Chapter VI
WOOD CARVINGS

The availability of wood in abundance forced the builders to make use of it for religious as well as secular constructions. It has already been referred to, how in the architectural set up, the rafters occupy an enviable position to form the pyramidal or gable roof. It seems certain that "sculpture in wood was produced since early times as the technique of even the builders of Buddhist chaitya caves, was that of wood worker". Wood became a pliable material as clay to the Kerala artists who exhibited their originality in creating heavenly as well as human figures and thus, compensated for stone sculptures in this temple complex. Unlike the painters the carvers chose to remain anonymous for there is no reference to them nor to their patrons not to speak of the date of execution, keeping us in 'wood'.

BRACKET FIGURES:

The shrine of Sankaranarayana has ten bracket figures inserted on the outer walls of the ground tala. Each figure


2. Vide Chapter on 'Painting'.

3. Unlike this temple, there are references about sculptors elsewhere: i) Silpi Komandan was honoured as Chirppurandirakan. See, Pillai, K.K., Suchindram temple, p.401.
ii) The Trippavallan temple complex, district Palghat, has bracket figures with names, such as Methil Raman, Kanur Kandan, as donors to the temple.
is shown as standing on an elephant, whose fore-legs are bent as though to allow the rider to mount on it. This is the device adopted by the mahots in Kerala and the panchederm is trained accordingly, for all the ceremonial processions of the temples. Similar bracket figures with elephants are seen throughout the state, e.g. Vinayakar temple, Kasargode, district Cannore, Siva Temple, Tali, district Kozhikode, Trippavallir temple, district Palghat, Peruvanam temple, district Trichur, Chatakulangara, near Chengannur, Vazhapilli both in the district of Quilon. The bracket figures might perhaps, be the influence of Hoysala tradition of Karnataka. The details of the figures are given below:-

1. **CELESTIAL BEING**: The elephant has coiled its trunk towards its right and bent as explained above. The standing figure wears a crown like that of the kathakali kirta, with all the intricate patterns. His ear-rings have the shape of conch. There are four rows of chains on his neck. An upavitam and an udarabandham stick to the body. His sparkling eyes convey vira-rasa. Since both hands are broken identification is not possible.

2. Kramarisch, Stella, Cousens, and Potuval, *op.cit.*, Pl.LXXXI.
2. **GARUDA**: The elephant mount is in the same posture. The rider seems to be, as it were, in an uncommon situation, identifiable as Garuda, eating the flesh of Jimutavahana. With his left leg bent resting on his right knee, Garuda is in the flying posture, with his wings spread out. The covered body is supported partly with his left knee, and partly with his right foot, which is shown upturned. Ripping open the body with his left hand, while the right fingers are held out, Garuda expresses a strange taste, as his tongue is stretched down. The particles of flesh and drops of blood spilt on the ground are also shown. His eyes are wide, with exclamation on seeing the human being. He wears a crown akin to that of Kathakali kirita in outline only. It differs in content, with regard to the inlaid patterns and serpentine motifs, so as to harmonise the flowing frill pattern of the two wings which balance the figure. The elemental power is suggested by the wings.¹ His ear-rings proclaim affinity with Kathakali dance. He has chains, upavītām and udarabandham as that of figure (1) mentioned above.

A leaf from the Nāgananda of Harsha is the theme of this carving. Jimutavahan volunteered himself to be the food for Garuda in place of Sankhuchuda. Garuda tasted his blood without knowing who his prey was became remorse-stricken, on hearing the sacrifice of a Vidyadhara. He laments: "How could this Mahatma become my morsel of food, in place of snake. I have committed a heinous crime for which there is no expiation."² The mental

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¹ The wings of Garuda have already been referred to in the Chapter 'Painting' and see pl. No. 67.

² Karmarkar, R.D., Nagananda, (Poona, 1923), Act V, Sloka 19.
anguish turned to be a sincere repentance. The artist has translated the depth of the emotions of physical desire fulfilled in the palatable fare with his hands and tongue, and ultimately turned to be a remorse of profound intensity.

The theme from Nagananda does not seem to be popular in the state as there are no parallels known so far. In translating the profound sentiment of Garuda in flowing lines and forms of a very high order, the creator has risen himself to the greatest height equal to the rank of the poet Harsha himself. Even the masterpiece sculpture of Garuda who 'is emblematic of the flight of consciousness that captures ambrosia from heaven' hardly surpasses this figure. The chisel of a consummate artist can be seen and felt in the nuances of distinguishing the physical urge subdued by nobler sentiment.

3. **NAGADEVATA**: A standing nagadevata on the elephant which follows the same posture mentioned in the figures 1 and 2. The crown is the same as that of figure 1 but the ear-rings as that of figure 2, and has the chains, upavīta and bracelet as that of both the figures, e.g.1 and 2. Both arms are broken. As is usual for the nāgadēva, a three headed serpent is shown over his head as canopy. He wears a transparent dress which highlights a special treatment.

4. **A BEARDED DEVOTEE**: A bearded devotee is on the elephant which exhibits the same posture. The linear treatment of beard adds grace to the figure. His right arm is broken.

5. **STANDING LADY**: A lady is shown standing on the elephant which

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displays the same posture. She wears ornaments like ear-rings, necklace and bracelet. Her hair-do is tilted towards the right side, a typical Kerala style.\(^1\) A unique feature of the carving is that she has raised her elongated eye-brow, a little too high. The intention of the artiste cannot be guaged. It would be too much if we say that the artist had anticipated Piccaso and his school of distortion,\(^2\) as it is a mere accidental accomplishment without any conscious effort to follow it up.

6. The rider is missing but the elephant remains to be in the same posture.

7. **THE PATRON:** The elephant is shown turning its trunk towards left. A male devotee is seen holding a flower in both the hands. He has turban as head-dress and not a crown. His dress upto his knees and his dhoti covers upto his ankles. The transparent drappery speaks volumes of the dexterity of the creator and the material prosperity of the donor, whose representation might be this figure. This figure cannot be of a ruler since he wears no crown nor does he have any of the regalia. Like the artist, the donor also chose to remain unknown unlike some of their comrades-in-profession elsewhere (Pl.69).

8. **RATI:** A divine lady is on the elephant which is in the same posture as explained in item No.7, above. She wears a crown, has ear-rings, necklace, chains, armlets bracelets and thus, ornamented completely. She holds a flower which has a long stem in her left hand while her right hand is in action, as though to

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1. Vide chapters on 'Sculpture' and 'Painting'.

take an arrow from the quill. Her chiseled face, full and rounded breasts and her attenuated waist, add to the charm and grace of feminine beauty. Her dress, which extends from her naval to anklets, is similar to that of Parvati (Pl.68). In Kathakali dance, the female characters do not wear crowns and hence, this is a deviation from it. Her appearance and stance go to identify her as Rati who has pushpabāna as her dart. Sculptural representative of Rati can be seen in Suchindram temple\(^1\) (which once formed a part of Kerala) and in Meenakshi temple,\(^2\) Madurai. She is shown as riding on a swan, holding lotus bud in her hand.

9. **MANMATHA**: The elephant has turned its trunk to the right again. A celestial being is in standing posture with crown, ear-rings, chains and other ornaments. His right hand holds a flower while the index finger is pointed down. The left hand is in katyāvālambita posture. The handsome face, and flower and his juxtaposition beside Rati, give us the clue, to identify him, as Manmatha. The representatives of Manmatha and Kati seem to be popular in wood carving as are seen in Venganallur, district Trichur, and also on Rathas of Perinkulam, district Palghat.

The detached namaskara mandapas are treasure-houses inasmuch as these structures preserve, of wood carvings in plenty. The pyramidal roof of the square namaskara-mandapa is covered with copper plates externally and with wooden planks internally.


to conceal the rafters. These wooden planks afford themselves as background on which figures in relief and round are inserted wherever possible. There are two rows of pillars, granite and wooden, granite to support the inner uttara and wooden to support the outer uttara. The ceiling of the namaskara- mandapa of Vatakunathan shrine contains nine squares each one enclosing a figure.

The tradition of beautifying the namaskara- mandapa goes back to the thirteenth century as the earliest namaskara- mandapa is found in Katinakulangara, district Trivandrum. Similarly, namaskara- mandapa of Tiruvambadi, Kazhakuttam, both in the district of Trivandrum, Kaviyur, Tirunakkara, Ettamanur, in the district of Kottayam, Tiruvillamala, Venganaller in district Trichur, Tali, Kozhikode are some of the examples of structures, which are art galleries, in wood sculpture.

The following are the details of the square ceiling:
1. The North-eastern square contains the figure of standing Trimurti, i.e. Siva flanked by Brahma to the right and Vishnu to the left. Siva holding parasu, stag and a trident, occupies the central place. Brahma is shown as folding his hands in praise of Siva. Similarly Vishnu is also shown in anjalimudra.

1. Kramarisch, Cousen, Potuval, op.cit., Pl.LXV.
3. Kramarisch, Cousen, Potuval, op.cit., Pl.LXXXII.
The theme conveys the superiority of Siva to that of either Brahma or Vishnu, otherwise they need not have been shown with folded hands (Pl.70).

2. Siva and Vishnu occupy the central square of the eastern portion. Both of them are standing. On the left of Siva is Vishnu, holding chakra and sankha in his rear hands. His frontal hands are extended, as though, to welcome his equal or lord. Siva feeding a stag with his frontal right arm, while holding in his left a drum or pot. This concept represents Siva as Kankālamūrti. 1 "Siva as Bhikṣhātanamūrti" or Kankālamūrti going abegging to receive offerings with dear closely keeping pace with him to nibble at the food also suggests the protection of pashus by Fashupati. A devotee is shown in between the gods in sirasyanjali mudra.

3. The south-east square contains the theme of Ganapati-puja. A squatting Ganapati has ankusha and pāṣaṇa in his rear hands, danta and book in his frontal hands. He is flanked by two lady votaries. In the same square below Ganapati, two men carry bananas, third one reaps the harvest (paddy) and a fourth carries the grain on his head. It is depicted that if one worships Ganapati, he is sure to achieve sarva-siddhi in this world and beyond.

This motif is an amalgam of the motifs in the painting of Padmanabhapuram palace. 3 Mattanchery palace 4 and of

2.Ibid, p.45.
3.Kramarisch, and others, op.cit., Plates XC and CIV.
4.Panel No.4 of the Mattanchery palace mural.
Mulikulam temple,¹ district Ernakulam. In the former two, only male devotees are shown with their offerings like bananas, milk and modaka. A Nambutiri Brahmin is shown offering naivedya to the lord. In the latter, a female devotee is shown along with the priest who does not belong to the "sacerdotal authorities" (Pl. 70).

4. The southern part of the central square has standing Vishnu as the figure. He has four hands holding sankha chakra, gada and padma. There are two flying figures shown in the mid air to indicate that they are heavenly creatures or angels. There are two votaries down on earth with folded hands.

5. The central square has lingodbhava-mūrti. From the 'oval shaped cut-out' of the linga, Siva emerges. He holds a stag and an axe in his rear hands. His frontal hands are kept in katyāvalambita posture shown only upto his knees. Brahma to his right and Vishnu to his left have surrendered unto Him after their efforts to measure Him were in vain. The swan, the vehicle of Brahma, is flying and boar, one of the avatars of Vishnu, is shown digging down. This concept is a replica of sculpture found in Brhadishvara temple, Tanjore. "Here is the concept of Jyōtirlinga same as the later iconographic concept of lingodbhava Siva issuing from and as a flaming pillar, understood by even Brahma and Vishnu amongst enlightened by the sudden appearance of Siva".² The carver

1. Kramarisch, and others, op.cit., Pl.CVI.
2. Sivaramamurti, C., Satarudriya, fig.19, p.48.
has exhibited his consummate skill in the craft in depicting the flames (Pl.71). Though one cannot claim the conception as original, as there are representations in other media, the treatment, the stance and the smooth modelling of this figure all go to prove it as one of the best specimen in the whole State of Kerala. This motif in granite, in fact, is seldom seen in the State. At Suchindram, there is a sculpture in which Siva emerges from "Om-shaped cut-out of a linga". Barr- ing that no such sculpture has been reported so far. The lingōdbhava-mūrti is happily the presiding deity of this temple. As he is the Lord of Lords, the artist has allotted a place which is the geometric centre of the ceiling, below which are the learned men prostrate.

6. To the right of the lingōdbhavamūrti is Siva in dhyāna posture (Pl.71). He is seated in padmasana his both frontal hands are stretched to the knees while the rear ones hold an axe and the stag. Yogeshvara is another attribute of Siva whose yogic form is popular since the days of Mohan-jo-Daro. The epithet Maharshi is the descriptive of Rudra as the foremost of gods and the supreme sage. There are two votaries, on either side, depicted to be flying, probably to indicate, that they are certainly not of earth, as the atmosphere is far from mundane.

1. Pillai, K.K., op.cit., Pl.20. Suchindram is in Tamilnadu and hence cannot be included in Kerala.

2. Sivaramamurti, C., Satarudriya, fig.13.

3. Ibid, p.11.
7. The extreme left of the western square contains Venugopala. Krishna plays flute standing cross-legged which is the accepted posture by the artists either in sculpture or in painting. He is flanked by two maidens. The one on the right keeps rhythm while the other on the left plays vina kept vertically. This theme was as popular in Kerala as outside the State, since there are representations of Venugopala in all the media of plastic arts. Similar representations in wood are seen in Venganallur and Tiruvillamala, both in the districts of Trichur and Tiruvangad, in the district of Tillichery. The vertical vina suggests that the Raghunath-vina has yet to invade the music world of Kerala.

8. The central square of the western panel is Siva, as Dakshināmūrti. He is seated in vīrasana on a pitha while the left frontal hand rests on his left knee, the right one shows chin-mudra. The rear hands hold an axe and the stag. This is another attribute of Siva as one who expounds and interprets the highest philosophy. He is given audience by three pairs of votaries. One pair on the top, in the flying posture, indicates that they are heavenly creatures. The second pair in the mid air suggests that they might be in the process of becoming angels and the third pair on terra-firm, yet to be redeemed (Pl. 72).

1. Vide Chapter on 'Painting' and see plates 71 and 72.
The examples of Dakshinamurti appears as early as eighth century as can be seen from the cave temple of Irinilankode, district Trichur. The popularity of this motif is evidenced by numerous representations in sculpture as well as in painting in the Vaṭakkunātha temple complex itself (Pl.71).

9. Gajalakshmi occupies the north western square. Two elephants raising their trunks with garlands are shown on either side of the goddess. She is seated in padmasana posture on a lotus holding and flower. In the fore-ground, a cow is grazing which indicates unruffled peace, while a man is shown plucking fruits from a tree, suggests prosperity. The perfection of feminine beauty seen either in her chiseled face or shapely breasts or the grace of both in superb modelling, and establish the sublime height of accomplishment of the creator and his tapas behind it. This motif became popular not only in temples but in residential houses also.

Below the ceiling, the beams that support it are treated as canvas on which the craftsmen have lavished their technique and know-how of carving in wood. Each beam is fitted with bead-work, conventional floral designs, geometrical patterns, ornamental foliage, scrolls and various forms of lotus flowers. The abundance of variety itself speaks for the creative talents. In certain cases, celestial beings are also shown to add to the divine atmosphere.

1. (a) Sarkar, H., Monuments of Kerala, pp.22-23, Pl.II. (b) Sivaramamurti, C., Art of India, p.456, Pl.744. The author ascribes it to ninth century.
Apart from the embellished designs and motifs, bracket figures are inserted adding to the multiplicity of sculptures. There are sixteen sculptures. Scenes from the Ramayana are depicted through some of these figures. 1) On all the four sides, representation of Rama with jata, dressed in bark, carrying bow and arrows are shown in various attitudes.
2) Visvamitra, taking care of young Rama is the them of one of the carvings. The treatment of his beard and jata and his graceful face, proclaim the master artist in every inch.
3) Parasurama with his axe is another figure that adorns this mandapa. In conformity with the tradition of a risi, he has grown his jata and beard, but his body is animated in defiant mood, ever-ready to destroy the kingly tribe. It speaks of the carnal power in sharp contrast to the figure of Visvamitra. Though they could be branded as belonging to the same fraternity, what a difference in treatment! (Pl. 77).
4) Rama aiming at Maricha, the fake fawn. The muscular strength in drawing the bow, while he bends a little to take the aim, is realistically depicted. Maricha is shown as terror stricken as though he has seen the agent of death.
5) There is a continuation of the incident in the next carvings as Maricha is shown smitten by the arrow on his chest and grapples with it, a desperate attempt to extricate himself from the death dealing dart.
6) Rama aims at Tataka, the demoness. Exactly the same dexterity as revealed in the earlier figures can be seen here. His prowess in archery is once again proved. His unmistakable aim is
Tataka as the target. She is shown as having oversized breasts, eyes with anguish as the arrow strikes her chest (Pl.85).

7) Vamana, the dwarf, as one of the avatāras of Vishnu is of the figures. He is depicted as a boy in his early teens holding an umbrella of the Kerala type. We have already referred to the particular type of umbrella held by Narada. It seems that that must be the pattern of umbrella prevalent in west-coast since early times as seen in the Ajanta frescoes.¹ It continues to be the same even to-day in the hands of Nambūtiri men and ladies, the latter hold even inside the temples to establish their rights and partly to be concealed from popular sight.

8) Venugopala holds his flute in his hands standing cross-legged plays the divine music.

9) Hayagriva, the divine horse in a galloping posture, is adding to the variety of sculptures. After killing the demon Hayagriva,² Vishnu himself was beheaded in the combat. When requested by gods, Visvakarma fixed the head of a horse and, thus, became Hayagriva. It cannot be said as rare as beautiful specimen are found in Trippavallur district Palghat.³ The canons of Vishnuḥdharmaṭṭara⁴ have been strictly adhered to in

¹Khandalawala, Karl, Indian sculptures and painting, pls.I & II.
²Bhārat varshīya prachīn charitra kosa (Marathi), Ed.by C.V. Chitrav (Pune, 1932), p.643.
³The representatives of Hayagriva at Trippavallur temple is in different form. He has four hands with attributes of Vishnu.
⁴Desai, Kalpana, Iconography of Vishnu, pp.143-144 and fig.103.
the sculpture of Trippavallur. But here one finds a deviation from the accepted tradition as the animal form is predominately retained. The presence of Hayagriva is a proof of the Madhva influence of the patron. After Saktan Tampuran, the Cochin rulers were followers of Madhva upto 1864.

One is apt to be miscarried by the impression that the wood carvers created only gods but this figure of Hayagriva bears testimony to the artists' observation of the animal world.

In Indian art, the figures are, as it were, modelled by breath which dilates the chest and is felt to carry the pulse of life through the body to the tips of his fingers. The figures representing Rama seem to be the best specimen which have acquired this quality. If we take up a comparative study of the sculptures in the land representing Rama, these figures can be evaluated and categorised as the finest achievements. The figures of Tiruvangad though virile lack the smooth modelling of Vatakkanathan. The sculptures of Sthanukulangara, though succeeds in narrating the story visually has the same drawback. Rama of Triprayar, district Trichur has a subtle grace and exquisite beauty blended with imperishable charm.

Similarly are the sculptures of Rama in Ettumanoor, Ramesvaram Koil and Kaviyur which are the prized achieve-

2. Kramarisch, and others, op.cit., Pl.XVIII.
3. Ibid, Pl.LXXV
4. Ibid, Pl.LXIX
5. Ibid, Pl.LXIX.
ments of the craftsmen.

All the beams contain panels consisting of fifty figures in relief. The panel on the north has the theme of 'churning the ocean'. The devas numbering twenty-five hold the tail of Vasuki and asuras, equal in number hold the head of the snake. Manthara mountain is shown in the middle as a triangular mass. The stupendous task of the devas and the asuras is shown with considerable care and caution as one can read the strenuous endeavour writ large on the faces of the participants. This theme, though not popular, is not uncommon, as found in Tiruvangad and Tiruvarp where the artists have equalled in their total involvement and spirit of the herculean task. There is one more specimen of this art motif in the nandimandapa. We come across Amrita-manthan, a fresco painting in the namaskara mandapa of Kachankuruchi temple, Kollengode, district Palghat. Another specimen in granite is found in Andhra where the sculptors had not reached the expected level, if performance is any indication. This motif has crossed the seas to the east to Indonesia where Ankor Thom has the largest specimen. "This temple has given the world the magnificent rendering of churning of the ocean...Long rows of gods and demons hold the serpent Vasuki - a motif that is found in the Gupta sculptures at Udayagiri near Bhilsa and in the Chalukyan sculptures. This version is the most exuberant of all. The theme is so appeal-

ing to the sculptor that it is repeated in all four sides of the monument".¹ The visual conception of manthana has been accepted in the tespechorean art 'that the Bharatanatya sastra illustrates this theme of churning of the ocean, woven into a type of play known as dima.²

Opposite to this panel are figures in exactly opposite mood and attitude. All the fifty figures indulge in dance. Both males and females are the participants who enjoy the atmosphere with ease, as can be seen in their 'gay abandance' in the rhythmic movements. The dance theme has become popular in the temples³ as well as in residential houses.⁴

The other two panels, i.e. facing east and west depict processions accompanying the king and queen as the central figures shown, as carried in palanquin. It was a common sight of the palanquin in Kerala till 1947. The processionists, majority of whom are on foot, are armed with swords, shields and lances. The lords riding on horses can be distinguished from the pedestrians.

¹ Sivaramamurti, C., The art of India, p.197.
² Krishnamurti, N.S., op.cit., p.263.
³ Kramarisch, Stella, and others, op.cit., p.139, and also Pl.73.
⁴ The plate No.73 represents the panel found at the lintel of Melekethil House, Pudiyankan, district Palghat. The Melekethil Nayars were the rulers of the area of the bye-gone days. They still retain some of the rights in the social gathering and have their history related to the royal house of Cochin.
It is to be noted that while depicting the crowd the artists have displayed their skill in spatial arrangement so as not to distort the optical pleasure or to overcrowd with more details. With staccato lines, they have achieved with brilliant results. Each man or woman has his or her allotted part beyond which he or she does not transgress.

The inner layer of the wooden planks which serve as background, has already been referred to. There are naga devatas fixed on them on all the sides. They are shown only upto the chest wearing crown, ear-rings and necklace. A three hooded serpent is shown as a canopy over each figure. The purpose for which they are kept is unknown since they do not fit in any of the thematic sequences of the figures, either in round, or in relief. As they are seen sporadically now, it is presumed that much might have been lost by way of pilferage.

THE NAMASKARA MANDAPA OF SANKARANARAYANA

This smallest mandapa is hewed in between the other two. Like that of the Vatakkunath, this mandapa has two rows of pillars, granite and wooden, performing identical function. The uttiras have been ornamented with gopura motifs and kudu Occasionally intercepted by divine figures. The ceiling is empty but remnants of red and green colours can be noticed. There are bracket figures in round, inserted on the beams as explained below:—

1. A lady keeps rhythm with cymbals locally known as ila talam (two small pieces of bell-metal). She has ear-rings, necklaces
bangles and anklets. The drapery is so exquisitely carved that one can feel the smooth texture of it. Her full and shapely breasts tilt, as she performs her orchestral part.

2. A man plays on mridangam (Pl.80), the percussion instrument. His dress is rather coarse in variety, shown fluttering at the ends, as the instrument conceals the dress. His complete identification with the orchestra is visible by his slight bent of the body, towards front, as his legs are shown kept apart, and partly bent. He is in total harmony with the cymbal player.

3. Another member of the orchestra with a vina which is kept vertically that the instrument may be vina or tambura, a drone to provide the base voice for the music. Probably he may be the vocal musician.

4. A piper blowing the pipe forms a part of this group (Pl.81). This instrument goes either in accompanyment with the singer or is performed as solo as and when warranted.

5. Four figures are performing dance to the tune of the orchestra and music. Details of their postures cannot be explained as the dancing figures are too small but balance and harmony among them, can be noted.

6. Two figures of Krishna, dancing on Kalia are the central figures of this atmosphere of festivity (Pl.77). Krishna has a turban which, is as simple as, is found among the cow-herds even to-day, in the Kerala village and not with the usual peacock feather. His dress hardly extends upto to his knees.
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Ear-rings are prominent. With both the hands, he holds the tail which is lifted up, as it were, in the form of an arch over him. Kalia has three hoods, over which Krishna has implanted his foot. Krishna gives the lead in dancing while others only follow his steps or accompany the rhythm with music and orchestra. A lively atmosphere is thus, created through these figures. It has a magnetism that more one looks, the more will one become a part of it. There are two specimen of these figures on opposite sides.

7. Venugopala, the supreme artist plays the enchanting music which enthralls the whole cosmos (Pl.83). There are two figures on each side. He has a head-dress, different from the one on Kaliya and has ear-rings and raiments similar to that of him.

8. Krishna holds a handful of butter in his left hand. The right hand is in akimbo position. He is enjoying butter either stolen from his house or elsewhere, whereby he has earned the title of makhanchor. The scene is snapped by the artist, who has conjured up this episode of Krishna and translated it in visual terms.

9. Krishna holds butter in his left hand (Pl.82). The right hand is broken. The details of dress and ornaments are similar to that of the figures of 7 and 8. A difference is noticed in his bulging stomach, probably after the morsels of butter. The childish pranks of Krishna are the delightful themes for the Vaishnavite poets. The poet Puntanam Nambutiri has earned a

1. Similar motif is seen at Kaviyur.
reputation as Krishnabhakta through his jnánapāna. There is a beautiful imagery in the following lines of his work:-

Visakkumböl Venna Kavarnu nnum Krishna
A tuthu và unī kani kānān.

(Oh, Krishna, I would like to see you as Kani as one who is indulged in the art of stealing butter when you feel hungry.) These lines must be the inspiration for these figures. Punnam wrote lively evocation of the 'unruly kid with a streak of mud on his tummy who wandered all over Vajra hugging a ball of butter with both his hands'.

10. Krishna eats a fruit. He holds a bowl in his left hand. He is shown in the act of eating the fruit with his right hand. His dress and ornaments are similar, to that of the figures explained. The fruit is of the size of banana, a special variety of Kerala locally known as nendra.

11. Krishna is shown as Vatapatrasayin (Pl.74). An infant who sucks his own right toe with his left arm. The right arm tends to extend to his thigh. The left leg is bent slightly. The Bhagavata Purana, lingers long on the infancy of Krishna. The Krishna cult forms a branch of Vaishnavite movement started as early as the ninth century in Kerala. Inaugurating the new dynasty, Kulasekhara Perumal introduced the Krishna cult in


2. Kani is the first auspicious sight on the day of Vishu i.e.when Sun enters in Aries (approximately on the 15th of April). It is one of the important festivals of the Keralites.

3. Chaitanya, Krishna, A profile of Indian culture, (Delhi, 1975), p.44.
his land.¹ Later the flute music of the mellifluous verse of Lilasuka's Krishna-karnāmṛtamu, in Sanskrit narrates many tender and amusing pranks of the child.² The current influenced vernacular literary tradition in south. However, Kerala had to wait for long, for further poems on this sweet theme till Puntanam, who poured forth his sentiments. When he lost his own child, in an accident, he consoled himself and taught the world:

When infant Krishna sports in my heart,

Do I need others as mine own?

The moral is too obvious to be explained. Despite the rich tradition in literary form its plastic form had to wait till the nineteenth century. As explained in the Bhagavata, the concept of vatapatrasāyin is best illustrated as "a baby lying on a pipal leaf on the waters of deluge. Conversing with the eternal old sage Markandeya whom he stupefies by his maya both apparently young and apparently old, really being different".³ But the artists of Kerala, do not seem to have gone far, to seek from the Bhagavata. Kulasekhara Perumal has composed Mukundamala⁴ and the invocatory verse is as follows:-

"Karārivindēna padārivindam mukhārivinde vinivēśayantam,
   Vatasya patrasya pute śayānam bālam Mukundam manasaṃ smarami".

It is this visual conception of the royal composer

¹Menon, Sreedhara A., History of Kerala, (Trivandrum, 1973), p.44.
²Chaitanya, Krishna, op.cit., pp.44-45.
³Sivaramamurti, C., Satarudriya, p.68, fig.53.
⁴Ayyar, K.V.Krishna, History of Kerala, pp.122-123.
that impelled the chisel of taksha. He can rightly be called a creative genius, who carved the most beautiful form, from which the nectar is oozing out incessantly. The felicity with which the cute infant holds the limb, which is smooth and pliant and indulges in sucking it, shows the happy marriage of consummation of skill and the intensity of inward awareness of the artist who has become non-pareil. The anatomy of the gray leaf speaks of the scientist in him. The royal composer, would have acclaimed his comrade-in-art, for his total identification, with his theme and would have certainly showered upon the latter his munificent rewards. If the function of the art is 'to stir, to awaken and to hold the attention of the worshipper' this objet de art is the one which fulfills it and leads him back to the centre from where emerged. This recherche of the Trichur Viśvakarma has elevated this piece of sculpture to the level of a poem, nay, 'music in wood-carving' the sweet melody of which continues to reverberate in the galleries of this mandapa.

The uttira has panels which are embellished in three distinct rows. The upper two rows consist of floral designs conventional motifs, the Kirtimukha motifs and geometrical designs as seen in the mandapa of Vaṭakkunāthan. The third row depicts human beings. The eastern panel contains twenty figures both males and females in dancing posture in tune with the orchestral accompaniment. Not all of them perform dance in the same way, in steps and postures. Here the
The artist seems to have in mind the dictum "variety is the spice of life". It would be easier to carve all of them in the same pattern, but it would betray mediocrity, a quality to which, none of the celebrated ones have stooped to in wood carving. Hence the choice for different postures which would call for more dedication and reflection. The musical instruments seen here are ganjira, chengila and vina. Ganjira is a percussion instrument, to be played, with one hand utilizing all the five fingers for the solphas. It has to be held, in other hand while playing. Chengila, is a round piece of bell-metal to be played with a small stick made of coconut reed. The main vocalist himself has to play on this with single beats only. In Kathakali, this has a predominant position. Vina is held vertically and played. All these are popular even to-day for dance concerts and, therefore, we get a glimpse of the cultural life of the people of Trichur through these visual representations. It is, therefore, of inestimable value to the art historian, as a source material to reconstruct history of dance, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The northern panel has twenty-six figures representing a procession of soldiers. The commander is riding on a horse which is bridled. The soldiers hold weapons like bows and arrows, swords and shields. Gun-powder has yet to reach to the Cochin army! The martial parade does show the 'swing' of hands. A lively and vigorous effect is achieved by showing the right hand high in the air, as though to threaten the
enemies. Since there was no 'supply corps', separately in the Cochin army, the provision had to be carried while they marched. Care is taken to show "killed deer" and thereby to establish the prevailing taste among the Nayar soldiers.

The panel on the south depicts Ganapati puja. The Deity is carved prominently at the centre as squatting. A priest is ringing the bell while another is offering karpura dhupa, a third blowing a conch. The naivedya of a bunch of bananas carried by men who also throng to have a darsan. Representative of the same theme has always been referred to. But the treatment differs as necessitated by the spatial limitations. At present, worship of Ganapati is not at all popular, as it is in Maharashtra. This piece of archaeological source material, has opened a new vista of thought, in favour of Ganapati, who was not only nominally present but was considered as a popular deity.¹ (Pl.81).

Like the wooden planks of the Vatakunathan, the planks in this mandapa offer background, to the figures inserted on them. The figures are eight in number as detailed below:

1. The figure that faces east (i.e. the deity Sankaranarayana) is a sage performing abhiseka. He has jatamakuta and beard dressed in bark befitting his spiritual status. The pitcher in his hand is shown emptying. From the circumstantial evidence

¹We have come across a ruined temple of Ganapati at Melarkode, Alatur, district Palghat. Even to-day, the adjacent lands are known in the name of Ganapati. Certainly these lands once belonged to the Ganapati temple.
we may identify him as Vasista, the preceptor of Rama (Pl.84) 
2. Another sage depicting chinmudra or samdamsa. He has the same dress as that of Vasista. Probably he may be Vamadeva another preceptor of Rama.
3. Rama sits in padmāsana posture. He wears a crown and has ornaments like ear-rings, necklace, katisutra and dressed in dhoti. His right palm is kept under left arm, as though, he is in meditation. The bow and arrows are kept in his lap. This is a ritual followed in the Kathakali dance known as guruvandanan to be performed, ere one undertakes any venture.
4. Sita stands in utter devotion and reverence. She wears no crown but has profusely ornamented. She has covered her breasts with a dress which extends upto knee. This is a typical Kerala dress, worn by the aristocrats of the land.
5. Laksmana stands as a dutiful guard ever-alert to strike at the intruder who disturbs the peace of his lord. He has dress and ornaments like that of Rama and holds a bow and arrows.
6. Rama draws the bow and aims at a (demon) who is missing. The flexion of his body and the strenuous effort in the archery speak, of the excellency of the craftsman.
7. Laksmana keeps his right hand, close to his chest with his eyes closed. The weapons are kept aside. This is a ritual in art of Kalaripayattu (a method of fight in Kerala) showing salutation with the preceptor, who has taught the art, before the combatants take up weapons. From the martial exercise, it

has intruded into Kathakali dance and one can see the hero performing this ritual, before charging his adversary.

8. A young lady pointing her index finger to a place (where she wants, probably) either Rama or Lakshmana with an inviting smile. Her smile betrays her canine teeth giving the clue for identification. She is Surpanakha in disguise of an enchanting lady. This piece which represents romance, has become one of the romantic pieces in wood carving.

All these figures follow a thematic sequence and, therefore, we are in a position to see a vignette from the epic Ramayana. The diction of this art work is of a high order almost reaching to the sublime height of the epic itself.

THE NAMASKARA MANDAPA OF RAMA TEMPLE

The detached namaskara mandapa in front of the Rama Shrine is as rich if not richer than the others in sculptural wealth. The square railing is now empty. Remnants of red, ochre and yellow colours can be seen.

Below the ceiling, the uttiras that support the ceiling have embellishments, as that of other namaskara mandapa. There are bracket figures which are inserted on the uttiras. 1. Rama lifts the bow as the test prescribed by the King Janaka for the contestants, who seek his daughter's hand. Though shown in simple dress, his majestic mein and deportment conform to the scion of the Raghu family. Non-challantly, he lifts the bow which has been reported to be of enormous size.

1.Reference has already been made to a similar one in the namaskara mandapa of Sankaranarayana.
2. Not only he is able to lift it, but tie the string as effortlessly, as he has lifted to show his prowess, in the use of arms. According to the story, the bow was broken into two and thereby accomplished the task and became eligible for Sita's hand. This artist does not seem to be interested in the destruction and, thereby disrupting the organic whole of the form of the art piece. This may be the explanation for the deviation from the traditional 'break up' of the bow, into the union of both ends of the bow, through his string of muscles.

3. Thus, became victorious Rama and Sita exchanged garlands. Sita's garland is intact while Rama's is missing but the posture of Rama suggests the action of exchange of garland. Here is a page from the cultural scene of the land. Among the high castes, exchange of the garlands by the couple marks the finale of the wedding ceremony. To-day in front of the Guruvayur temple, district Trichur, one can witness this social custom.

4. The sage who blesses the couple is Visvamitra, for whose protection was the mission of Rama. Visvamitra has jatamakuta and flowing beard exudes compassion.

5. An exquisite piece of sculpture representing Parasurama challenging Rama. As belonging to the order of the sages, he has jatamakuta and a full grown beard. He holds a parasu (axe) to exterminate the entire clan of ruling class to avenge the death of his father. Defiance is writ large on his face and tamasic mood predominates in his stance, in sharp contrast to the serenity of Visvamitra.
6. There are four sages shown independently, whose role cannot be explained. Probably they might be followers of Visvamittra or observers to the wedding ceremony. Apart from their jata-makuta and beard, they hold umbrella of the Kerala type. The thematic sequence of Rama's marriage and confrontation with Parasurama is in continuation of the story of Ramayana from the namaskara mandapa of Sankaranarayana.

7. There is a unique sculpture of two ladies on the south-east corner entirely different manner as well as in matter. One lady is holding the right leg of another lady who in turn holds with her left hand the former's left leg and thus, forming an oval shape. The divine drama presented from the pages of Ramayana, has nothing to do with this secular design. The conception of creating a geometrical pattern by means of two ladies, is simply brilliant. Almost near in approach, is a sculpture in granite found in Andhra. 1 "Two ladies continue to form a wheel, they can roll on like flying wheel". It is interesting to have comparative study of the two sculptural representations. The Andhra sculpture is to form a circle, whereas the Trichur sculpture is to form an oval shape. The medium also differs, from the maleable stone to the pliable wood. The former seems to be an acrobatic posture, whereas the latter gives the effect of floating in mid-heaven. It effortlessly floats, while the Andhra sculpture is of earth, and is earthy. The ingenuity of spatial arrangement to fix it on the beam, adds to the very acme of the science of archi-

1. Krishnamurti, N.S., Andhra dance sculptures, fig.9. We have come across another one in the temple of Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh.
The uttiras are ornamented with beautiful panels. The western panel has forty figures in a royal procession. The royal personage are in two pallanquines, followed by the soldiers on horse-back and on foot. The pageantry consists, not only of soldiers, who carry bow, arrow, swords and shields, but of musicians with their instruments. The instruments are timila, chenda, pipe(long and short) and conch. The conch is universally used in India and, therefore, it cannot be claimed exclusively for Kerala and so are the pipes.

Timila, a percussion instrument, forms part of the 'pancha vadya' set consisting of timila, maddalam, edakka, samkhu and pipe. Timila is a long kettle drum of wood, two sides of which, are covered with the hides of cow, and fixed in tension, with the help of cotton ropes. It is played on one of its faces, with both the hands. This is accepted as a devavadyam like maddalam. As devavadyam, it has entry, like the Brahmins, upto the sopana.

Chenta, as a percussion instrument, has incalculable dimensions in the aspect of 'laya' or rhythm. It is a long barrel drum of wood, the two sides of which are covered with cow's hide. Both the sides are tied and brought to tension, by means of thirty-two knots of cotton ropes. It is played with two sticks, on one of its sides unlike maddalam or mridangam.

1. Panchavadyam is a special orchestra for the procession in Kerala.
which are played on both sides with both the hands. Chenta has a very prominent place in Kathakali dance, setting the rhythms for the dancers. In Yaksagana of south Canara the same chenta is used. A similar drum is seen in Japan known as 'Taiko'\(^1\) which is a flat barrel drum, with two cow hide heads. It is placed on the floor and played with wooden sticks. But chenta is hung on the shoulders and is played and not to be placed on the ground. It is branded as asura vadyam, unlike maddalam, which is the sole percussion in the kootiyattam, the oldest Sanskrit stage. This ostracism perpetuated on chenta as an asuravadyam has nowhere been so scrupulously observed, and adhered to, than in this temple. This instrument is an apartheid - so much so that, it has no entry ear the sopanam. During the puram festival\(^2\), the reverberating chenta is used only upto the vilakkummatam and not beyond.

For the first time, both chenta and timila are seen in these carvings, though other instruments also find a place, even in painting. We have literary evidence,\(^3\) to show the existence of chenta and the caste people who played on it. It speaks of the late entry, however, popular are they in the modern days.

The eastern panel has forty-figures of males and females in dancing posture. Various postures and gestures are carved

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1. Kishibe, Shigeo, "Noh, the traditional theatre of Japan". Quarterly Journal of the National Centre of Performing Arts, No.4. (Dec.1974), Pl.op.p.3.


3. Pillai, E.K., Kerala bhāshayute vikāsa parināmāṅgal, p.138. The word 'ochan' referred to in the inscription of Trippal-katal temple, Kilimanoor, means the artist who plays on chenta.
and presented. The figures, though crowded, are virile and vibrate with energy, move to and fro as dictated by the creators. The details of dress, ornaments and posture would have been lost had it been executed by lesser masterful minds. Here one can witness the epitomy of the craftsmen, employing their hearts and souls on their choicest designs and modelling. "Each subject has its proper place, each place its meaning, and each figure its functions". The art of the "bull figures" known as Kadala basava\(^1\) (because of the size of a Bengal gram) though precedes in every respect, must have influenced the Trichur sculptors.

The rest of the two panels show processions. Elephants are seen in the processions. They are bedecked with golden masks, a device popular even to-day. The kolam or titambu is seen on the elephants. Titambu represents the deity for the purpose of utsava and is taken out in procession. In Tamilnadu, there is utsava bhera to be taken out during the procession. In Kerala, titambu functions as utsavabhera.

The wooden planks which conceal the rafters have lent themselves background, for the display of artistic creations, like that of other Namaskara mandapa. There are a number of figures representing naga devatas and other celestial beings.

The Nandi mandapa has a wealth of wood-carvings. It is full of soot and dust and whatever bleak chance of identification is also lost due to smoke emanating from scores of lamps fixed on the railings of the mandapa. There are three ceilings

\(^1\)Narasimhachar, R., Kesava temple at Belur, (Bangalore, 1919), p.20.
which are embellished and so also the beams which support it. Scenes from the Bhagavadgita, Ramayana and Bharata are depicted. The central ceiling has the figures of astadikpalas or the regents of eight directions and Brahma in the centre (Pl.73). The regents and their attributes are:-

1) Kubera, presiding over wealth on the north.
2) Soma or (Isana, Siva) for truth on north-east.
3) Indra for courage and power on east.
4) Agni for sacrifice or ritual on south-east.
5) Yama for justice on south.
6) Nirruti for misery on south-west.
7) Varuna for knowledge on west.
8) Vayu for life and health on north-west.

Such ceilings with the astadikpalas are generally seen in the balikkal mandapas of the temples as observed in the temples of Ettumanur, Vaikom Tiruvillamala and Katinakulangara. The carvings of this mandapa have the same standard of realism and beauty of their counter-parts in this temple complex.

The dancing hall or kuttambalam has a number of wood carvings representing the main avatars of Vishnu, Ganesa, Hanuman and Kirata. Though these figures were carved later than that of the temple complex, the quality is preserved by and large.

2. Kramarisch, and others, op.cit. Pl. LXV.
EROTIC SCULPTURES

A number of wood carvings, portraying sexual expression, form a significant part of the art tradition of this temple complex. Surprisingly enough neither stone nor terracotta are the media, for the sexual motif as the artists chose wood for it.

All the three namaskara mandapas offer sufficient treat to the lovers of art catering to all tastes. After having decorated the mandapas, as explained, the artists made use of the space behind the uttiras. These are carved on all four uttiras of the namaskara mandapa. These figures are hidden from public view, maintaining strict secrecy, in tune with the theme of the carvings. This is one of the peculiarities of this temple, as such carvings are discretely kept in places, which are normally inaccessible to public, unlike the temple of Guruvayur, district Trichur, where the terra-cotta figures, representing sexual union are shown, at a very prominent place in the first tala itself. Probably the Trichur artists wanted to follow the Vijayanagara school, where the maithuna motif is placed in dark corners and unfrequented parts of the temple.1 The erotic motifs, therefore, are relegated to places which are not prominent. In sharp contrast, the orissan artists paid homages to erotic motifs by placing them, in the predominant architectural parts.2 Though all the three

2. Ibid, p. 70.
namaskara mandapas have erotic sculptures, the namaskara-mandapa of Sankaranarayana and Rama have figures which display mild and subdued gestures by the mithunas (pairs). Many of them are shown as indulging in pre-coital preparations. They touch the partner's chin, hand, lip or breasts. But the namaskara-mandapa of Vatakunathan has sculptures from pre-coital scene to actual combat. There are representations of 'purusāyitam', 'cunnilingus', 'fellatio' or orgies of different types. The qualities of smooth modelling and grace of the sculptures of the ceiling found on the other side of the uttira are totally absent in these figures. A conscious and deliberate attempt on the part of the masters to make it grotesque can be seen here. The modelling is sharp, often squat, almost bordering to 'vulgarity'. Some of the specimen are brought into sharp focus of the camera and are explained below:

PANEL 1.

The central figures indulge in the act of 'maithuna' (pl.97). The figures of the extreme left are preparing for the final act, as the male partner has extended his hand towards the chin of female partner. The figures on the right are in exultant mood. Though their gesticulations or postures do not suggest their carnal desires, they form a part of the game, in which the central figures are actively participating. The male partner is lying beneath, while the female partner has more active role in the posture. This is a type of 'purusāyitam' in which the female partner has a more aggressive role than the male partner. Excepting the central figures, all other figures
have a peculiar type of dress covering only the vital part of the body. But all the figures have a unique type of head-dress irrespective of sex.

**PANEL 2.**

A royal pageantry is depicted, with the first four figures (Pl.100). Ebullient and prosperous men accompany the royal personage, shown as carried by attendants. The affluence of the one, who is next to the right of the king, can be seen from upper cloth, folded and held in hand. The attendant, standing left to king, holds an umbrella which is broken. One lady is kept upside down, and her legs are held wide with the help of two men. The men, to her left, indulge in oral congress (cunnilingus). The head-down poses are seen at Belur-kesava temple. This art tradition permeated slowly to the southern tip of India. The significance of the royal procession beside the "athletic feat" in 'sexual sport' cannot be understood nor the relation to it. Quixical still is the pose itself.

**PANEL 3.**

Out of the three pairs, the central pair in nude, dance in ecstasy (Pl.90) infatuated with passion. The other pairs are ready for copulation. The female partner to the right fondles the genitals of the male partner and a pre-coital scene is, thus, made up. The couple on the left makes further advances, as the male partner has lifted his spouse and thus, a purusavita posture is worked up.

1"The motif of attendance and the Sanghatakas is common in sculptures, where the element of ritual is indicated by male parties having umbrellas". See, Dange, S.A., Sexual symbolism from the Vedic ritual, Delhi, (1979), pp.227-228.

2.Desai, Devangana, Erotic sculptures, p.69.
PANEL 4.

A figure plays vina which is held vertically (Pl.99). Beside him is a Brahmin whose yajnopavita is conspicuously seen. He may be a vocalist as can be seen from his posture. A third figure is shown playing a stringed instrument, a prototype of old yazh. The fourth figure exposes her posterior. The profuse hair gives the clue. The central figures, three, are engaged in an orgy. The male partner is sitting while a lady is made to lie horizontally allowing the male partner to perform cunnilingus. The lady stretches her hand further and caresses the genitals of a third figure. The next three figures indulge in a frenzied dance.

PANEL 5.

The first two figures are indulging in a frenzied dance to the tune of instrument (a lute) played by a third figure. The fourth one has a fan which is not an indigenous one. Probably the one that European ladies used to hold. Two pairs are shown in the act of copulation. The female partner sits on the male and, thus, gives the posture of puruśāvitam. The other pair is in exotic posture. The female partner stands head-down while her partner holds her legs apart and performs cunnilingus. Besides them another lady is shown in head-down posture(Pl.101).

PANEL 6.

The first four figures are enjoying the fun (Pl.102)

2.Dange, S.A., op.cit., p.229, "It indicates the Indra-Indrani motif of the Rig Vedic times, also taken as dualism in the yogic concept, which probably lies at the back of the 'fellatio-cunnilingus motif' when transferred to the sphere of sex.
A lady is lying on the lap of her male partner giving the posture of purusāyita, while the figures to her right, caresses her left foot. The lady stretches her hand and fondles the vagina of another lady (fourth figure) who exposes her pudenda. The next pair is engaged in the sexual act in the sitting posture, cross-legged. The next pair is shown, as in the preliminary stage of the sitting posture. Beside them, the next figures present a different situation. One lady is sandwiched in between two men, who are eager to have her. One to her left pulls her right arm while the other to her right holds his organ for insertion. Another lady holds the latter's arm with her right hand, while her left shows her breasts to him.

PANEL 7.

A chain of orgies are carved (Pl.103). The function of the first pair has to create excitement only. The male partner fondles the breast of his beloved, who in turn holds a lady, who stands by. The third lady holds a man, who exposes his genitals in act of fellatio, shown by another man who is made upside down with the help of another lady who holds his right leg with her left hand, while she fondles with the genitals of the man, who is standing upside down. As he indulges in fellatio, he does caressing the vagina of this lady.

The art form representing sexual motifs raises the question as to how and why had it found a place in the precincts of a temple. Some of the explanations offered are worth consideration.
1. That the mithuna motif\textsuperscript{1} is a device adopted for warding off the evil eye.
2. To emphasise that the euphemeral nature of sexual pleasure in contrast to the everlasting god-head.\textsuperscript{2}
3. To attract the voluptuous to the temple and then divert them to god.\textsuperscript{3}
4. To warn the snare and pitfall that the devotees have to face.\textsuperscript{4}

Another explanation offered is by a scholar who had surveyed all the erotic sculptures in northern India. She concludes "the rationale of the erotic motif consists in their function as 'alankāra'.\textsuperscript{5} The word alankāra is not used to denote mere embellishment but in its paradigmatic sense. Alankara, to appear in the temple, needs religious as well as social sanction and, therefore, a peep into the art tradition which had set the trend towards erotic form is necessary.

In the performing art of Kooti-yattam, there is a convention to discuss the four purusarthas. They are asana, rajasēva, vinōdam and vañchana. The third one refers to sex. The description of the limbs of the heroine in the sambhōga sringāra mood, is a special delectable item, in the Kathakali dance.

\textsuperscript{2}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{3}Pillai, K.K., \textit{Suchindra temple}, p.341.
\textsuperscript{4}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{5}Desai, Devangana, \textit{Erotic sculptures}, p.203.
The literary tradition is rich in the production of belletristic literature which throws light on the attitude and nature of the society. The upper class had enough leisure for its pleasurable pursuits. Prolific was the production on different Kutaci (devadasi) in Kerala that the very number of eighty-one\(^1\) gives a shock to the puritans. This speaks of the permissiveness of the society. Candrotsava or the festival of moon, a work of the fifteenth century has a discussion among some leading courtesans in which\(^2\) "Vatsyayana is quoted by them as authority to prove the correctness of the thesis expounded". Even religious works do vie with each other in this regard. Tenkailanāthōdayam\(^3\), the work which refers to the origin of this temple complex, has description of srinārāṣa almost bordering to the depiction of erotism. The murals of Mattanchery palace supports the view of glorifying sex: "All the panels here (the ladies chamber) like Siva\(^4\) dallying with Mohini, Krishna with gopis and other paintings breathe an air of freedom, charged with an under current of sensuousness in spite of the fact that the themes, are mythological. It may be said that "when sexual intercourse got the status of sacred ritual, the artist, the product of the age, was bound to carve them. His age demanded it, his society approved of it, his


\(^{3}\) Tenkailanāthōdayam, (Malayalam), Sloka 35; and, 'Naravaniyam' Dasaka, 66, Slokas 6 to 10.

\(^{4}\) Sarkar, H., Monuments of Kerala, p.70.
religion sanctioned it, he was equipped for it by his age old artistic tradition".\textsuperscript{1} To conclude, we may say that the artists, whether in literary medium or in plastic arts, had the same fervour in dealing with religious ideas or eroticism and, therefore, distinguished themselves in either case with no commitments to anybody and if at all, if they were, committed to art and to art only.

In the absence of inscriptions of the period 'in which the carvings were executed, fixing the date of execution, has to be from circumstantial evidence. The temple complex was converted into a garrison by Tipu in 1789-90.\textsuperscript{2} The vandalism of the iconoclast has already been referred to. Hence the wood carvings which are easily breakable and perishable could not have escaped the eyes of the 'fidel' Sultan. It may, therefore, be argued that after the advent of Tipu, whatever remained must have been lost, either partly or completely. During the reign of Saktan Tampuran (1790-1805 A.D.)\textsuperscript{3} the temple complex was renovated as the King had usurped the management from the traditional Yogatiripad.\textsuperscript{4} It is on record about the renovation of Tiruvancakulam and Tiruvillamala\textsuperscript{5} temples by the King. Since there was general progress

\textsuperscript{1}Vidya Prakash, \textit{Khajuraho, a study}, (Bombay, 1967), p.187.
\textsuperscript{2}Menon, Sreedhara, \textit{A survey of Kerala history}, (Kottayam,1970) p.294, and see Chapter I.
\textsuperscript{3}Menon, Sreedhara, \textit{A survey of Kerala history}, \textit{op.cit.},p.294. and see chapter I.
\textsuperscript{4}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{5}Pisharoti, K.R.R., \textit{Annual report on archaeological researches. Cochin State}, p.21.
and prosperity, during his regime, this temple had its share of cultural efflorescence in the art of painting and wood carvings. One can find affinity in the wood carvings of Trichur, Tiruvillamala and Venganallur in the conception, design and execution. All these art forms might have been directed, inspected and patronised by the same benefactor. The benefactor is, of course, none other than Saktan Tampuran. The carvings, therefore, have to be placed only after 1790 and not before.

Last but not least important is the preservation of wooden images. There are idols made of wood in many of the Bhagavati temples in Kerala. The idol of the Bhagavati temple Kodungallur, district Trichur, is a classical example. During our survey, we came across such idols in the following temples too! Putukkulangara temple, Alatur, Parakkati temple, Kavasseri, Pookulangara temple, Kunisseri, Nellikulangara temple, Nemmara, and Vimbalati Pallassena, all Bhagavati temples, in the district of Palghat. At Putukkulangara, Alatur, the Saptamatrikas are also of wood. Since wood cannot be subjected to abhiseka constantly, a device adopted in these temples is that a Sivalinga of granite is kept in front of the idol, and all the ablutions are on it. The wooden image is simply dressed and ornamented. Every year, the idol is treated with a concoction of indigenous chemical substances. The process is known as chântattam. It preserves the paint, prevents weathering and helps maintain durability and freshness. The ingredients are guarded as professional secrets among the professional artists viz. Kurups.
At Kodungallur, there is another idol, to the right of the wooden image, known as Mūla-Vigraha. The chantattam treatment commences every year from the first of mēsham (when the sun enters the zodiac of Aries) and continues for a fortnight. During the period, the Mūla-vigraha is worshipped beside the Siva Linga. Worshipping wooden image is a Pallava tradition. "The object of worship inside the cella (mūlabhēra) was a painted and decorated wooden or stucco relief which was not to be bathed".  