyes. She carries *Kapāla*, *śūlaabhaya* and *varada*.

¹² ibid, p.40-41

¹³ The one who born from a brāhmin father and śūdra women.

¹⁴Sanderson, Alexis, The Śaiva Literature, p.40-41

¹⁵Buddhist Tantra has eight Māṭṛs. Eighth one is Mahālakṣmī.

These are the seven mothers, which are very popular in India. The text *Māṭṛsadbhāva* and South Indian versions of *Brahmayāmalatantra* have discussed the worship of *Bhadrakālī* along with *Sapta-māṭṛ*¹⁶s.

Śeṣasamuccaya

The text *Śeṣasamuccaya* by Cennāśankaranambūtiri was written in the fifteenth century, which is discussed the rituals of many deities such as Brahma, Sūrya, Vaiśravaṇa, Kṛṣṇa, Sarasvati, Lakṣmī, Pārvati, Jyēsthābhagavati, Bhadrakālī, Sapta-māṭṛs, Rurujit and Śiva. The Chapters 7-9 of *Śeṣasamuccaya* is focused on the rituals of Goddess Rurujit¹⁷ along with *Sapta-māṭṛs*. The auto commentary of *Śeṣasamuccaya* by the same author says the ritual of Goddess *Rurujit* was taken from *Māṭṛsadbhāva*¹⁸. *Śeṣasamuccaya* is only one text, which quotes *Māṭṛsadbhāva* and it also summarizes the ritual of Goddess Rurujit within three chapters.

Flora and Fauna descriptions in *Māṭṛsadbhāva*

There are many descriptions about the flora and fauna in *Māṭṛsadbhāva*. Different types of Seeds, *dhātūs*, metals, etc. are describing in this text. In the seventh chapter of *Māṭṛsadbhāva* is describing the *bījāṅkurārpaṇa* part, tells seven types seeds need to be used. Tila (sesame), Niṣpāva (lablab bean), rājamāṣā (kidney bean), priyaṅgu (millet), śālī (pady), sarṣapa (mustard), mudga (green gram), yava (barley), māṣa (urad dal) these are the seeds need to be used in *bījāṅgurārpaṇa*. Then in the fourth chapter the author discussed about different types of trees can be used to make *pratimā or bimba*. Madūka (Indian butter tree), candana (sandal tree), Śrīvṛkṣa (common flag), śamīdrumaṃ (fabaceae), Mahīruhaḥ (teak), Sarala (a type pine tree), Badarī (Indian jujube), Khadira (cutch tree), Śiṃśapā (aśoka), Bakula (cherry), Tinduka (gaub tree), Raktacandana (red sandal tree) and panasa (jackfruit tree) are can be used to make *bimba*¹⁹.

There are many other flora descriptions in this text and the text also mentions some fauna descriptions. When discussing the different types of soils, there we can see some discussion on fauna²⁰.

¹⁶ These three texts such as *Māṭṛsadbhāva* and South Indian versions of two *Brahmayāmalas* are discussed the rituals of Sapta-māṭṛs, along with Virabhadra and Gaṇapati.

¹⁷ The name Rurujit first used in *Śeṣasamuccaya*. *Māṭṛsadbhāva* does not mention this name. There only says Bhadrakālī and other names.

¹⁸ अथरुरुजिदिगिरिशादिरूपाणीत्यादितएवप्रसक्तानांशिवैकवेरीमातृक्षेत्रपालानांयोगपद्यैकस्मिन्नायतनेस्थापनप्रदर्शनार्थं 'मातृसद्भावाद्यागमोक्तक्रियाक्रमं' वदन्स्वतन्त्रादिभेदांश्चयोजयन्भिन्नसक्षणमाह - अथस्वतन्त्रस्येतिSS 7th chapter, 1st verse commentary.

¹⁹ चतुर्णामपिवर्णानां वृक्षभेदस्त्वथोच्यते ॥
मधूकंचन्दनञ्चैवश्रीवृक्षञ्चशमीद्रुमम् ।
द्विजानांक्षत्रियाणान्तुप्रशस्यन्तेमहीरुहाः ॥
चन्दनंसरलंबिम्बंचम्पकंबदरीतथा ।
विशांखदिरबीजाखशिशपाःकथिताबुधैः ॥
शूद्रेसालञ्चकुलतिन्दुकं वर्णतोद्रुमाः ।
रक्तचन्दनवृक्षेणमधूकेनाथवापुनः ॥
पनसेनाथवासर्ववर्णानाञ्चविधीयते ।
तथैवप्रतिमानाञ्चवर्णानाञ्चप्रकल्पयेत् ॥ Mā.Sad, 4th chapter, 13cd-17 verses

²⁰ There are many other flora descriptions in *Māṭṛsadbhāva*. Different types of *ausadhi*-s, variety of seeds, description of many types of flowers descriptions having given in *Māṭṛsadbhāva*.

Architectural and Iconographical knowledge in *Māṭṛsadbhāva*

The author of *Māṭṛsadbhāva* must be well versed in the architectural and iconographical knowledge systems. The chapters second and third focus on the architectural elements of *Māṭṛsadbhāva*. From *Bhūparigraha* to building a temple is elaborately discussed here and the measurements of each portion are also discussed in these chapters very well. The author used measurements like hasta and *āṅgula*²¹. He discusses which places that are good and not good to build a temple or shrine in detail. After that, he discusses what are the dimensions of the shrines for each deity and where the kitchen and well to be made. Decoration style for each deity also discussed here. In other chapters, he discusses the measurements of *homakuṇḍa* and Padma, and what are the colors uses to draw the Padma, etc. are discussed in this text.

In the fourth and fifth chapters of *Māṭṛsadbhāva*, the author discusses the iconographical elements. He says the *pratimā*-s can make by wood, stone, *dhātu*-s, metal and *ratna*-s also. The text discusses which type of wood can use for making *bimba*, what are the qualities it needs, which type stone needs to make a *bimba*, the qualities and disqualifies of stones are discussed in these two chapters. And he explains the measurements of each *aṅga*-s by *āṅgula* measurement. Eyes should be certain *āṅgulas*, hand, leg, nose, forehead, belly and all body parts measurements are mentioned here in detail. This shows that the author of this text must be well known in architectural and iconographical knowledge.

Conclusion

Many texts are produced on the subject of Kerala Tantra. Among them, very fewer texts are published and a large number of texts need to be edit and published. This study is focusing on the general outline of Kerala Tantra Literature and a brief study on *Māṭṛsadbhāva*. The text *Māṭṛsadbhāva* is ritualistic text on the worship of Bhadrakālī along with Saptamāṭṛs. This text has discussed the subject as a ritualistic perspective, but the text includes much architectural and iconographical knowledge. Compared to other Tantric manuals of Kerala, *Māṭṛsadbhāva* holds a detail iconographical elements and having discussed the measurements of every *aṅgas* of the *bimba*. The text also discusses the different types of woods, *ratna*-s, different types of soils, seeds, *gandh*-as, metals, *auśadhī*-s and so on for use in rituals. So this text gives not only the ritual knowledge, but it also gives other knowledge systems such as architecture and iconography. The edition and the study of *Māṭṛsadbhāva* will give a vast knowledge of different materials and will enlighten the rituals of Goddess Rurujit. There are many Kerala Tantra texts that are waiting to become published, and they need to come in front of the academic world.

²¹This is an old method of measurement, which use especially for the temple architecture. The measurements are specified with hand and fingers.

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