Chapter V

PAINTINGS

The efflorescence of Ajanta radiated its art impulses to many centres in south India viz. Badami\(^1\); it travelled eastwards to Panamalai\(^2\) during the Pallava rule, swept down to Sittanwasal\(^3\) under the Pandyas and crossed the western ghats to Tirunandikara.\(^4\) The art historians of Kerala have accepted the murals of Tirunandikara as Chera art which "could recover the grace of Ajanta figuration, perhaps even more successfully than the Pallavas or the Pandyas".\(^5\) But it has been challenged by an authority on Kerala art, and so far his has been the lonely one. "The murals of the cave temples at Tirunandikara should not be taken to be of Kerala origin, to call it early Chera, is fraught with great many historical problems."\(^6\) This statement is based on an exhaustive survey of the Chalukya, Pallava, Pandya and Kerala traditions and, therefore, we are inclined to accept this view. Whether Kerala was responsive, or not, to the art impulses, will remain a problem till new source materials are brought to light. Hence, there seem to

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3.*Ibid*, p.73, fig.28.

4.Tirunandikara was a part of southern Travancore till 1956.


be no remnants of the ancient Chera painting. The murals of Ettumanoor and Mattanchery are, therefore, to be taken as the earliest existing murals of Kerala.

The landing of the Portuguese at Calicut in the year 1498 ushered in an entirely new era in the history of Kerala. Kerala was exposed to the western influence resulting in cross-fertilisation of ideas. The land could imbibe, inter alia, the technique of the western artists and make use of the same freely, without neglecting the local tradition. The newly acquired, savoir faire, found expression in the murals of Mattanchery palace, which was built by the Portuguese in 1557 A.D. for their protege, Veera Kerala Varma (1537-1565). Since the palace was built in the sixteenth century, the murals cannot be of the sixteenth century as accepted by some scholars. The palace was rebuilt by the Dutch and, therefore, the paintings must be later by a century. The murals of Ettumanoor, also suffer similar handicap, as the temple was renovated in 1545 and, therefore, the murals belong to the

2.Velayudhan, P.S., Kerala caritram, Vol.I, p.366. The editor fixes the date as 1555. There is a difference of opinion with regard to the date of construction. The Department of Archaeology has fixed the date as 1557 A.D. C.Sivaramamurti follows the date as 1557. Vide, Sivaramamurti, C.,Nataraja - art and thought, (New Delhi, 1976), pp.163-178.
same period according to the same scholars. But some of the features have kindred echoes in Krishnapuram palace murals. The paintings can be of a later period. "The lure of European paintings was, therefore, felt soon after the arrival of the Portuguese and the decadence of indigenous culture was clearly demonstrated during the Dutch interregnum by the predominant popularity of 'Flemish nudes' (specimen preserved in palaces at Trippurirala and Trivandrum)."

The Vatakunathan temple complex has imbibed the art heritage of both the Mattanchery and Ettumannoor murals and, it is necessary to refer to both in the pages that follow:—

While the former two murals remain anonymous the Vatakunathan has irrefutable evidence of the names of the artists, with their dates of paintings, like those noted in Aimana, district Kottayam, and Kumblanad, district Trichur. There are six different forms of murals executed by different artists, out of which three are of great help to the students of art, but only two have succeeded in preserving their dated documents. The Sankaranarayana murals were painted by Kannan the Nayar disciple of the preceptor, Netra Nambutiri, on 23rd September, 1731. The murals facing goddess Parvati were executed by

Vasu of Avanaparambu, a disciple of Kizhakkeppal Achyuta- warrior on 18th November, 1811.

The earliest paintings are seen on the second tala of the shrines of the Sankaranarayana and Sree Rama - remnants of vertical stripes and stars, similar to those on the flag of U.S.A. But the stripes are in saffron colour locally known as Kavi, commonly found in Tamilnadu but seldom in the temples of Kerala. Since the multitudes of paintings are of a later date, the stripes and stars are not as significant as to claim a tradition, except to convey the fact that this complex shared the same tradition of Tamilnadu. The next stage of execution of the paintings is found in the outer wall of the shrine of Sankaranarayana. They are described below:-

**RAMA-RAVANA BATTLE**

Rama and Lakshmana are shown in the battle scene aiming their arrows at Ravana while the monkeys witness the war in total amazement. The colours used are sombre red, white and (occasionally) but black. Blue is conspicuously absent. The figures are conventionalised and statuesque, adorned with all kinds of ornaments. Rama wears a crown-rather unrealistic, as he has given up the same. Probably to deify him, these adornments are kept. The monkeys have white beard on their extended jaws, and sans tails. The lines are sure and the depth of the shades are dexterously executed. There is a happy marriage of line and colour. The vigorous battle scene
presented by the artist seems to be a copy from the panels of the Ramayana of Mattanchery palace, under orders. In this painting, little can we see of deviation, either in line, tone of colours or the spatial scheme, to affirm the freedom of the artist. Obviously he has borrowed the design, technique and execution of the Mattanchery palace. "The Ramayana scenes of Mattanchery are akin to the mural paintings on the walls of Sankaranarayana."  

THE BATTLE SCENE

The battle scene is continued, not by males but by females. Three pairs of ladies are shown fighting with daggers (small dagger) and shields. They are firm in their forceful thrust and agile in their jumps, to escape the onslaught. The expression on their faces are, as it were, in conformity with the toughest job in which they are engaged in, as opposed to their tender nature, which is associated with their oldest profession. The weapons, like bow and arrows, belong to the earlier period, or to the ancient period but churika and shield belong to the eighteenth century and are used even today in Kalari Payattu, the traditional methods of war of the Keralites. This throws light to the fact that Kannan has portrayed the contemporary weapons and technique of warfare. Women were also trained in the art of warfare and quite a number of them have become immortal in the "ballads of Malabar". The form and dress of the ladies do not correspond, to those of

the locals, but have affinity to the Nayak style (Pl. 55). Only profile is shown in the elongated eyes and in sombre red clothes.

**LOVE-LORN LADY**

This panel is of a lady sitting, set in Kerala backdrop. Her right arm rests, on the right knee, the left on the floor. The braided-hair-do, which is tilted towards right follows the style of Kerala. She has long ear-lobes, which are not ornamented and so is her body. But care is taken to focus the breasts, which are full and temptuous. Her oval face, long lingering looks, under the elongated eyebrows, give the effect of love-lorn damsel. In sharp contrast to the ladies discussed above, this lady is the daughter of the soil. (Pl. 35). The artist must have looked around and translated on canvas what he saw while he kept the others in style as dictated to him.

**NATARAJA**

Siva dances in the form of Nataraja. He is depicted as having 18 hands holding weapons and the most prominent is a huge staff, *nandi-dhvaja* held vertically. He tramples upon the Apasmara, with his left foot, while his right foot is raised almost *urdhva-janu*.¹ The main right hand and left hand are in *ahuvavarada* and *danda hasta*. In the hand to the right he carries an axe, drum, noose, snake, flame, lunar crescent and trident. To the left there is the deer, flower, bell

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¹ Sivaramamurti, C., *South Indian painting*, p. 283.
lute goad, skull cap bowl. There is another dancing figure in miniature, shown inside a circle amidst hands. This Pradışa dance, is being witnessed by Parvati, their elder son Ganapati on his mouse, which also looks up to see the Lord's dance. Younger son Subramanya tries the dance pose, beside his peacock. Vishnu keeps the rhythm on the percussion and a host of celestial beings watch with folded hands. The whole picture is a replica of Ettumanoor shown in a circle. This form of Nataraja agrees with that of Ettumanoor but certain variations are noticeable. Probably because of liberties taken by the artist and partly due to the limitations of the space. A comparative study is necessary to highlight the same. The circular prabhavali of Ettumanoor is missing here. The Apasmara is disproportionately bigger in the former, whereas it is in proportion to the central figure in the latter. Apasmara raises his head on the left side of Nataraja in the former, while it is on the right in the other. It is being coiled in the earlier one, but free in the latter. Instead of Ehrngi in the centre, it is mini-Nataraja in Trichur. Vishnu has four hands in the former, only two in the latter. Subramanya holds his peacock in the former whereas he dances here. In the former, Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatana and Sanatkumara are shown prominently, above the Nataraja, while they are conspicuous in their absence in the latter. Lastly, the bull is in recumbent

1.Ibid, and plate 151.
posture in the former whereas it watches its master's dance in the latter.

The painting of Nataraja in this shrine is smaller in proportion but has all the qualities of the Ettumanoor tradition. "Against a background of lines undulating away from the centre to the periphery with a rare speed of motion, the figure of deity appears serene in its poise and the countenance of the stern god is relaxed and gracious in ecstacy of the dance."¹

The conception of the art form of Nataraja marks the acme of perfection of creative art. "From the slow and simple abhanga movement at Mohen-jo-Daro and Harappa, the human form goes on discovering its potentialities of action and motion, until it reaches the height and depth of cosmic movements, as one sees in Tāndava of Nataraja."² The Chola bronzes of Nataraja are the best specimens of this art form. From the sculptors, the artists borrowed the concept of "translating the motion into concrete vision" and used the medium of canvas. The plasticity of these bronzes has elevated them to the "poems on bronzes". The artists of Kerala stand humbled at the altar of those specimen. While reproducing, there are limitations, as can be seen in comparison. The 'jata' of the bronze figures are flying, from the central object, afford-

¹Sivaramamurti, C., South Indian painting, p.82.
ing the artist to make patterns. Ganga invariably shown in anjalimudra on the right of jata. These elements are absent in the paintings of Kerala.

The dance of Siva, in fact, represents his five activities, viz. Srsti (creation), sthiti (preservation), samhāra (destruction), tirōbhāva (veiling) and anugraha (grace). These separately considered, are the activities of Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra, Maheshvara and Sadasiva. There is no better interpretation of Nataraja than the one put forth by Ananda Coomaraswamy "Siva in Nataraja manifest makes his step to the time of a specific rhythm on the body of a being which has lost its power and potency of being. As he takes a step along time he is poised for the next, in a moment, the earlier step goes into the heap of the past, and becomes Apasmara or Bhuta...

This continuous ceaseless, eternal movement in rhythm is what is sought to be symbolised by Siva in his manifestation of Nataraja, dancing on the prostrate body of Apasmara-Purusha."^2

Apart from the main figures, other figures also make interesting study. Vishnu is keeping rhythm on Mizhavu, an instrument of percussion. The traditional Chakyars use this percussion to keep rhythm. The Chakyars have borrowed from kūtyāttam the traditional Sanskrit drama of the land. Even to-day, mizhavu is used by the Chakyars as an accompaniment

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2. Coomaraswamy, Ananda, Dance of Siva, (New York, 1924), p. 59
while performing the virile dance like Tandava, the mizhavu has limitations, as a percussion to keep rhythm. In Tamilnadu mrdangam keeps rhythm, in the dancing scenes, sculptured by artists. An inherent weakness of mizhavu is that it is incapable of producing cholkettu or rhythmic solphas, which are manifold and varying, as this instrument can produce only a single repetitive beat, which is ill-suited to vibrant and virile dance of Nataraja. It should be noted that the mrdangam did not form part of the orchestra during the eighteenth century or even if the local people knew about it, the Nambuttiri patrons, might have insisted on using mizhavu for kutiyattam, which is staged only in the precincts of temples (Pl.34). It was, therefore, during the period of Svati prince of Travancore that music in Kerala became replete with solphas with the help of Tanjore Trios.

We come across this form of Nataraja in many temples like Triprayar, Pundarika Puram, Peramangalam, Vaikom, Padmanabha puram Palace,² Aimanam Edassery³ and Tiruvanchikulam, where we come across a specimen of Nataraja in wood with all the details of the painting. Many artists have vied with each other in depicting this form almost conforming to the standard

1. There is another specimen of Nataraja on the same wall. See pl.36.


NARASIMHA

Narasimha is shown as sitting in Yoga pose in varada mudra. The painting is very small almost miniature as compared to other figures of the shrine. This form conceived and executed as Yoga Narasimha is rarely seen in Kerala (Pl.37). There is no sequence of story to warrant the presence of Yoga Narasimha and, therefore, his presence in a miniature form is baffling.

YOGA DAKSHINAMURTI

Siva is shown as vyākhyana-mudra, sitting on a paryanka with yoga-patta on his knees. This painting is influenced by a similar one seen in Brhadeshvara temple, Tanjore. "The entire wall space consists of a huge panel with Siva as Yogadakshinamurti, seated on a tiger skin in a Yoga pose, with a yogapatta or paryankāgrandhibandha (ascetic's band of cloth around the legs) across his waist and right knee, calmly watching the dance of two apsaras. It seems Siva as Yogadakshinamurti to be popular in Kerala as there are representations in paintings as well as in stone sculpture." ¹

BHISHMA'S BED OF ARROWS

Bhishma is shown reclining on the bed of arrows as described in the Mahabharata. The grandsire, majestic in appearance with a graceful face shining with his white beard

¹Sivaramamurti, C., South Indian painting, p.82, fig.35.
brims with karuna rasa. He could defy even death and that was why, he waited for an auspicious time, uttarāyana, to shed his mortal coil. Both Arjuna and Krishna are shown nearby whereas their enemy cousins are far off (Pl.33).

The physiognomy of the human beings, or gods, have travelled farther from the classical proportions of Ajanta. The canons of sculpture, prescribed and conditioned the paintings too. The forms are sculpturusque, with all the details like the crown, the ornaments, raiments, stances and expressions. The dialated eyes expressing veera-rasa are depicted in Kathakali dance. The hands are folded over the head as sirasyānjali. The Kathakali dance has much to say in this regard. It was the king of Kottarakkara (1575-1630) who gave this art form to the world. The Kerala artists had in front of them all the divine characters on the stage. Kathakali set the models for them and the artists translated on canvas as they had nothing else to fall back upon.

The figures are crowded but one can distinguish the role of each one. This makes us think that the artists were familiar with baroque style of the west, through the Dutch who rebuilt the palace of Mattanchery. The trisula of Siva with the curve of prongs in the Chalukya fashion, suggests the main source of inspiration. In all these figures the

1. Sivaramamurti, C., South Indian painting, p.150.
halo around the crown points to the same source, as also the exaggerated details of ornamentation.\textsuperscript{1}

These paintings offer enough scope to investigate into the technique of the paintings. Generally murals are not found in the temples which are constructed of granite from the base to the top.\textsuperscript{2} Most of the temples of Kerala have granite as the base and laterite or sometimes timber is used for the walls and \textit{sikhara}. The walls of Sankaranarayana are of laterite, and the ground was prepared out of lime plaster with lime and sand as principal components, the latter having been purposely added to serve as an inert material. The layer of rough plaster is 1.7111 mm thick.\textsuperscript{3} It shows delicacy in handling the brush in contrast to the plaster technique, used in Peruvanam (District Trichur) and Padmanabhaswami (District Trivandrum). The analysis shows that Kannan was a past master in handling the brush whereas his comrades-in-art in Peruvanam (25 miles away from Trichur) and in Padmanabhaswami in Trivandrum could hardly match in dexterity. The low percentage of the impurities, the firm adherence of the plaster and the absence of slaking on the fresco grounds indicate special attention was paid in preparation of pit lime.' This

\textsuperscript{1}Ibid.


observation is noteworthy as it comes from an authority in the chemistry of paints and colours and speaks volumes of the artist's thoroughness in the details of the preparation of lime which lasted for long and remain beautiful. The rough wet plaster received a coat of lime wash to a thickness of 0.3 mm. to 0.4 mm.¹ The surface was trowelled over to impart a fine gloss, as is done in the case of Ajanta, or in the murals of Kerala. The pigments used are yellow ochre, red ochre, terra verte, carbon and lime.² Indigenous sources are tapped to mix the colours and, therefore, it can safely said that the western influence is limited to the minimum. "The full surface appears very smooth and glazed and must have undergone the polishing process. Whether the surface was allowed to dry completely or not is difficult to judge."³

MURALS ON THE INTERIOR OF THE EASTERN WALL

The murals found on the inside wall facing goddess Parvati are later than the Sankaranarayan murals. There are seven large paintings in rectangular panels, portraying different deities without any story sequence. In this regard the artist has followed the tradition of "Kovanithalam" of Mattanchery palace. It is curious to note that he has not followed the "Royal Chamber Hall tradition" which his earlier contemporary followed in the Sankaranarayana shrine. The

²Ibid.
technique of preparing the ground and mixing the colours as found in the Sankaranarayana murals seems to be unknown to Avanaparabu Vasu who drew these figures. Eighty years made a lot of difference and the tradition of Sankaranarayana is lost once for all! Had Vasu followed Kannan, these paintings would not have been in this condition of disintegration as discussed below:

1. **Rama**: Sri Rama on the throne in a **mandapa**, amidst his consort Sita, brothers and Hanuman. Rama sits in virasana posture. The throne has lion motif and the **mandapa** is painted yellow. It has cornices. Rama and Lakshmana are painted in blue and Sita, Bharata and Satrughna are in yellow. Hanuman has red face, dark curley beard and is seen bowing before Lord Rama. This theme of **Rama Pattabhishekam** (Pl.4d) is borrowed from the panel No.17 of the Mattanchery. Rama is represented as conceived in the dhyana sloka:

\[
\text{Vaidéhi sahitam samadrumatalé haimé mahā mandapé}
\]
\[
\text{Madhyé puspakásane manimaye virasané susthitam}
\]

That he is seated in the golden throne with Sita and in the attitude of teaching the highest philosophy to the assembled sages and his brothers while Hanuman reads the text. Natural scenery is shown in the background as is the case of Mattanchery but not reproduced. While in the former, a banyan tree is painted, and on the branch of the tree a gandharva playing on his vina, which is held vertically. A yakshini listens

\[1\text{.Sivaramamurti, C., South Indian painting, p.145, Fig.94.}\]
from the other branch of the tree. In this painting a number of trees are shown so as to make a grove. A couple of squirrels hop about and parrots look on from different branches of the trees. Though the dhyanasloka does not contain this background, the liberty taken by the artist is perfectly in tune with the Kerala setting.

This theme of Rama as the exponent of philosophy became popular from the time when it was presented visually in the murals. There are bronzes in south India representing the same theme, and the same tradition was continued in the medium of painting in the murals of Tiruvancikulam, Triprayar both in district Trichur, and Ettumanoor in district Kottayam. The panel occupies an area of 48"x40".

2. NARASIMHA: Narasimha killing the demon king Hiranyakasipu while Prahlada looks on with folded hands. The painting is faded. The details of Narasimha's hands and his expression cannot be made out. The demon is on his lap, and Narasimha gorges his enemy's intestine, the colour of which has faded from deep red to light rose. Narasimha is painted in yellow and white, while Prahlad is green. Hiranyakasipu has gone into limbo of darkness. The dhyanasloka inspired to create this scene is "Dvāre toruyuge nipatya nakharān vyulkhāya vaksobhuvi nirbhindannadhī garbha nirbhara gala drakthāmbu badhōtsavam pāyam pāyamudairayo bāhu jagat samhāri simhāravan" 2. This concept is visualised

1.Ibid.

and enacted in the Kathakali dance as Narasimha removing Hiranya's intestine with his teeth and nails (as no weapons should be used). The artist had both in view as the characterisation confirms. Narasimha is painted as yellow and Prahlada as green, popularly known as Pacha for noble heroes like Dharmaputra, Arjuna, Nala etc. Yellow which is purely divine is used for Siva and Narahari. The influence of Kathakali, therefore, can be seen and felt. The panel occupies an area of 41"x38".

3. KRISHNA-SUDAMA: Meeting of classmates, Krishna and Sudama is represented. This painting is also faded. Both are sitting on a bed while the 'blue boy' Krishna is seen clearly. His beloved bhakta is completely faded. "The contrast in the emaciated form of Sudama, the eyes of Krishna and the embarrassed looks of Sudama, though the figure is somewhat worn out, are indeed very interesting." Krishna eats avil (beaten rice) while his consorts look on. Krishna retains grace but his consorts lack grace and charm, as the lines have become angular and drapery has degenerated into a cloth-cover, rather than a comfortable dress. This marks the beginning of the decadence of a tradition. The bed and pillows have designs and linings of red silk, showing the signs of affluence. The canopy of the bed has melketty, a device popular in Kerala houses. The silky canopy has been tied at four places to prevent from falling. The entire bed is decorated with garlands.

The kirita is noteworthy because the typical Krishnamuti

1. Sivaramamurti, C., South Indian painting, p.145.
of Kathakali, used for Krishna has been accepted. The same crown can be seen in panel Nos. 28\textsuperscript{1} and 29\textsuperscript{2} of the Mattanchery palace. The crown of Krishna seen in this painting is not different from that of Giridhari of Mattanchery, both of which ultimately seek inspiration in the early paintings of Vishnu as Krishna playing the drum for Siva as the dancer in the Ettumanoor, where the feature is not so developed as in the eighteenth century. This panel is 48"x40".

4. **UMA-MAHESHWARA**: Represents Uma-Maheshvara and others but faded almost. All that can be identified are Siva sitting on throne along with Parvati, who shares his left thigh for her seat (Pl.38). Among the assemblage are seen Muruga, on his peacock, his elder brother Ganapati, beside his mouse, and Nandi with his red-horns lying on the foreground. This is a replica of the panel No.30 of Mattanchery. The central figures in Mattanchery and also those found in Tiruvanchikulam indulge in love-sport.\textsuperscript{3} It is depicted as Siva's left index finger, fondling with the breast nipple of Parvati - such details cannot be made out in this painting. The other representations of the members of the family are visible. Bhūtaganas and devotees, companions of Parvati, Ganesh and Muruga are present on either sides. The comfortable doze of resting of the bull, Nandi, is indeed a delightful representation. "It closely follows the dhyana śloka, mangalāyatanam dēvām

\begin{itemize}
\item[1.] Sarkar, H., *Op.cit.*, pl.XII.
\item[3.] Sivaramamurti, C., *South Indian painting*, p.138, fig.89.
\end{itemize}
yuvānām atisundaram dhyāyet kalpatarōmula sukhāsīnam sahōmaya,
that describes him comfortably seated under the Kalpataru,
surrounded by his bhūtaganas and devotees and the companion of
Parvati, Gānesha on his mouse, Kartikeya with his peacock are
also present on either side.¹ If all the details are visible,
we could echo the same "sentiments and reactions on the attend­
ants around from the main theme, of the most interesting mural
while the maids-in-waiting express coyness and indifference to
age and outlook. Nandi is bored, obviously, he sprawls at the
feet of his divine master and licks his haunch in lazy content­
ment."² The love-sport indulged in by Siva, though cannot be
seen now, must have been depicted as we have reasons to think
for the same. There is a literary reference in the Tenkaila­
nathodayam, depicting Siva thus: "Pārilerelinnu nātham neri
tatavumitam trittutakāmbilambil chērum gouri mulakkān mukalil
valamitum vāmahastāmgulīyam."³ "The Lord of fourteen worlds,
fondles with his left index finger, the breast nipple of Parvati
who sits on his lap". As it is taken from this poem which
gives us the origin of this temple, the artist must have
certainly depicted the erotic sentiment. The patron king Veera
kerala Varma was the grandson of the king for whom Mattanchery
palace was built. Both in Mattanchery and here the inspiration
must be due this sloka, but unfortunately due to the ravages of
weather the artist has kept us guessing, while he has recorded

1. Ibid, p.143.
3. Tenkailanathodayam, Sloka 35, and meaning p.58.
his name in indelible ink.

It is recorded in this panel that in the year 985(M.E.) 6th of Vriscika (equivalent is 11-11-1811) Avana Parambu Vasu, the disciple of Kizhakepat Achyuta Variar has offered these paintings as humble donation. This is an invaluable record to the student of history of art, inasmuch as, much can be said about the family tradition, caste and the artist who executed apart from the irrefutable source material of the date of painting. Avanaparambu, is a family of Nambutiris, the lords of the place. Variar is an Ambalavāsi now engaged in the work of gathering flowers and making garlands for the temple. The disciple belongs to the highest caste and the preceptor to a lower caste, a tradition of Kerala, of which Mepatur Narayana Bhattatiri, is a classic example, to break fresh grounds. It was a taboo, during his days to learn under lower caste preceptors, for which, he had to incur the displeasure of the society. Later, it became a worthy tradition to be emulated.

5. **UMA-MAHESHWARA**: Another representation of Uma-Maheshvara but completely worn out. What remains now, in a painting (82"x40") is a slanting roof supported by two pillars. The central figures are completely worn out.

6. **VENUGOPALA**: Venugopala is shown surrounded by maids. Krishna is playing his *venu* and the gopis offer accompanyment to his orchestra; one is shown playing on a *vina* which is held vertically. Another is playing a pipe (not flute); a third one is serving the Lord with chamara. Two *ālavatam* are placed on each side of

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1. *Ālavatam* is circular in shape, made of pea-cock feather and stems, used as *alankaras* in Kerala.
Krishna. The panel has a tree in the background. A parrot and a peacock listen to the divine music. Even a cow beneath the tree, is attracted and turned towards the Lord. Even though weathering has set in, some of the colours retain the lustre. The fresh leaves are shown as green, and the faded as yellow. The tree is black and shaded to get the tonal effect. This painting covers an area of 45"x48".

Krishna has the same kirita discussed in the painting No.3 and it means that it is conventionalised. The lines are yet to become angular and, therefore, some sparks of an almost dying style can be seen. The presence of alavatam is due to the influence of Kathakali. When divine characters or emperors are on the stage, these are shown to impress that they have a special privilege. "The theme of Venugopala plays a very important role in the selection of subjects for the murals. We have it in the earlier series of painting from Cochin state as from Triprayar, Tiruvanchikulam and later in the eighteenth century at Trichur."

7. VISHNU SITTING ON ANANTA: This is the largest of this lot, as it covers an area of 66"x40". Vishnu is in sitting posture. The seat is manipulated by Sesa by changing and recoiling to a lesser degree than the usual method of spread out, so as to provide a seat (Pl.41). Along with Vishnu are seated his consorts, each one holding a child. The right hand of Vishnu is in vyākhya-mudrā. His rosy palm, in a blue background, is exposed, while his index finger and thumb are held together.

to depict the mudra. Ananta is painted in black and white. Narada in pink, with white beard, holds his vertical *vina* in between. Krishna and Arjuna, both of them in blue, are present. Krishna keeps his left hand, on his chin, and the right on his hip. Arjuna worships with folded hands. Some sages offer *anjali*, others *sirasvānjali*. Garuda is on the left of Vishnu in *anjali mudra*. He has spread out his right wing. In the foreground two votaries are playing pipe and mrdangam respectively.

This theme, popularly known as Vaikuntham, is taken from the epic *Bharata*. When a Brahmin lost all his nine children in a mysterious way, Arjuna offered himself to protect the would be new child at the cost of his own life. But the tenth child also vanished. Out of humiliation, he was prepared to immolate himself but was saved, due to the intervention of Krishna who took him to Vaikuntham to show all the children. Sesa-sayi-Vishnu is depicted generally in the sayana posture as can be seen at Guruvayoor, district Trichur.\(^1\) This painting, therefore, marks deviation from the tradition and the artist had the sitting Vishnu, at Panel No.20, of the Mattanchery, as his model. He borrowed only the central figure but the rest, is his contribution. Arjuna is bewildered whereas Krishna looks on as a sport. To suggest that Arjuna arrives in Vaikuntham in search of the Brahmin children both the goddesses hold children.

The colour scheme is as good as is the spatial arrange-

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1. There was a mural painting Srivaikuntham at Guruvayoor. In 1971, it was destroyed but the replacement in sculpture has retained all the details of painting.
ment. The effect of the crowd is shown, but with restraint. Green, blue, black, white, red and pink are the colours used to paint the celestial scene and one can find a harmonious blend of line and shade to a satisfactory extent. The depth can be felt from the seat afforded by Ananta. The garuda's outstretched wing denotes, the elemental power.

An important feature is the introduction of mrdangam. It was mizhavu, used as a percussion, to the dance of Nataraja. This marks the popularity of mrdangam eighty years after the Sankaranarayana murals. The long pipe was introduced in painting No.6, for the first time, which is followed here, and shows its popularity. Locally known as kurumkuzhal, it is used even to-day in the temples of Kerala. Longer pipes are popular in Tamilnadu known as bheri which began to appear in the beginning of this century.

Vandalism need not be perpetrated by barbarians alone destroying the art treasures as it can effectively be destroyed by those who consider themselves civilised. The modus operandi of the latter is white washing. Never there was a case of white plaster darkening the art treasures as is found here. If the plaster is removed many more paintings will see the light of the day.

The paintings on the inside wall facing Vatakkanāthan are executed after those discussed above. There are two paintings, one above the other, showing distinct features. Artists seem to go in for larger murals as can be seen from the painting which is described below. This is larger than the largest
discussed as No. 7. It represents the theme of Gajendramoksha. (Pl. 42) Vishnu, in green, has eight hands, the right four holding gada, bow, shield and conch; and the left, chakra, arrow, churika and padma. Garuda carries Vishnu. The effect of flying is achieved by showing the legs as bent towards the right. This is the usual technique adopted by sculptors and seldom by artists, as the former have limitations, yet the artist preferred the sculptural mode.

The main elephant is shown as the biggest in size, struggling hard to extricate himself from the clutches of the crocodile. Raising its trunk, it displays the helplessness and consequent agony and finally, complete surrender to Adimula (primeordeal cause). Vishnu reaches to rescue him. A wide canvas of 60" x 55" is used to portray a wider space of heaven and earth. From the heaven apsaras shower flowers (pushpavrsti) to honour the Lord. Many sages are seen in anjalimudra. Narada has white beard, keeps tuning his lute, which is shown in red colour. While his right hand holds an umbrella, the left is on the strings of the lute. Brahma in yellow has black jata, holds a rosery and jalapātra in his rear hands, and frontal hands in anjali-mudra. Siva, dressed in elephant and tiger skin, watches the drama. His rear hands hold stag and paraśu, the frontal hands are folded to show anjali. The apsarās are dressed in green, blue, yellow sarees, peeping down as though across a wall that separates heaven from the earth. Their braided hair exhibit different styles. A natural idyllic scene is presented with trees, bushes and a small brook, in light blue. In the fore-
ground, six elephants enjoy their solitary sanctuary, away from human habitation. In background, are shown six tigers, resting in their den while six deer sporting farther away. A solitary deer is being chased by a tiger.

The painting, apart from its colossal form and content, has a perspective. From the heavens rushing to the earth, to liberate His devotee, is the action and movement of painting and the same is achieved, though not at a high level. The artist has borrowed this theme, from the Krishna puram palace situated at the southern corner of the State.  

The painting in the Krishna puram palace was executed in 1725 A.D. It is considered to be the largest in the State as it occupies an area of 154 sq. feet (14'x11'). "The artist of this colossal dimension 'gave form to the heroic pose, latent in the Vijayanagara figures and endowed it with ponderosity of the Kerala idiom, its sumptuous flow by a stimulus whose own source in Vijayanagara has become dry". It is true of this painting of Vatakkunathan too, because the sumptuous flow of line is the part of its impressiveness. Although it lacks blending of several components in spatial arrangements, it does not suffer from curious mixture of elements from east and west as is criticised in Krishnapuram palace.

3. Ibid, p.185.
Certain innovations can be noted in this painting as the introduction of Siva is purely a Vaishnavite theme. To depict Narada with a palmyrah umbrella of the Kerala type is to evoke rise in order to relieve the high-strung drama, of the painting. The Chakyars used to caricature Narada, as Kalahapriya and the artists expressed it in plastic arts as can be seen in the wood carving of the temples. Certain minute observations of the artists to feel realism can be seen in the denizens enjoying their solitude and elsewhere the chase of prey by a hounding tiger in conformity with the law of jungle.

An inscription purported to proclaim the preceptor and desciple is worn out completely. An important document is, therefore, lost to the art world. It is certainly of a different idiom other than that of Vasu.

2. NATARAJA: The one that is represented above this painting is Nataraja whose design and execution are entirely different from all the paintings of this temple complex (Pl.43). It is in outline drawn in red ochre, over a white surface. Details of Nataraja like the right foot on the apasmara, left foot raised to perform the Tāndava dance are depicted. He has only four hands, the frontal right in ahuyavara and the left danda-hasta. A snake is coiling on his neck, his jata unlocked and a crescent on it, are shown clearly. The artist of course a different person under different dictate has copied the technique from the "Mattanchery ground floor models". Panel numbers 21

1. See Chapter on "Wood Carving".
to 25 are executed in similar technique, depicting different scenes of Parvati's marriage.

The ground or the white surface is a specially prepared plaster having over it a thin wash of lime. Imbibing this technique, the artist has created something new, although, the theme is popular and found in this temple complex in different idiom and medium. From Mattanchery, this technique has spread as far as Kidangur (dist. Kottayam) in the south, and upto Tenari (dist. Palghat) in the north of the State.

It seems that the unknown artist has something different to dedicate, and the temple is wealthier because of his contribution, though with a single one yet significant. But there cannot be a solitary one like Blanco White's sonnet 'on night and death' or Pachimirium Adiappier's incomparable Tana varna composition in Bhairavi.

The largest mural Nataraja and Vasukisayana:

1. As discussed earlier, the artists seem to be bent up on creating the largest paintings in this complex. The walls of the mandapa where a Nandi is installed, can claim to have the largest of the paintings of the entire complex. "In the Vatakku-natha temple of Trichur, on the inside walls of the middle prakara of lamps, there is a large, probably the largest, mural representing Nataraja." It occupies an area of 100"x80", the

1. Sarkar, H., op.cit. p.70
2. Ibid.
entire space of the western wall, facing Nandi. It goes unnoticed on account of the addition of an uncouth bull of modern type, made of painted clay which almost hides this and the adjacent panels, representing Padmanabha Vishnu as Sêshasâyä.\(^1\) It is completely weathered to-day, as the details cannot be studied even with a magnifying glass in spite of the fact that the mural is of enormous size and proportion. Nataraja is represented in a circle as in the case of that in Ettumanoor. Probably the decay must have set in only within the course of four years as an earlier investigator has recorded thus: "This large panel of Nataraja follows the usual mode of representing Siva, sixteen armed and the details of Ettumanoor are repeated here. The three handed, three legged small dancing figure looking like Jvahara or Bhairava is also repeated at Ettumanoor".\(^2\)

What remains to be appreciated to-day is the graceful colour combinations of green, yellow, blue and black, which emits rays into the otherwise dark chamber.

\(^2\)Vasuki sayana: On the adjacent wall, facing the south of the mandapa, has the largest of all the panels of this temple complex occupying an area of 180"x100" (15'x8.4').\(^3\) Perhaps Krishnapuram Gajendramoksha mural may be the largest of the State in total area (as it is 14'x11' = 154 sq.ft.). Horizontally, the

\(^1\)Ibid.

\(^2\)Ibid.

\(^3\)Kramarisch, Stella, Cousens & Potuval, *op.cit.* p.170.
the area occupied by this painting, surpasses even Gajendra-
moksha which is only 14' whereas this is 15'. Since the mural
is the largest of the Nataraja figures the patron or the
artist must have in mind, that this painting shall not be excell­
ed. That may be the reason behind the enormous size of this
painting.

The same fate of weathering has befallen to this paint­
ing, as in the case of its western neighbour, but not the
frustrating extent of it. It is easily passed as representing
Vishnu as Śeshaśāyi. "The Seshasayi panel on the adjacent wall
(northern wall is also very large one and clearly indicate how
great tradition of representing Siva and Vishnu together, one
a picture of dynamic force, and the other of static power."\(^2\)

Generally Vishnu is represented as śayana-mūrti, i.e.
reclining on bed, Ananta. It is the privilege of Vishnu image
alone to be represented in śayana form in addition to the
sthanaka and āsana forms.\(^3\) Since the tradition has given this
stance and pose to Vishnu and, therefore, any god on this pos­
ture is to be identified as Vishnu according to the statement.
To impose such judgement on the art motif, is to fetter imagina­
tion of the creative artists as the following observation would
substantiate and prove.

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2. Ibid.
On deeper scrutiny of this mural, we could get results which are startling and revolutionary. These horizontal lines are visible on the forehead of the Sayanamurti. The caste mark for Vishnu is *pundarikam*, three vertical lines, and not horizontal lines which are the caste mark of Siva. Secondly, a long neck (5") of a bird, blue in colour is also visible. The rest of the details are two ladies on each side, and the hood of a serpent. The long neck in blue, can be identified as that of a peacock, the vehicle of Muruka, son of Siva, and belongs to the Saivite family and not to the Vaisnavite family. In the Seshasayi paintings Muruka is not shown anywhere. Hence the conclusion is that this painting does not represent Vishnu as Seshasayi. It represents, Siva as *sayanamurti*.¹ The presiding deity of this temple complex is Siva, and there is every reason to be so. The concept is Vasukisayana, i.e. Siva reclining on the serpent bed Vasuki. This is a very rare motif, to be conceived at, much less to be executed. How can an artist be so non-conformist as to deviate from the accepted tradition? Siva has not been described in any of the dhyanaslokas in this posture nor are there any reference to the same posture in the canons of iconography. To substantiate that the mural does not represent Vishnu but Siva, we have only one example of its kind in the country.

It is at Trippavallur, district Palghat (Pls. 44 and 45). On the western inside wall facing Narasimha, there is a large mural representing Vasukisayanam. The artist has taken care to highlight the theme, knowing the rarity of it, by inscribing the

¹We could not take photograph of the entire painting as it is weathered. Only Ganga could be snapped. (Pl.39)
dhyanasloka in Malayalam script:

Kailasoparikadri peyasayanam karunyavara nidhim
Karpurasphatak sundatunum kartavani lalitam
Gangā sanmuga nandi nāga vadanā Brahmade samsevitam
Dhyayet bhaktaparayanan bhavabhaya dhvamsam Sivam sashvatam.

Translation: One should meditate upon Lord Siva (the auspicious one) who is (also) Real and Beautiful, who has for his bed the son of Kadru (i.e. the lord of serpents, Vasuki) on the top of the Kailasa mountain. He is the ocean of compassion as fair as camphor crystals; who is fondled by Parvati and waited upon by Ganga. Shanmuga, Nandi, Ganesha, Lord Brahma and other deities (like lords Indra etc) devoted to his devotees, he destroys the fear of mundane life.

The inspiration of the painting is this Dhyanasloka which clearly states Siva reclining on Vasuki.

There is an inscription at Trippavallur which is as precious as this dhyanasloka. The inscription says that "this painting is executed by Vasu of Kavassery in 1753, as an offering to the deity who resides in Trip (modern Trippavallur) for the benefit of the people and crave indulgence for errors. He is the desciple of the sage residing at Maheshvara svami guha at Tirunelly." For the purpose of further clarity, he has taken pains to write names of each god and goddess.

The six-hooded Vasuki forms the bed as Ananta forms to

his lord Vishnu and the hoods are spread forming a canopy over Siva, whose head is on the lap of his consort. Vasu has termed it Parvati Talpam to make his idea clearly understood by the devotees. Siva's profile face, though turns to the right, actually looks at a lotus in the left hand. His right arm is extended as an additional support to his head. A cobra coils on his neck and functions as ornament to justify the name 'Naga-bhushana'. The body is otherwise bare but for the panchagacham dress, extending up to his feet. His feet are on the lap of Ganga. The artist terms it as Ganga-Talpam. Besides Ganga to the left are Vishnu, Brahma, Indra, Narada and Nandi all with folded hands. On the foreground, there are goblins and the bull. To the right is a saint, seated with a jalapatra in his hand. There are some more figures on the foreground to the right which cannot be identified due to weathering. In the background, there are a number of gods and sages. Sanmuga and Nagavadana must be there on the foreground but lost in weathering. From the Dhyana sloka, Vasu has been able to translate the theme of Vasuki-shayana in the medium of painting.

An entirely different world hitherto unknown to the art world is mirrored through this mural. The technique adopted is known and inherited, the colours are indigenous like blue, black, rose and white. The lines articulated have lost much of the dexterity of a rich tradition. In 1731, Kannan of Trichur could imbibe, digest and execute "Mattanchery Royal Chamber style" but after 22 years Vasu of this temple stuck on to the decadent Nayaka style.
The costumes and drapery of this painting help study the social accomplishment during the eighteenth century. Siva wears a *kirita* and not the usual *jatamukuta*. The *kirita* is the same as is used in the Kathakali. A crescent is seen on the top. His long and wide eyes look towards left hand, his third eye is closed. He wears a *Kankana*, black in colour which may be of serpants. His torso and feet adhere to a formula with no pretension to the observance of anatomical exactitudes. Parvati and Ganga have no bodices but wear sarees. While Parvati has no crown, Ganga wears one. Vishnu stands folding his frontal hands to express anjali, while the rear holding *chakra* and *sankha*. His *kirita* speaks of the influence of Kathakali. Like Siva, he panchagacham, while the upper portion of the body is bare. The three-headed Brahma has *jatāmukuta* as distinct from others. His four hands holding rosary and vessel with the rear and *anjali* with the frontal hands. He has Pundarika on his forehead, grown beard, shown as black, *rudrākṣha* on his neck and is dressed like Vishnu. Narada with his white beard and black *jata*, shows *shirasvānjali*, holding his lute in between the folded hands. He wears a *vajnōpavītam* and is dressed like sages of the Kathakali dance. While all these divine beings face the devotees, Indra is shown facing Lord Siva with folded hands. He has the same type of crown as discussed earlier, dressed like a king, as can be seen by the folds and frills of silky garments. A notable feature of portrayal of this personality is that a number of eyes are all over his body. Usually nobody profanes him though he has been, the root cause of many a love-episode. Nandikeshvara is
shown at his feet, as a model of Vellatādi (white-bearded) character of Kathakali. He wears a garment which looks like a "flowing gown". All the gods have crowns and the sages jata.

As each character is painted distinctly with their names and all other paraphernalia, one cannot commit mistake in identifying the gods and goddesses as visualised by Vasu. Even this method of educating the devotees is as novel as is the unique creation itself.

With this mural of Vāsukisāyana, the doubt has been cleared that the sayana pose is not the monopoly of Vishnu; secondly the the painting of Nandi-mandapa of Vatakunathan complex represents Vāsukisāyana and not Sēshasāyi; thirdly, the theme of Vāsukisāyana has become a part of the art heritage of Kerala.

The Nataraja painting exhibits superior skill and technique while the Sayana-mūrti is inferior. The colours of Nataraja are bright while those of the latter are sombre; the 'roundness' of the dancing figure makes it almost a masterpiece while it is flat in the case of the reclining lord; one feels verve vivacity and vibrancy in Nataraja when the latter imposes reverence and repose.

With these different characteristics we can conclude that they are not contemporaneous and not executed by the same artist though juxtaposed as neighbours. The statement that the Nataraja seems to have been executed in the sixteenth century cannot be correct¹ because the murals of Ettumanoor and Mattan-

¹Sivaramamurti, C., South Indian painting, p. 289.
chery cannot be as old as sixteenth century, as discussed earlier but are of seventeenth century. The murals of Nataraja, therefore, can be of the eighteenth century, when the State reached the zenith of perfection in different schools. Certainly, Nataraja must be one of the products of those haydays. Vasuki-sayana cannot claim the same superiority and, therefore, it is later than Nataraja. Whether the artist Vasu has borrowed from Trichur or vice-versa is a problem for us. The temple of Trippa Vallur has borrowed many features from Trichur, e.g. the temple complex itself as Siva as the lord of south instead of north Krishna in the middle and Narasimha in the north. The management of both the temples were in the hands of Nambutiris. But these factors are insufficient for us to solve the problem and, therefore, it cannot be categorically said, as to which was the original model. Probably they can be contemporaries, in which case Vasukishayana of Trichur can be of the middle of the eighteenth century.

Was it due to the narrow chauvinism of Siva cult that this motif emerged, or a fertile imagination of the artists of Malabar? While probing into the philosophical background, it is clear that it cannot be a sudden emergence either in Trichur or in Trippovallur, as the seeds can be seen in earlier paintings, which show the supremacy of Siva over Vishnu. Panel No. 14 of the Mattanchery palace represents Sheshashayi, i.e. Vishnu in sayana pose on Ananta. His right hand is shown vertically

extended down offering puja to a Siva-linga. The tradition handed down from Mahabalipuram, or as seen to-day in Sri Rangam is that Vishnu's right hand is shown either as a support to the head or extended vertically down.\(^1\) The idea of supremacy of Siva is, therefore, germane in the Mattanchery palace painting itself. The rationale behind this painting, is logically extended and expanded in the form of Vāsukisāyana and the rest of the trios give audience unto Him. In Sheshashayi Vishnu painting, Siva is not represented at all. The murals of Guruvayoor would have confirmed this. However, the sculptural representation which has replaced the painting has the motif without any change, i.e. the right hand is shown, as performing the Linga-puja. In this temple complex, a painting in Sri Rama shrine, represents the same Sheshashayi motif. It has, therefore, become the part of the cultural heritage of the land.

The artists were not satisfied with the decoration of the main shrines, as can be seen from the small shrine of Nandi, outside the Vilakkummatam. On the northern wall of Nandi shrine, there are three paintings, which are in decay, due to exposure. These murals form the last connecting link of a rich tradition of this temple complex, as with these an era came to an end.

Of the three paintings, two can be identified as follows:

1. Venugopala (Pl.54): plays flute in Vrndavan. Two gopikas are attracted to the divine music. A page from Kerala idylic world is presented. This is a specimen of the mural discussed as

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1. Sivaramamurit, C., Mahabalipuram, (Madras, 1973), Pl.V.
item No.6. Its occurrence in more than one place confirms the fact that the theme was popular.\footnote{Sivaramamurti, C., \textit{South Indian painting}, p.245.}

2. It portrays an \textit{abhisēka} on Krishna. A number of people including women are seen busy with the rite of ablution. The theme is Govindabhishekam performed by Nandagopa and his tribe. After the atlantian task that earned the name Giridhari, all the people looked upon Krishna as the Saviour Lord. Indra surrendered to Krishna bringing along with him Kamadhenu, the divine cow, whose milk was used for the ablution along with the waters of Ganga, brought by Airavata elephant. The poet Narayana Bhattatiri sang these:

\begin{quote}
\begin{verbatim}
Sneha snutai stōum surabhi payorbhir,
Govinda nāmaṅkita abhyashinchan
Airavatōpa hṛdivya gaga
Pathobhirindröpi cha jāta harsha.\footnote{Narayaneeyam, Chapter, 'Govindabhishekam' Sloka 4.}
\end{verbatim}
\end{quote}

When Krishna was, thus, anointed with the milk of Kamadhenu, he was known as Govinda. Indra performed the rite of ablution, with Ganga water brought by his elephant. The unknown artist has mirrored the sentiments expressed by Narayana Bhattatiri. This theme is not unknown, as there is a representation of "Abhishekam" in the Mattanchery palace. Amidst the Ramayana panels, the panel No.5 represents the theme with a difference. Krishna is painted in white, has eight hands. This painter has followed the description of Narayana Bhattatiri and not that
in Kerala, with an overhaul touch of Vijayanagar patterns and with a strong bias for weired Kathakali make up. The painter has a keen eye, for details, and passion for groups, and group composition".¹

MURALS IN THE SRI RAMA SHRINE

The rich tradition seems to have ended with the murals of Nandi outside the Vilakkumandapam. The murals in Sri Rama Shrine exhibit different characteristics, that they proclaim different masters with different technique. It is a parallel development along with Mattanchery palace, where the murals of ladies chamber exhibit, certain features and techniques adopted from the European tradition. The British influence is partly responsible for the propagation of the western influence to the detriment of the indigenous tradition.² The artists seemed to have, more in favour of palette and oil colours, as can be seen in these paintings. The form of these paintings is 'far removed from the classic tradition' nor can claim proximity to the Nayaka style. It is of a hybrid variety exhibiting more from the west and less from the land. But colours retain their brightness, the strokes are effective, giving occasionally, depth and tonal variation as discussed below:-

1. Siva is sitting along with his consort Uma, their sons Ganapati and Subramanian, on a bed. Siva is represented as vyākhyāta. A sage is also included among the audience. It is significant to note that the walls of the Vishnu (Rama)

the first figure is that of Siva. It shows not only the
ecllcticism; but to fulfill a purpose. The purpose is that,
through Siva, the story of Ramayana is narrated to his family
and to the world. The poet Tuncat Ezhuthachan, the father of
modern Malayalam literature, in his epic Adhyatma Ramayanan
makes this couple enter into a conversation and in the course
of which Parvati requests to her Lord to explain to her the
philosophy of Rama. Siva explains thus:
"Sri Rama padambujam vandichu
Samksepichu saramayulla tatvam
Cholluvan kettaium nee"2

"I shall explain to you the philosophy of Rama
briefly, hear me".

He explained to all those assembled. The artist has
translated the opening scenes of Ramayana. But the story
sequence is not followed immediately.

2. Goddess Raja Rajeshvari: She is shown sitting on a
golden throne in a pillared hall where four goddesses also sit.
In this panel, the technique of presenting architectural features
is used. There is a pillared hall and the throne at the centre
of the hall. Other goddesses are seated, in two rows, on a
raised plateforms, thus, leaving the middle, as a low plain
leading to the central figure. The depth and tonal variations
of the shades have been achieved in the low lying floor, which

1. George, K.M., 'Malayalam literature upto the Trio', K.C.

2. Adhyatma Ramayanan, MSS, (preserved in the Melekettil family,
Puliyankom, Alatur, Palghat), p.3.
separates the raised platform on either sides leads to the throne. The green velvety throne gives a contrast to the red saree of the occupant, Raja Rajeshvari. The goddess on the left of Raja Rajeshvari is shown playing on vina (Pl.52). The blouse and saree speak of the 'age' in which the painting was executed.

The painting is to represent the goddess conceived in Dhyanasloka:-

\[
\text{Ratna stambha sahasra nirmita} \\
\text{Sabha madhye vimanothame} \\
\text{Chintaratna vinirmitam janani te} \\
\text{Simhasanam bhavaye.}
\]

This Dhyanasloka is the inspiration for this painting. It is composed by Sankaracharya in praise of Hemambika, district Palghat. Even to-day the traditional priests of the temple offer services beginning with this invocation.

3. Shesashayi Vishnu (Pl.51) reclines on his bed of Ananta. Vishnu faces westwards and his right hand is shown vertically down worshipping Shivalinga. This motif has become the tradition of the land as discussed elsewhere. Sri Devi sits near his head while Bhudevi at his feet. Besides, Yashoda is sporting with Krishna. It is intriguing to see the latter along with Shesashayi. If the purpose was to show Yashoda the entire universe along with Shesashayi, it was defeated because of the poor technique of juxtaposition of the main figures. All the same it has broken fresh ground as the theme is quite novel. The wall of the integrated Agramandapa has
has provided enough space so as to make this painting the largest of this shrine as the space for other paintings has to be limited due to architectural embellishments.

4. The story of Usha's marriage is depicted in the next six paintings which cover the northern wall of the shrine (Pls. 60 and 61). Usha dreams the handsome Aniruddha. The artist has adopted a technique which is trite.

5. Her friend Chitralekha, expert in occult science, fetches him to her bed chamber.

6. Aniruddha and Usha enjoy the game to Chaturangam Indian chess. It shows that this game was popular among the ruling class.

7. King Bana imprisons Aniruddha as the latter is shown in prison (Pl. 56).

8. Usha is shown as virahadukhita.

9. Krishna, knowing the plight of his son, prepares for a battle against Siva, being the guard of Bana. Ganapati on his mouse and Muruka on his peacock are shown accompanying Siva (Pl. 63).

10. Siva intercedes on behalf of Bana and the scene ends with the marriage of Usha and Aniruddha.

The next scenes are from Ramayana. The entire eastern and southern walls are covered by these paintings.

11. Rama and Lakshmana accompany Vishvamitra to the forest.

12. Rama kills Tataka (Pl. 62).

13. Four marriages are shown representing the marriage of Rama and his brothers with Sita and her sisters (Pls. 53, 64 & 65).

15. Manthara and Kaikeyi are together hatching the conspiracy.

16. Ravana in disguise of a mendicant appears before Sita.

17. Hanuman pointing towards Rama with the message "unto whom thou shalt surrender". (Pl. 58).

18. The last painting represents the theme of Narasimha, killing Hiranyakasipu, who is on His lap struggling hard as his crown has fallen and his canine teeth are exposed (Pl. 59). Narasimha has eight hands holding Gada, Sankha, in the extreme rear hands, chakra and padma in the middle. The next two hands are busy in ripping open his heart, while the frontal hands enjoying his intestine and blood. The theme is the plastic reproduction of the performing art Kathakali as discussed earlier. Hiranya wears a green silky garment, while Narasimha has yellow Panchagacham and Prahlada with folded hands also has yellow dress.

**MURALS ON THE WALLS OF VATAKKUNATHAN TEMPLE**

The murals found on the outer walls of the presiding deity were the last of the series to be executed. These paintings confirm the fact that the art tradition of this temple complex has come to a grinding halt. Similarities can be found in the murals of Vatakkunathan and Sri Rama Shrines, although dissimilarities are more and pronounced. The colours still retain their brightness in the latter but faded in the former. The
forms speak poorly of the creative genius, which was dried up almost from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards. The poor quality can, therefore, be attributed to the paucity of artists and unenlightened patrons. After the renovation of the Koothambalam, the artists were summoned to decorate the wall of both the shrines. M.G.Warriar was one of those artists who painted or repainted.\textsuperscript{1} Different artists executed these murals. Even in this complex two sets of paintings can be seen. One set, smaller in proportion to that of Sri Rama Shrine with lesser technical know-how, is seen on the wall of the shrine. Other set, shorn of the sense of spatial scheme, is found wherever space is available. The choice of theme is as erratic as the choice of the space. However, the sense of boldness in presenting themes, which hitherto unheard of, is a significant factor.

1. A goddess on horse. The contour of the figure betrays the decadent Nayaka style which somehow lingered on here.

2. Vishnu sitting on his bed Sesha and flanked by his consorts, Sri Devi and Bhudevi, are as graceless as the earlier painting. The hood of Ananta arrests our attention, because of the deft handling of brush. The artist, obviously, wanted to copy an earlier painting but in vain.

3. Goddess Kali, portrayed in blue colour expressing ferociousness. The effect is achieved to a lesser extent by means of her canine teeth and garland of skulls.

\textsuperscript{1}I am grateful to Shri M.G.Nayar for this piece of information.
4. Vishnu in sitting posture with his consorts but without Ananta.
5. Goddess Lakshmi standing on a lotus.
6. Siva is seated along with Uma and Ganapati.
7. Siva performs the dance as 'Nataraja'. He wears a crown instead of jata. The crescent and snakes are visible. He holds the Nandistaff vertically. It lacks virility of Nataraja found in Sankaranarayana shrine (Pl.48). Its stance, as though challenging for a fight, is an apology of Kerala Natarajas.
8. Siva shown as vyākhyata sitting with the yōgapatta, hand expressing the vyākhyamudra and explaining to the sages who listen to Him. This picture is a copy of a painting of the Sankaranarayana shrine (Pl.47). At least it has a message.
10. Worn out.
11. Arjuna performs austerities to get divine weapons (Pl.57) Similar motif is seen in Lepakshi paintings but no similarities in style can be noted. 1
12. The avatar of Kalki on horse-back with sword and shield.

THE SECOND SET OF PAINTINGS OF VATAKKUNATHA
1. A battle scene between Kiratamurti and Arjuna. Probably the artist wanted to continue the story of Arjuna's penance.
2. Siva bestows the invincible Pāsūpat weapon while Parvati looks on. She has dressed up like a modern lady with saree and blouse. This again throws light to the date of execution. Siva is dressed in Panchagacham holding bow, arrows

1.Sivaramamurti, C., South Indian painting, p.144 and fig.68.
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Parasu and staff in his four hands.

3. A goddess whose form is like Ganapati without tusk. She has four hands the rear holding Ankusha and a book the front expressing varada and abhaya (Pl.46). The goddess is identified as Ganeshini.

4. A scene from Ramayana where Dasharath kills the deer indulged in love sport.

5. The Deers assume the original forms as sages. The wife of the sage curses the King, who is grief-stricken. A moving pathetic scene is mirrored though with limited technical perfection.

6. The next three paintings show, a deviation from the 'sublime theme' to the naked facts. The birth of a child is shown in the canvas. A lady is shown suffering from labour pain. She is reclining, on the shoulders of an elderly lady. The pregnant lady is showing her pudendum (Pl.50).

7. Her eyes are covered with a red scarf.

8. Actual delivery is shown, the child is being taken by a third lady while the mother reclines on the second lady. The theme is quite unconventional, nay too progressive, when we consider the age in which it was painted and the place too. Probably, this may be the first of its kind to translate this theme in canvas, as we have a model in Terra-cotta, adorning Guruvayoor temple. Probably the artist wanted to portray the birth of Rama as the next painting is about him. One finds a parallel of similar representation in the earlier Vijayanagar paintings, found at Sangita mandapa of Vardhamana temple.
at Tirupparuttikunram of the fourteenth century. "The naivity of scene in the story of the Tirthankara presents his mother Priyakamini in labour. A couple of centuries later in Chidambaram and in temples of Kerala in the narration of story of Ramayana where the queens are similarly depicted".

9. Rama and Lakshmana practising the art of archery.
10. A sitting Parvati showing varada mudra.
11. Same theme besides Ganapati.
12. Nataraja different from the earlier one, inasmuch as the audience consisting of Vishnu and Brahma.
13. Venugopala plays his flute while Gopikas watch.
15. Varahavatara, the divine boar.
16. This painting represents the meeting of Bhishma and the fisherman (father of Matsyagandha, nee Satyavati). The prince is in full attire with his crown, an umbrella over him, held by his attendants. The subject, half naked holding his oar. And yonder the maid Satyavati looks on. Her profile and uncovered breasts are suggestive of her charm. With the sea as background this meeting gives a glimpse of the scenery of earstwhile Kerala sea shore (Pl.49).

1. Sivaramamurti, C., South Indian painting, p.104.