CHAPTER III

MUSIC FOR RITUALS IN VISHNU TEMPLES
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Vishnu cult is the most popular cult pervading in Kerala. Different manifestations of Vishnu such as Vamana, Varaha, Parasurama, Srikrishna, Narasimha and Srirama are also worshipped all over the state. Guruvayur Srikrishna temple and Sri Padmanabha Swamy temple are the most sought after Vishnu temples of Kerala. Of the many Avathars of Vishnu, Krishna is the favorite of devotees and this may be the reason behind the establishment of numerous Krishna temples in Kerala.

Among the rituals conducted in the temples of Krishna, Krishnanattam, a dance drama composed by the Zamorin king Manaveda is very important. This is often staged inside the precincts of Guruvayur temple as the main ritual. The entire story of Lord Krishna from Avataram¹ to Svargarohanam² is told through this dance drama. Krishnanattam is also considered as the predecessor of Kathakali. This is also offered as nercha or offering to the Lord by his devotees.

The other rituals associated with the Krishna temples are Pani kottal, Kriyanga Panchavadyam and Kottipadiseva as in the temples of other deities. During kottipadiseva Ashtapadi of Jayadeva are also sung after the rendering of one or two Tyanis in praise of Lord Krishna.
Some prominent Vishnu temples of Northern Kerala

Guruvayur Sri Krishna Temple

This Krishna temple is situated in a small place called Guruvayur in Thrissur district. The legend says that the idol of Krishna was installed by the ‘Guru’ of Devas, Brihaspathi and by Vayu deva. Thus it got the name Guruvayur.

The main priest of the temple is called Melsanthi and under his guidance all the Nithya Nidana Pooja are conducted in a systematic manner. But the right of taking any decision related with the temple goes to Tantri.

Guruvayur Utsavam is conducted in a grand manner. Ustavam is of Anguradi type which is more of Satvik nature. Tantrik rituals are given preference in Anguradi Utsavams. The main attraction of Guruvayur Utsavam is the elephant race or Anayottam. Usually there will be a huge crowd to view the event. Pallivetta followed by Arrattu is considered to be auspicious to attend.

Guruvayur Ekadasi is the other important day and lakhs of people observe the Vratham on that day. It is generally said that it is very easy for person to attain salvation who observe Ekadasi Vratam. There will be a huge crowd of devotees to have a Darsan of Lord Krishna on the Ekadasi day especially in Vrichika month defined as Guruvayur Ekadasi. Chembai Sangithotsavam conducted in the commemoration of famous Carnatic musician late Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavathar is the main attraction of the Ekadasi festival.
Kadalai Sri Krishna temple

*Kadalai Sri Krishna temple* is situated in Kannur district. This temple is of great antiquity. It is said that the idol of Krishna installed in the temple was once worshipped by his consort *Satyabhama*. The original idol or the *Moola Vigraha* of Krishna is kept inside the temple only but the *Seeveli Vigraha* was taken to the famous Krishna temple of Ambalapuzha during the *Tipusultan’s invasion* or *Tipusultan’s Padayottam*.

Numerous instruments are played for the daily rituals in the temple. For the Abhishekam that is done in the morning hours of a day, Valamtala of Chenda is played along with Chengila. Melam comprised of instruments such as Chenda- Valamtala and Idamtala, Ilatalam and Kurunkuzhal are performed for Usha Pooja. Same instruments are repeated for the Melam performed for Uccha Pooja and Athazha Pooja. Usually instruments like Timila and Chengila are used for Seeveli.
During Utsavam the Seeveli is conducted with Vilakkacharam. Valamtala of Chenda is played when the Pradakshinam is done for Seeveli. This will be followed by the Nadasvaram performance with the accompaniment of Tavil. After this Kriyanga Panchavadyam and Melam is performed. The other ritual conducted during the annual festival of Kadalai Sri Krishna Kshethram is the ‘Tidambu Nrittam’. This is a ritual conducted commonly in almost all the temples of northern Kerala. The literal meaning of Tidambu means idol mainly of the presiding deity of the temple. The main priest places the idol over his head and dances according to the beats of Chenda. The names of talas to which the dance is performed are Takiladi, Atantha and Chempata. The Nrittam usually starts in a slow tempo and gradually increases to higher tempo.

Nitya Pani or Cheriya Pani is the routine ritual of temple but Kottipadi Seva is generally absent in Kadalai Sri Krishna kshethram. Pani is performed on Timila.

**Trichambaram Sri Krishna Kshethram**

The Srikrishna temple of Trichambaram is another important Vishnu temple of northern Kerala. The Melam accompanied for the daily Poojas is the specialty of the temple. Tidambu Nrittam is also performed daily in this temple. For Utsavam which lasts for 14 days, the Nrittam will be performed to the accompaniment of Udukku.
Thirunavaya NavaMukunda Temple

The NavaMukunda Temple situated in the place called Thirunavaya is an ancient and prominent Vishnu Temple. The deity worshiped here is Lakshminarayana. This temple is associated with the story of Markendeya who was a Siva Bhaktha. When Lord Yama came to him since his life span has come to an end, he entered to the Nava Mukunda temple to save his life. The legend says that during this time, the Lord Nava Mukunda gave him a hand full of sand and directed Markendeya towards the west to Lord Siva residing at Thrirprangode. He also instructed him to make a Siva Linga out of this sand. Markendeya followed Vishnu’s advise and when Yama approached him, he embraced the Siva Linga and got rescued by Lord Siva.
Ritualistic art forms performed in Vishnu temples

Krishnanattam

Great Zamorin king Manaveda Raja wrote a poem in praise of Lord Guruvayurappan called Krishnagiti in an era prior to the time of trinity of Carnatic music, around 1654. This is considered as the first musical composition composed in Kerala with details regarding ragas and talas to which it is sung. There is no evidence of having such a musical composition before the advent of Krishnagiti. This work written in Sanskrit consists of Slokas and Padams. Krishnanattam is a dance drama based on Krishnagithi performed in the precincts of Guruvayur temple as an offering by devotees. Now it is the most prominent ritual of Guruvayur temple.
Both Melppathur Narayana Bhattathiri author of Narayaneeyam and Raja Manaveda were ardent devotees of Lord Guruvayurappa. One day lord appeared in their dream. Moved by the dream, former composed Narayaneeyam and latter, Krishna Githi. Theme of Krishnagithi is the story of Krishna as said in the tenth and eleventh cantos of Srimad Bhagavatha and Mahabharatha.

The incident that paved the way to compose Krishnagiti is given below:

Manavedan reveals his desire to see Krishna to Vilvamangalam Swamiyar, a great Krishna Bhaktha. He readily accepted the request and showed Krishna, who was playing under an Elanji tree. Manavedan was wonder struck by this vision. He moved forward in ecstasy to embrace the Lord. To his dismay, Lord suddenly disappeared leaving a peacock feather. The Elanji tree under which Lord was playing is now there in the south east corner of Sri Kovil of Guruvayur temple. An idol of Krishna was made using the Elanji wood as a commemoration of this incident. Manavedan was deeply moved by this happening that he decided to compose Krishnagiti at the request of Vilvamangalam Swamiyar.

He completed the whole work in front of Lord itself. He installed the peacock feather in the lord's headgear. This headgear was used in the Krishnanattam performance until it got damaged during the attack of Kodungallur fort, where it was kept, by the Dutch army.
Manavedan composed Krishnagithi following the style adopted by Jayadeva whose work is Githa Govindam which is popular all over India. Krishnagithi consists of eight plays and is presented in eight consecutive days. The plays are Avatham, Kaliya Mardanam, Rasakrida, Kamsavadham, Svayamvaram, Bana Yuddham, Vividha Vadham and Svararohanam. Krishnanattam is considered as the fore runner of Kathakali. It is Kottarakkara Thampuran who designed Kathakali after watching Krishnanattam. He wrote Ramanattam following the pattern of Krishnanattam.

The Krishnanattam play begins with Kelikottu to which instruments like Maddalam, Chengila and Ilathalam are played. This is usually performed in the evening to inform the public about the play. Kelikottu is done in the east Nata of Guruvayur temple. The northern area beside the Srikovil will be made ready for the performance. After Nithya Nidana Pooja, Srikovil will be closed around 10.30 pm to start the play. A Brahmin will light the Kali Vilakku kept there. Following this all the instrumentalists would row up with their instruments. Maddalam artists are the first one to perform. They touch the instrument with great care and lift it up. The artists play on both sides of the instrument to invoke the Sabda Brahma. Then they tie it around their waist. An item called Kelikkayyu is then performed along with Chengila and Ilatalam.

When Kelikkayyu is completed, it is the time to hold a Thirashila or a colour full curtain. Then the artists perform Todayam behind the Thirashila. Todayam is generally performed by woman characters. This item is the prayer to seek the blessings of almighty. Todayam begins with a Padam taken from Kaliyamardanam, Narayana Narakantaka Naraka Parayana. A Mangala Sloka, “Souvarnabhuta” is then recited.
Todayam is followed by Purappadu. Purappadu is a well choreographed item performed by Krishna or Balarama, or either both of them together. Here they dance to difficult steps and gestures.

Next item is Avatharam performed by the characters of Brahma and Bhumi Devi. Usually in Krishnanattam, Purappadu will be enacted by the characters of Krishna or Balarama. Purappadu in Kamsa Vadham occurs in the middle of the play. “Vivida Vadham” has two Purappadus whereas there is no Purappadu in Svargarohanam.

The concluding part of a play is called Dhanasi. Any way Dhanasi is not performed in Svargarohanam. In Dhanasi, artist dances to a particular style with the accompaniment of music. The Padam Narayana Narakantaka from Kaliyamardanam is sung here too. Finally the play concludes with Mangalam after the dispersal of characters. Soon after this a couple of beats will be played on Maddalam and ends the play.

**Make up used for Krishnanattam.**

Five kinds of make up are used in Krishnanattam. They are Pacha, Pazhuppu, Kathi, Minukku and Kari. Pacha is used for characters like Krishna, Vasudeva, Nandagopa, Rukmini, Udhava, Muchukunda, Dandavakthra, Kamsa and Jarasandha. Kathi is used for villain characters like Sisupala, Sankhachuda and Bana. “Pazhuppu” is done for the characters like Balarama, Siva and Bhima. All the woman characters and some characters like Narada, Sandipani, Yavana and Kuchela apply Minukku. Kari is applied for Puthana and hunter Jara. A number of colourful masks are also made used in a Krishnattam kali.
Many props like bow, arrow, mace, shield, Chakra are utilized during a Krishnattam performance. We also come across some beautiful tableaus in Krishnattam. Special dance forms like “Mullappoo Chuttal” are performed. This form appears in Avatharam and Rasakrīda. In Rasakrīda, it is performed by Krishna and Gopis.

**Musical aspects of Krishnagithi.**

Krishnagithi is comprised of 321 Slokas, 62 Padas, 93 Padyagithams and 2 Dandakas. It is estimated that Krishnagithi and Chaturdandi Prakasika of Venketamakhi belonged to the same period. Manavedan has the credit of introducing many ragas like Kanakurinji, Indisa, Pantayari, and Kedarapantu which are unfamiliar to common Carnatic music circle. Some ragas like Indisa, Kedarapantu, Pantayiri, Samanta Malahari and Gandhara Malavi are not in use at present. Ragas presently sung in a Krishnattam play includes Ahiri, Anandabhairavi, Kanakurinji, Kamboji, Kalyani, Kedaragoula, Ghantaram, Todi, Devagandharam, Dvijavanthi, Natta, Nattakurinji, Navarasam, Neelambari, Pantuvarali, Padi, Puraneer, Bilahari, Bowli, Bhupalam, Bhairavi, Madhyamavathi. Mayamalavagoula, Mukhari, Mohanam, Yadukulakamboji, Varali, Sankarabharanam, Saveri, Sarangam and Sourashtram. The palm leaf manuscript preserved in the Krishnattam Kalari gives information about some rare ragas used like Ramagri and Mechili Bouli. The raga and tala to which a Padam is sung is specified in manuscript itself.

For singing Slokas, Manavedan has not specified any particular raga. Singer has the right to choose any raga with which he can beautifully render it. There is also a practice of singing Slokas in the raga to which the Padam is composed. So Slokas are rendered in
common ragas like Devagandhari, Anandabhairavi, Puranir, Surutti, Mohanam, Saranga, Nattakurinji, Neelambari, Sahana, Yadukulakamboji and Bilahari. But usually singers opt for Kedaragoula for rendering Slokas. Manaveda has prescribed ragas Bhairavi, Bhupali, Indisa, Kanakkurinji, Sourashtram, and Indalam for a Sloka sung in the play Rasakrida. This Sloka is in Ragamalika. The fact that Manaveda composed a Ragamalika in a period prior to the century when Ragamalika actually came to be composed is interesting.

In Krishnattam Slokas and Padam are sung in the same tempo. But in Swayamvaram a Padam is rendered in three speeds i.e. slow medium and fast followed by a Ragalapana. The Padam of Krishnattam has the sections Pallavi and Charanam. Some Slokas are rendered to tala.

Many Padams of Krishnanattam are not sung in the ragas as mentioned in the manuscript. For example a Padam “Thrapayalapidu” was originally set in Padi raga but presently it is sung in Dvijavanti. Like wise a Padam in Nadhanamakriya is rendered in Navarasam now a day. Like wise 2 more Padams in Nadhanamakriya is now been rendered in Yadukula kamboji and Madhyamavathi. A Padam of Rasakrida was initially rendered in Kanakurunji, now in Anandabhairavi. A Padam now sung in Nattakurinji was originally set to Kanakkurinji. In Kaliyamarddanam there is Padam in Sourashttram where Kaliya’s wives request Sreekrishna’s pardon is presently rendered in Anandabhairavi. Some Padas which were originally composed in Ahiri are now sung in Bhairavi, Bhupalam and Thodi.
In Krishnanattam performance singers generally stands behind the actors. There will be a singer leading the show called Ponnani and the singer following him is called Singidi. Ponnani plays chengila and Singidi Ilathalam. They will be accompanied by Sudhamaddalam, Thoppimaddalam and Idakka. In a Krishnanattam performance singers usually render the Slokas and Padams once. But some times according to the situation they repeat. Earlier there was a practice where the actors used to sing along with them. But this practice is extinct now a day.

The style adopted for singing Padams is the Sopana style. Kavalam Narayana panicker opines that two line structure of Tyani is basic to the singing of Padam in Krishnanattam and Kathakali.

Talas used in the Padam of Krishnanatta are Adanta, Chempa, Chempada and Panchari which are very popular in Kerala.

End Notes:
2. Death and returning to heavenly abode.
3. A right done a day before the concluding day of an Utsavam.
   The concept is that the deity is going to hunting and returning successfully.
4. Aaru in Malayalam means river. Final day of Utsavam in which the devotees take divine bath along with the Vigraha.
5. Medicinal plant usually seen in some temples of Kerala. Its botanical name is Mimusops elengi Linn.
KRISHNANATTAM