Tantra Literature of Kerala- Special Reference to Māṭrsadbhāva

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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 Māṭrsadbhāva is one among them, which discuss the ritual of Goddess Bhadrakāli/ 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 Māṭrsadbhāva refer to Brahmayāmala many times. The present study is focusing on the special features of Tantra literature of Kerala and a special discussion on Māṭrsadbhāva along with Brahmayāmala and Śeṣasamuccaya.

Keywords: Māṭrsadbhāva, 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 Saṁhitā 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 CennāsNārayanāNampūtirippāṭu and commentaries on *Viṣṇusamhitā* have narrated some element on philosophical discussions 1.

Kerala Tantra is a mixture of different traditions such as Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, Śākta, Vaidika, Śmārta, 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 Saiddhāntika- Pāñcarātra traditions. It also contains elements of beliefs and practices of several other traditions like śmārta 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 style 2. CennāsNārayanāNampūtirippāṭu 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*ais a compilation of many pre-*Tantrasamuccaya* texts and Saiddhāntika-Pāñcarātra texts 3. 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 chapters 4. The pre-*Tantrasamuccaya* texts such as *Payogamañjari, Viṣṇusamhitā, Īśanaśivagudevapaddhati, Mātrṣadbhāva* 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 NampūtiriBrāhmīns for the authority of doing temple rituals. The 5th verse from the first chapter of *Tantrasamuccaya* describes the qualities of an ācārya.

Vipraḥkulīnāḥkr̥tasaṃkriyaugah.  
Svadhītavedāgamatattavettā.  
vanāśramācāraparodhidīkṣo.  
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.

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1The discussion on philosophical elements means, these commentaries deliberate the yogic prāṇāyama-s, paheabhūtakalpana, philosophical thoughts on installation and jñānāḥōra 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, Viṣṇusamhitā and Īśanaśivagudevapaddhati and Āgamic/Saiddhāntika and Pāñcarātra are the core of *Tantrasamuccaya*.  
4The ritual of Viṣṇu, Śiva, Durgā, Śaṅkaranārāyaṇa, Subrahmanyā, Ganapati and Śaṣṭa are the seven deities.  
5*Tantrasamuccaya*, 1”ch, 5th verse
Mātrṣadbhāva

Mātrṣadbhāva 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-mātrṣ or Seven mothers. The text is believed to be the first Śākta worship text from Kerala. The text 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-mātrṣ 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.

Brahmayāmala Tantra

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

There are around five versions of Brahmayāmalatantrasare discovered in India. 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 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, 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/Bhadraṇī 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 power.

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

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8The first chapter of Mā.Sad mentions what are the subjects going to discuss and
Yāmalaṁisāmāloṣṭvamāhārīṣyamāṇurūpataḥ.
9jagaddhitāyacāsmābhihkriyatesārasaṃgrahaḥ. Mā.Sad, 1st ch, 2nd verse
10athaikavīrīṃpratimāṃpravakṣyāṇamāsataḥ.
Brahmayāmalatantraśāṣṭrotāḥ. Mā.Sad, 5th ch, 1st verse

9Hatley, Shaman, The Brahmayāmalatantra and Early Śaiva cult of Yoginīs, 2007, p.3-5
10Ibid, pp.3-5
11Sanderson, Alexis; The Śaiva Literature, 2014, pp.40-41

Available Online: https://aipublisher.org/ajahss-volume-2-issue-6-june-july-2020/
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 Mātrṣadbhāva.

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 library. 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. But the Mātrṣadbhāva do not mention non-brahmin priests carrying out the worship of Bhadrakālī and this makes it clear that the Mātrṣadbhāva was written for the rituals to be performed by an orthodox Kerala Brahmans 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 Brahmayāmalaand 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 Cāmuṇḍa/Bhadrabhāva. This shows the historical evidence to the extent that these texts were not only known and studied but were used as ritual manuals.

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

Māheśvari- 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 aksamāla. 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.

Vaiśṇavī- Vaiśṇavī holds cakra, śaṅkha, abhaya, and varada as attributes. She wears a yellow garment. On her head is a kiriṭa-makuta.

Vārāhī- Vārāhī has the face of a boar and she yields 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, śulaabhaya and varada.

Sapta-mātrs- The worship of Sapta-mātrs is a pan-Indian concept and it has spread all over India, including Buddhist culture. Sapta-mātrs are Brahmāṇī, Māheśvari, Kaumārī, Vaiśṇavī, Vārāhī, Indrāṇi and Cāmuṇḍā. The seven mothers have different attributes and different vāhanas.

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 Mātrs. Eighth one is Mahālakṣmī.
These are the seven mothers, which are very popular in India. The text Mātrsadbhāva and South Indian versions of Brahmayāmalatantras have discussed the worship of Bhadrakālī along with Sapta-mātrī."}

Śeṣasamuccaya

The text Śeṣasamuccaya by CennāśŚankaranNambūtiri was written in the fifteenth century, which is discussed the rituals of many deities such as Brahma, Sūrya, Vaiśravaṇa, Kṛṣṇa, Sarasvatī, Lakṣmī, Pārvatī, Jyeṣṭhābhagavatī, Bhadrakālī, Sapta-mātrs, Rurujit and Śiva. The Chapters 7-9 of Śeṣasamuccaya is focused on the rituals of Goddess Rurujit along with Sapta-mātrs. The auto commentary of Śeṣasamuccaya by the same author says the ritual of Goddess Rurujit was taken from Mātrsadbhāva. Śeṣasamuccaya is only one text, which quotes Mātrsadbhāva and it also summarizes the ritual of Goddess Rurujit within three chapters.

Flora and Fauna descriptions in Mātrsadbhāva

There are many descriptions about the flora and fauna in Mātrsadbhāva. Different types of Seeds, dhātūs, metals, etc. are describing in this text. In the seventh chapter of Mātrsadbhāva is describing the bijāṅkurāṛpa 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 bijāṅgurāṛpaṇa. 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), Śrīvṛṣka (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.

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 fauna.

16 These three texts such as Mātrsadbhāva and South Indian versions of two Brahmayāmalas are discussed the rituals of Sapta-mātrs, alongwithVirabhadra and Ganapati.

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

18 'अथरुरुजिजिजिरिशाजिरूपाणीत्याजितएवप्रसक्तानाांजशवैकवेिीमातृक्षेत्रपालानाांयोिपद्यैनैकस्मिन्नायतनेस्थापनप्रिशशनाथं' 1ST chapter, 1st verse commentary.

19 'चतुणाशमजपवणाशनाांवृक्षभेिस्त्वथोच्यते'।।
 मधूक ां चन्दनञ्चैव
 श्रीवृक्षञ्चशमीद्रुमम्
।।

20 There are many other flora descriptions in Mātrsadbhāva. Different types of flowers, variety of seeds, description of many types of flowersdescriptions having given in Mātrsadbhāva.
Architectural and Iconographical knowledge in Mātrsadbhāva

The author of Mātrsadbhāva must be well versed in the architectural and iconographical knowledge systems. The chapters second and third focus on the architectural elements of Mātrsadbhāva. 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 aṅgula\textsuperscript{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 homakunda 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 Mātrsadbhāva, 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 aṅgula measurement. Eyes should be certain aṅgulas, 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 Mātrsadbhāva. The text Mātrsadbhāva is ritualistic text on the worship of Bhadrakāḷi along with Saptamātrs. 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, Mātrsadbhāva 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-\(\text{\textminus}\)s, metals, ausadh\(\text{\textminus}\)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 Mātrsadbhāva 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.

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