Vedic Ritual Tradition of Kerala

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Yajñas or Yagas are explained in various Brāhmaṇa texts. All Vedas are having their own Brāhmaṇas. Yagas are coming under the Karmakanda portion of Brāhmaṇas. In these portions different types of sacrifices and the method of the performance of these sacrifices are explained. The performances of these sacrifices are a combination of Brāhmaṇas representing three Vedas, and the participants of Yaga are also representing three Vedas. The Mantras and the methods of performance of Hota is explained in Ṛgvedic Brāhmaṇas. The Ṛtvik Adhvaryu is representing the Yajurveda Brāhmaṇas, and the Ṛtvik Udgāta is representing Sāmaveda. The performances of other participants of sacrifices are also explained in the three Brāhmaṇas.

The Srauta sacrifices can be divided in to two major portions, Haviryajña and Somayaga. These two portions have seven subdivisions, and each portions are explained thus:

अग्न्याधेयं चाग्निहोत्रं दर्शदर्शोदितक्रिया
तथैवाग्रायणेष्टिश्च चातुर्मास्यानि च क्रमात्।
निरुद्धपशुबन्धश्च सौत्रमण्यपि सप्तधा॥

अग्न्याधेयं, अग्निहोत्रं, दशपूर्णमसि, अग्रायणेष्टि, चातुर्मास्य, निरुद्धपशुबन्धः, सौत्रमणि are known as Haviryajñas. The subdivisions of Somayaga are also explained thus:

अग्निष्टोमस्तथाAgnishtomastathatyagnishtoma ukthyasca Shodasi.
Vajapeyotiratroptoryamassamsthastu saptadha.

Agnishtoma, Atyagnishtoma, Ukthya, shodasi, Vajapeya, Atiratra and Aptoryama are known as Somayagas.

The Mimamsa System of Indian Philosophy give the answer to the questions like what is Yajña and what are the objectives of sacrifices. Yajña or Yaga is being performed as a symbol of sacrifices. In a Yaga the man or the Yajamana offers a lot of things in to the divine fire and that offerings are only for that particular deity and not for the Yajamana, and he wishes that these offerings are not for him. "Idam na mama", The definition of Yaga instructed by Mimamsakas as "Devatoddesena dravyatyago yagah" means the sacrifice of sacred substances like ghee, rice, etc for the divine power. The motivations behind the ritual performances are absolutely the ultimate happiness of the entire world. "Lokassamasta ssukhino bhavantu" This was the sincere prayer of the ancient sages. This Mantra alone proves a secular harmony of those periods.

Historical background of Kerala ritual tradition.

In this paper the historical background of Kerala ritual tradition is being discussed. According to the tradition, the ritual sacrifices began in Kerala in the time of Melatole Agnihotri. It is believed that Agnihotri had performed 99 Yagas. As far as the period of Agnihotri is not accurately determined the authenticity of this tradition cannot be accepted. According to the story of Parayi petta Pntirukulam the paternity of Agnihotri is attributed to Vararuci who was considered as a contemporary of the great poet Kalidasa. But due to lack of clear historical evidences this story cannot be accepted authentically. According to another story Vararuci, the father of Agnihotri and the Kalidasa's contemporary poet Vararuci are two different personalities. There are a lot of contradictions in the story of Vararuci and Agnihotri, and hence in this paper the period of Agnihotri is not of great concern.

Now let us analyze other references on the historical background of Kerala ritual tradition. While going through Sangha works we will get some indications regarding the ritual sacrifices performed in Kerala. In a song of Akananuru, there is a reference about Yaga performed in Kerala. According to this song a Yaga was performed by sage Parasurama at Cellur Talipparambu. In the third decade

(Dasaka) of Akananuru it is mentioned that Palyani Chelkkezhu Kuttavan performed nine Yagas. There is also a reference of Somayaga in Cilappatikaram of Ilango Adikal. He brought the four elements (Caturbhuta) from Amaravati to Vanci Nagara and performed Somayaga

Salas were very prominent in the educational history of Kerala. These Salas were the centers of Vedic and ritual studies. A copper plate issued by Ay king Karunantadakkan in the ninth year of his rule (AD 864 - 865) provides the detailed information about the regulation laid down for admission to the Sala attached to Parthivasekharapuram. This Sala was an institution where the Vedas and ritual topics are being taught. Besides this, Kantallur, Parthivapuram Salas were also considered as the educational institutions for Veda and ritual sacrifices.

In the history of Kerala Sanskrit literature, there is a brief description of Putumana Comatiri and Kelallurr Neelakandha Somayaji. Putumana Comatiri, who performed Somayaga and became a Somayaji, who was famous astrologer and the author of Karanapaddhati, who was also lived between 1375-1475 AD. In Keraliya Samskrita Sahitya Caritram there was no any reference on his sacrificial performances. But by the title of Comatiri (Somayaji) it can assume that he performed Somayaga. Neelakandha Somayaji of Kelallur (1450-1540) was a famous commentator of Aryabhatiya and the author of Siddhantadarpana. He was born in Gargagotra. He belonged to Kelallur Mana south side of the Trikkandiyur temple in Malappuram district. His father's name was Jataveda. Vadakumkur Rajarajavarma Raja observed that Neelakandha Somayaji was performed several Somaygas (KSSC I P- 348) From the brief description of these two scholars it can be assume that the ritual tradition in Kerala was developed in a remarkable position, in the period of 15th century AD.

Some Peculiar Features of Kerala Ritual Tradition

While explaining the Kerala ritual tradition Dr. Frits Stall states "The Namboodiri performances are not artificial or scholarly reconstruction nor are the result of recent revivals. The tradition is authentic and alive. They perform rituals as

they have learned from their preceptors it is their tradition." (Agni Vol: I Introduction P 4) According to him, the ritual tradition of Kerala follows an oral method of teaching and learning process in the sacrificial performances. The Namboodiries of Kerala uses Malayalam language also in these oral methods of teaching and learning process. The influence of Malayalam language can see not only in the teaching learning process but in the performance also they use many Malayalam sentences. In Varana or Ritvigvarana (choosing the participants for ritual sacrifice) the Yajamana addresses the chief priest and other advisers in Malayalam. In the beginning of Agnyadhana, Yajamana request Rakshapurusha or Patron to protect the sacrifice thus: "Agnyadhanam Rakshiccu Tarenam" (you must protect the Agnyadhana). The Rakshapurusha may be a prominent person in that village or he may be the king of that country. His reply will be "Am" (yes). Then the Yajamana put another request before the Rakshapurusha" Agnyadhanattinnu sadhanangal ellam ulavayittarenam" (you are requested to arrange all the articles for Agnyadhāna. The reply will be same as to the first request. After that the Yajamana approaches his family preceptor and request him "Agnyadhanattinnu Taittariyaccatangu Kattittarenam" (you are requested to guide me through Taittariya procedure for Agnyadhana). Through the same method he asks to Vaidika also to guide him for completing the sacrifice successfully. Vaidika, Rakshapurusha and family preceptor (Otikkan) are the most prominent personalities in ritual sacrifices. Then the Yajamana submit the same request before the Sāmavedin priest. After getting the approval from Sāmavedin priest he approaches all of the other Ṛtviks and requests them one by one to fulfill the sacrifice. "Agnyadhanattinnu Adhvaryavam/Hautram/Audgatram ceytu tarenam" (You are requested to performs Adhvaryu/ Hota/Udgāta etc., in this Yaga). For Agnishtoma and Atiratra the same process will be followed. The word Agnishtomattinnu or Atirtrattinnu will use instead of Agnyadhanattinnu. During the Somakraya ceremony they also use both Sanskrit and Malayalam languages. The Soma seller will be a Tamil Brahmin who is believed to be a representative of the Gandharvas looking after the Soma plants flourishing in the mount Mujawat. They are Swana, Bhaja, Anghri, Bambhari, Hasta, Suhasta, Krisanu. (Ekahahinasatrangal, P 29).

During the period of Deeksha Yajamāna is not allowed to speak in Malayalam. He should speak in Sanskrit itself and he should not expose the teeth while laughing. There are also many restrictions for Yajamana during the Deeksha period. Another peculiar feature of Kerala ritual tradition is that on the fifth day of Agnishtoma after the offering of Soma juice during the ceremony of Dvidevatyagrahapracara, there is a custom among Namboodiris to place money offerings for the tutelary deity (Paradevata) of the Yajamana on the thigh of Hota. It is considered as highly important. According to Kerala tradition, rice gruel is distributing to all those who attend the sacrifice at about 2 PM each day. The expenditure for this should met by the Yajamna or his relatives. It is customary to conduct a delicious feast, each day after the Vapa offering on the fourth day. Indra and other Gods are believing to be present in the sacrificial hall till the end of the Sama chants on the last day and according to tradition, the feast is for them.

Pasvalambhana or animal sacrifice was very common in Kerala ritual tradition also. But during the Atiratra performance at Panjal on 1975, there was a protest from the public that an animal should not be killed during the Yaga. As a result of this public protest, Vedaratnam Erkara Raman Namboodiri, Cerumukku Vallabhan Somayaji,Taikkad Vaidikan and other scholars engaged in a serious discussion on this matter. After analyzing various theories and rules of sacrifice they reached in a conclusion that Pasvalambhana can be performed by Pishtapasu. (The artificial meat which is prepared by rice powder, hot water and Ghee) Since the Panjal Atiratram on 1975 the ritual sacrifices performed by Namboodiries are follows the method of Pishtapasu instead of Pratyakshapasu.

The peculiarities of Kerala ritual tradition mentioned here are not completed. There are many other special features in Kerala sacrificial tradition, which are based on the social culture of Namboodiri Brahmins. This paper is intended to point out only some important customs and rules of Kerala ritual tradition.

Discription of Srauta rituals performed by Namboodiri Brahmins.

According to the Srauta ritual tradition of Kerala the Namboodiri Brahmins used to perform only three types of sacrifices mainly. They are Agnyadhana or Adhana, Agnishtoma or Somayaga and Atiratra or Agni. A Namboodiri couple married from the same caste is only eligible to perform Agnyadhana or Adhana. The duration of the Adhana is one day. After the performance of Adhana, a Namboodiri is called Aditiri. An Aditiri who performed Agnyadhana is only eligible to perform a Somayaga. In Agnyadhana, there are only five Ṛtviks as the participants. They are Adhvaryu, Hota, Agneet, Brahma and Udgāta. The mode of performance of Agnyadhana is an abridged form of Somayaga.

Agnishtoma is popularly called Somayaga or simply Yaga. The duration of Somayaga is six days. Only an Aditiri is eligible to perform Somayaga. After the performance of Somayaga Aditiri gains the title as Somayaji. There are seventeen Ṛtviks in a Somayaga. Among these Adhvaryu, Brahma, Hota, Udgāta and Sadasya are more important than the other twelve. The names of these twelve Ṛtviks are Pratiprasthata, Brāhmaṇacchamsi, Maitravaruna, Prastota, Neshta, Agnidhra or Agnit, Acchavaka, Pratihari, Unneta, Pota, Gravastota, and Subrahmanya. Apart from these Rakshapurusha, Salavaidya, and many other supervisors will be there in the Yagsala. A detailed description of Somayaga is explained by Vedaratnam Erkara Raman Namboodiri in his work Ekahahinasatrangal.

Next prominent sacrificial performance of Kerala is Atiratra or Sagnicayana Atiratra which is popularly known as Agni. This sacrifice will go up to twelve days. The number of Ṛtviks in Atiratra is same as Somayaga. Most of the ritual activities of Atiratra are expansion of those in Somayaga. The number of Pravargya, Upasat, etc. will be double. The most important distinguishing factor in Atiratra is the construction of Vedi or Citi. This Citi is being constructed with the bricks in the shape of an eagle with wings spread ready to fly. The method of construction of Syenaciti is based on the Karika of Yogiyar known as Yogiyarude Karika, a work written in Sanskrit which deals with different units of measurements used for the layout of Pragvamsa, Mahāvedi, Citi etc, dimensions of differ-

ent types of bricks used for Citis and the mode of measurements accepted in Kerala tradition. Baudhayanasulbasutra explains the method of construction of various types of Vedis and Citis generally. But in Kerala tradition, the Karikas of Yogiyar is being considered as the most authentic. Instead of a detailed description of Atiratra, this paper focuses on the other sacrifices which are used to perform in the house of Yajamana.

Apart from these three sacrifices, there are ten types of Ishtis being performed in Kerala. They are Darsapurnamasa, Nakshatra, Ayushmati, Anvarambhini, Mrigara or Pavitramrigara, Pathikrit, Surabhimati, Vibhrashta, Vaisvanari and Traidhatavi. In the category of Pasubandha there is only one ritual known as Prayascittapasu. Soma sacrifices are of two types; Agnishtoma and Atiratra with Agnicayana. Here a question may arise. Why Namboodiris are performing only two types of rituals. An authentic and detailed answer has been given by Dr. Frits Stall in his most eulogized work 'Agni'; Namboodiris preserve a very early stage of ritual development. It is quite possible that Agnishtoma represent the original Indo-Iranian Soma ritual. This would have been a product of Indo- Iranian fire cult, which developed into a celebration of Soma, when Vedic nomads had entered the Indian plain. When Agnicayana was combined with Soma ritual, some ceremonies were extended so as to last through the night. Hence Atiratra with Agnicayana would have developed as the first composite ritual of an Agnicayana and Soma sacrifice. A remarkable fact accords with this hypothesis. Namboodiri Sāmavedins belong to archaic Jaiminiya School. The subdivisions of Jaiminiya Samhita mention none of the seven varieties but Agnishtoma and Atiratra.

Here a list of Namboodiris who performed Somayagas and Atiratras during that many years is given. The details are being listed according to alphabetic order and this list includes the year of performance in Malayalam era as well as Christian era.

1. Azhakappura - 1074 (1899)
2. Alampilly (Kavalappara) - 1104 (1929)
3. Alampilly- (Kizhayoor) - 1116 (1941)
4. Amettur - 1102, 1145 - (1927, 1970)

5.	Anjam	- 1067, 1105-(1892, 1930)
6.	Adakkaputhur Kunnam	- 1102 (1927)
7.	Bhatti Thekkedam	- 1062, 1098 (1887, 1923)
8.	Bhattipputhillam	- 1078,1103,1140,1164,1185, 1178 (1903, 1928, 1965, 1990, 2003, 2011)
9.	Bhatti Vadakkedam	- 1084 (1909)
10.	Cherumukku	- 1044, 1058, 1070, 1105, 111 1129, 1140(2), 1048 (A) 1060 (A), 1130, 1150(A),1180,1188. 1869, 1883, 1895, 1929, 1939, 1954,1965(2), 1873(A),1885(A), 1955, 1975 (A), 2005, 2013)
11.	Cheruppoyilam	- 1091 (1916)
12.	Chola	- 1104 (1929)
13.	Eledam	- 1101, 1140 (1926,1965).
14.	Ezhikkode	- 1090 (1915)
15.	Ennazhi	- 1078,1102 (1903,1927)
16.	Eratta	- 1104 (1929
17.	Erkkara	- 1062,1068,1104 (1887, 1893, 1929)
18.	Edathara Moothedam	- Date Not Available.
19.	Kakkad	- Date Not Available.
20.	Kaliyath	- Date Not Available.
21.	Kallanikkad	- Date Not Available.
22.	Kanayoor Kapra	- 1086,1103 (1911,1928)
23.	Karthiyam	- Date Not Available.
24.	Karuvattu (Vattamkulam)	- 1102 (1927)
25.	Kizhakke Kuthulli	- 1081,1102,1129, (1906, 1927, 1954)
26.	Keezhe Narippatta	- 1070,1140 (1895,1965)
27.	Keezhmundayoor	- 1060 (1885)
28.	Kizhuprakkad	- 1113 (1938)
29.	Kizhayoor Pallisseri	- 1128 (1953)

30.	Korattikkara	- 1090 (1915)
31.	Kodakkattu Kuthulli	- 1101 (1926)
32.	Koyithadi	- 1127 (1952)
33.	Krisnath	- Date Not Available.
34.	Kuzhiyamkunnam	- 1091 (1916)
35.	Kummini	- 1097 (1922)
36.	Kunnam	- 1128 (1953)
37.	Kurissathamanna	- Date Not Available.
38.	Kuthulli	- 1094,1128(1919,1953)
39.	Kunnam Kizhayoor	- 1068, (1893)
40.	Mangalatheri	- 1079,1114 (1904,1939)
41.	Marath Kapra	-1013,1043,1073,1090,1097,1108,1121,1140, 1181(1838,1868,1898,1915, 1922, 1933, 1946, 1965, 2006)
42.	Mele Narippatta	- Date Not Available.
43.	Mepoyilam	- 1102, (1927)
44.	Mozhikunnam	- Date Not Available.
45.	Mundayoor (Attoor)	-1091,1103,1128,1916, 1928, 1953)
46.	Mundayoor (Arangottukara)	- 1060 (1885)
47.	Moorthiyedam	- 1078,1102, (1903, 1927)
48.	Muttathukattil Mamunnu	- 1055, 1086, 1104, 1019 (1880, 1911, 1929, 1844)
49.	Moothedam (Veroor)	- 1130 (1955)
50.	Nalledam	- 1074 (1899)
51.	Narayanamangalath(Narath)	- 1103, 1130, 1140, (1928, 1955, 1965)
52.	Neddham	- 1068 (1893)
53.	NellikkattuMamunnu	- 1091, 1116, 1076, 1093, 1131 (1916,1941, 1901, 1918, 1956)
54.	Nedungottur Moothedam	- Date Not Available.
55.	Nedungottur Para	- Date Not Available.

56.	Nilayangod	- 1080 (1905)
57.	Ottupura Kizhayoor	- 1080 (1905)
58.	Pakaravoor	- 1078,1098,(1903,1923)
59.	Pazhayam	- 1095 (1920)
60.	Pallisseri	- 1078,1128 (1903,1953)
61.	Pandam	- 1085 (1910)
62.	Para	- 1089 (1914)
63.	Padinjattad	- 1091,1102 (1916,1927)
64.	Padinjattukara	- Date Not Available.
65.	Pathirappilli	- 1034,1088 (1859,1913)
66.	Perumangattu	- 1079 (1904)
67.	Pothayath	- 1086,1140 (1911,1965)
68.	Pottakkuzhi	- 1011 (1926)
69.	Pukkuzhi	- 1089,1113 (1914,1938)
70.	Puthumana(Thonnallur)	- 1076,1104)
71.	Puthusseri	- 1086 (1911)
72.	Thekkeppattu	- Date Not Available.
73.	Thekkumparampa	- 1128 (1953)
74.	Thiyyannur	- 1104 (1929)
75.	Thottam (panjal)	- 1087,1100 (1912,1925)
76.	Vadhyan(Attoor)	- Date Not Available.
77.	Vaykkakkara	- 1080,1127 (1905,1952)
78.	Vengallur	- Date Not Available
79.	Venthrakkad	- 1085 (1910)

This list has been prepared with the reference of 'Agni' by Dr. Frits Stall. Some other sacrifices which are not mentioned by Dr. Stall given below. Kuntur Atiratra done by Puttillatt Ravi Akkittarippad in 1990, Somayaga performed by Puttillatt Ramanujan Akkittarippad son of Ravi Akkittarippad in 2003 at Thrissur and he also performed Atiratra at Panjal in 2011. Cherumukku Vallabhan Akkit-

tarippad performed Somayaga and Atiratra in 2005 and 2013 respectively. Kaimukku Vaidikan Raman Akkittarippad is another prominent Srauti who performed Somayaga and Atiratra in 2009 and 2012. Naduvam Narayanan Akkittarippad performed Somayaga and Atiratra in 2010 and 2012 respectively. In 2013 a Somayaga was performed by Kavumpuram Vasudevan Somayajippad in 2013 at Sukapuram. Among these the Atiratras of Naduvam Narayanan Akkittarippad and Cerumukku Vallabhan Akkittarippad was held at outside of Kerala. The previous one was held at Bhadracalam in Andhra Pradesh and the other was held at Hyderabad.

Prominent Srauta scholars of Kerala

A Brief life history of some prominent scholars who played a remarkable role in the development of ritual tradition of Kerala in recent years. Among these scholars, Vedaratnam Erkara Raman Namboodiri is the most distinguished personality. He was born at Erkara family at Mookkutala Village in Malappuram district on 1898. He studied Sanskrit from the famous institution known as "Pakaravur Gurukulam". Being a reputed scholar in Srauta sacrifices, he participated more than hundred Yagas. He also leads more than sixty sacrifices throughout Kerala. He had been honoured with "Vedaratna" by Sanskrit college Pattambi. In 1972 he became the founder and chief editor of Anadi magazine, which was published from Tirunavaya Brahmasvam Madham. A collection of his famous articles based on Vedic literature "Amnayamathanam" obtained the Kerala Sahitya Academy award. He was the key factor and main advisor of world famous Panjal Atiratram on 1975. He was the only Malayali scholar who obtained the award for Sanskrit scholars from the government of India in 1977. Besides the Amnayamathana he wrote four more books namely Ekahahinasatrangal, Srautakarmavivekam, Prayascittakarika and Rigvedanukramanika with commentary. He passed away in 1983.

Another veteran scholar of Kerala Srauta tradition was Taikkad Vaidikan Neelakandhan Namboodiri. He was born in 1927 at Vattamkulam village in

Malappuram district. He studied Rigveda through traditional system and practiced different types of recitation like Padaptha, Jata, Ratha etc. But his field of specialization was the ritual sacrifices. He studied all the manuals of Srauta sacrifices, and was very closs to Erkara Raman Namboodiri. He took prominent roles in various Somayagas and Atiratras. He took also the leadership of more than fifteen Srauta sacrifices. He was the in charge of Atiratra performed at Kuntur in 1990. He passed away on 2009.

Puttillat Ravi Akkittarippad was a prominent scholar in Veda, Smarta and Srauta He was born in the village of Chembra in Palakkad district in 1928. He was a well versed scholar in Rigveda and was expertise in the chanting of Jata, Ratha etc. He was also an authority in Rigveda Sarvanukramani. Being an authority in Grihyasutra, he was a popular instructor of various Grihya ceremonies and also very famous as a renowned Purohita. He participated in several sacrifices as Adhvaryu, Hota, and performed Somayaga in 1965. He also performed Atiratra in 1990 at Kunturr. He received Vedapandita Award from Olappamanna Deviprasadam Trust. He also participated in Trisandhas and Anyonyams. He passed the rigorous Vedic examination known as "Kadannirikkal". Very soft and bold in character, Ravi Akkittarippad passed away in 2014.

Cerumukku Vallabhan Somayajippad was another most prominent scholar in Srauta sacrifices. He was born in 1900 in Cerumukku Mana in Palakkad district He was known as C V Somayaji among the scholars. As an expert in Srauta subjects, he was also fluent in English. When Dr. Frits Stall came to Kerala, he was the only person among the Srauta scholars who could communicate with Stall in English. He carried the key role in Panjal Atiratra held in 1975. He passed away in 1990.

Many other scholars have contributed their knowledge to flourish the ritual sacrifice tradition such as Taikkad Kesavan Namboodiri, Narayanamangalathu (Naras) Narayanan Namboodiri, Pantal Damodaran Namboodiri, etc.

The ritual traditions of Kerala are spread out mainly in three villages. They are Sukapuram, Peruvanam, and Iriñjalakkuda. These are known as Gramas. Ac-

cording to the ritual tradition of Kerala, Vaidikas are the supreme authorities of ritual ceremonies. There are two Vaidika families in every Grama. The Vaidika families of Sukapuram Grama are Taikkad and Cerumukku; Vaidikas of Peruvanam Grama are Perumpadappu and Kaplingad; and the Vaidikas belonged to Irinjalakkuda are Kaimukku and Pantal families.

In the modern period, people of Kerala are approaching the ritual ceremonies with a curious mind. Since the last two decades, there is a remarkable development in Kerala ritual tradition. Public involvement in Yagas has increased and most of them consider the rituals as a cause for rain. But the rain is not an important part of the result of Yagas. The orthodox people believe that Yagas are performed for the well being of the whole universe. But many other people consider it as a means for the purification of the atmosphere. Anyway, the popularity of rituals in Kerala is increasing, and in many cases this popularity is being turned to commercial, religious, and political benefits and motives.

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