

# ŚĀKTA CULT OF TANTRA TRADITION OF KERALA: SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ŚEṢASAMUCCAYA AND MĀTRṢADBHĀVA

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**Abstract:** Kerala has a rich tradition on Tantric culture and especially in temple worship. There are many texts that have been produced in Kerala on temple worship, among them *Śākta* Tantra texts are comparatively very less in number. *Śākta* cult of Kerala is more famous in the worship of Rurujit and its temples. There are sixteen Rurujit temples in Kerala. The temples have a different way of worship and the architecture of those temples is also different from orthodox Kerala temples. The traditional art forms such as *teyyam*, *tira*, *pāna*, *kalamezhuttupāṭṭu*, *muṭṭiyēṭṭu* and many more are contributed to Kerala to cultivate the cultural heritage. Those traditional art forms have their own *Śākta* worship and they use the *Bhadrakālī totṭam* (song) for their traditional art form. Among the literature on *Śākta* worship of Kerala, *Śeṣasamuccaya* and *Mātrṣadbhāva* hold prominent positions. As per the name indicates *Śeṣasamuccaya* is a compilation of different texts. *Mātrṣadbhāva* is purely dedicated to the worship of *Bhadrakālī* along with *Sapta-mātrṣ*. The present study is focusing to give a general outline of *Śākta* worship of Kerala and it also discusses how the two texts, *Śeṣasamuccaya* and *Mātrṣadbhāva* contributed to *Śākta* cult of Kerala. The present scenario on Kerala *Śākta* worship is also included in this study.

**Keywords:** *Śeṣasamuccaya*, *Mātrṣadbhāva*, *Śākta*, *Bhadrakālī*, *Tantra*

## Introduction

Kerala has rich tradition on Tantra especially on temple worship and also the household worship of traditional deities. The study on the temple worship of Kerala reveals that this tradition was prevalent since many centuries before and as per the literary evidences; the available first Tantra manual of Kerala was produced in 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. So it is clear that the temple worship was must be in Kerala before 12<sup>th</sup> century. The Tantric tradition of Kerala mainly focuses the temple worship and most of the literature produced in Kerala on Tantra are discussed the temple rituals and its concomitant subjects. Tantric tradition of Kerala is not following pure way of Tantric rules; it is a mixture of different traditions such as *Śaiva*, *Vaiṣṇava*, *Śākta*, *Vaidika*, *Paurāṇika*, *Gāṇapatya* and *Saura*. The inspirations of these traditions can be seen in Tantra manuals and also in the rituals. The literature on Kerala Tantra is very vast and many texts on temple worship have been produced in Kerala. There are many texts still remaining in the form of manuscript and they are waiting to come in the light of academic research. The rituals of Kerala Tantric tradition is mostly influenced by *Saiddhāntika* and *Pāñcarātra* traditions, the ritual elements of these traditions are highly adapted to Kerala Tantra. The rituals such as *aṅkurārpaṇavidhi*, *balī* offering, *upacāras*, *ātmanyāsa*, expiation rituals are some of them which are deeply adapted from *Saiddhāntika* and *Pāñcarātra* traditions. The literatures on Kerala Tantra are based on these two streams.

Tantra Literature of Kerala can be generally divided as two, *Pre-Tantrasamuccaya* texts and *Post-Tantrasamuccaya* texts. *Tantrasamuccaya* by Cennās Nārāyaṇan Nampūtirippāṭu, is an epitome work on Kerala Tantra, especially on temple worship. The text discusses the rituals pertaining to different deities such as Viṣṇu, Śiva, Śaṅkaranārāyaṇa, Durgā, Subrahmaṇya, Gaṇapati and Śāsta. The text begins with the description on the architecture of a temple and discuss the whole rituals such as installation of a deity, daily worship details, *utsava* rituals, expiations rituals, *jīrṇodhāra* (renovation) rituals and so on. There are many texts have been produced before and after of *Tantrasamuccaya* and still this text (*Tantrasamuccaya*) considered as the main ritual manual of Kerala. The reason for the wide acceptance is, after the emergence of *Tantrasamuccaya*, it produced a prodigious change in Kerala Tantra rituals and also in the literature style of Tantra manuals of Kerala and it also made easiness to understand for the practitioners of Kerala Tantra as well as the scholars those are interested in Tantric tradition of Kerala.

## Śākta Cult of Kerala

As earlier said Tantra tradition of Kerala is a mixture of different traditions, among them the *Śākta* cult having adorned an important position. *Śākta* tradition of Kerala is not only in temple worship, it also having performed in the traditional households. The castes like *Nāir* and *Tiyya* families having worshiped *Bhadrakālī* in their houses. *Śākta* cult in Kerala mainly discusses the *Bhadrakālī* worship. There are many names for *Kālī* in Kerala such as *karīnkālī*, *Kaṅṭhekālī*, *Bhadrakālī* and many more. The *Maccilamma* concept of *Kālī* in *Nāir* families and *Kurumba* of *Tiyya* families are worth to note here. The traditional martial art form of Kerala known as '*kalari*' is famous for their devotion to the Goddess *Kālī*. Almost all the castes including the royal families also having worshipped *Bhadrakālī* and the royal families have their own special shrine dedicated to Goddess *Bhadrakālī*. Even in the beginning verse of the *Kathakali* (traditional art form of Kerala) is venerated the Goddess *Śrīporakkaliśvarī* (considered as *Bhadrakālī*). As Chelanat Achyuta Menon observes that, there is hardly a Hindu

community or a village in Malabar that does not worship Kālī in one form or other, or own a shrine dedicated to the Mother Goddess<sup>1</sup>. As per the literary evidences Śākta worship was practiced in Kerala well before 14<sup>th</sup> century A.D and still it is continuing without breaking<sup>2</sup>. Śākta cult of Kerala not only in the ritual side, it also influenced in the arts from such as *teyyam*, *tira*, *pāna*, *kalamezhuttupāṭṭu*, *muṭiyēṭṭu* and so on. Those rituals art forms are highly deep rooted in Kerala and those enrich the cultural tradition of Kerala. These traditional art forms are performing the story of Bhadrakālī and demon Dārika. The story of the battle between Bhadrakālī and Dārika is portrayed in these art forms. All these art forms have a possessed person for performing the art and he enacted the story by some rituals and dance. They use the *toṭṭam pāṭṭu*<sup>3</sup> for the ritual art and the story is portrayed in *Bhadrakālīmāhātmya* or *Bhadrotpatti* text. The story itself portrays the origin of Māṭṛs and Bhadrakālī<sup>4</sup>.

### Concept of Kālī in Kerala region and Worship of Goddess Rurujit

Kerala has different concepts for Bhadrakālī. In India the Goddess in *Devīmāhātmya*, who killed demons Sumbha and Nisumbha is famous, but in Kerala the Goddess is primarily narrated as who killed demon Dārika. The text *Bhadrakālīmāhātmya* or *Bhadrotpatti* is discussed the story of Goddess Bhadrakālī and demon Dārika and their battle. This form of Bhadrakālī is most famous in Kerala. Apart from this, the concepts such as Maccilamma (Goddess in the garret), Kuṭṭikalute amma (mother of children), Vasūrimāla (Goddess of severe illness), Porkkalattilamma (Goddess in the battle field) and Śmaśānakālī (Goddess in cemetery) are some of them have been worshiped in Kerala. There is one interesting form of Kālī in Tamil Nadu that *Korravai* is known as Goddess of victory and she was worshiped by Kings and soldiers who belongs to *Marava* caste. The two prominent forms of Bhadrakālī in Kerala are Dārukajit and Rurujit, means the first one is who killed demon Dāruka and the second one is who killed demon Ruru. Both forms have temples in Kerala and still they are worshipping as their powerful forms.

There are so many temples belongs to Bhadrakālī in Kerala and most of them are very powerful centers. Among those temples, Rurujit temples hold prominent position, because of the peculiarity of rituals and unique architecture of those temples. There are sixteen Rurujit temples in Kerala and most of them are in Malabar area. The temples are known in vernacular Malayalam as *Kāvu*. The word *Kāvu* means, “which protects”. Most of the temples of Rurujit (Bhadrakālī) situate in forest areas or on the top the hill, which is also a reason for those temples known as *Kāvūs*<sup>5</sup>. The most famous Rurujit temples are Kodungallur Bhadrakālī temple, Tirumandhamkunnu temple, Mamanikkunnu temple, Pisharikkavu temple, Muthootkavu temple, Madayikkavu temple and Kalarivathukkal temple. All these sixteen temples were under the custodianship of different regional Kings (*Nāṭuvāzhikal*) and they worshiped the deity to win battle or to protect their place from the enemies<sup>6</sup>. The priests of these temples are also different compared to other orthodox Kerala temples. The priests of these temples are from three castes, *piḍāra*, *mūssad*, and *aṭikal*, they known as *Śākteya* Brahmins. They are not orthodox Kerala Brahmins, they believed that they came from the north side of India. Their worship is also different, they offer liquor and meat to the deity and their style of worship is also different from *Nampūtiris*<sup>7</sup>.

The architecture of these Rurujit temples is different from other traditional Kerala temples. The principal deity of these temples is Goddess Rurujit/Bhadrakālī. Sapta-māṭṛs, Vīrabhadra and Gaṇapati are also installed as main deity. Apart from these, Śiva, Kṣetrapāla, Khaḍga and Nāndaka are also installed. Sapta-māṭṛs are Brahmāṇī, Māheśvarī, Kaumārī, Vaiṣṇavī, Vārāhī, Indrāṇī and Cāmuṇḍī. There are three types of installation process of the deities, *sāṅga*, *niraṅga* and *bhinna*. *Sāṅga* means Kālī and Sapta-māṭṛs are installed in the same sanctum and Śiva and Kṣetrapāla are installed separately. *Niraṅga* means Kālī alone is installed and last one *bhinna* denotes Kālī, Sapta-māṭṛs, Śiva and Kṣetrapāla are installed separately and all have separate sanctum too<sup>8</sup>. The name Rurujit mentions only in *Śeṣasamuccaya* text, there is no other printed text, which discuss the rituals of Goddess Rurujit.

### Śeṣasamuccaya

*Śeṣasamuccaya* is a Tantric manual of Kerala, which discuss the rituals of different deities such as Sūrya, Vaiśravaṇa, Kṛṣṇa, Sarasvatī, Brahma, Pārvatī, Lakṣmī, Jyeṣṭhābhagavatī, Bhadrakālī, Rurujit, Śiva, Kṣetrapāla and Sapta-māṭṛs in ten chapters. The author of this text is Cennās Śāṅkaran Nampūtirippāṭu and it believes that the text was produced in between 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. The text is available with the auto-commentary by the author called *Vimarśiṇī*. The chapters seven to ten in *Śeṣasamuccaya* discuss the rituals of

<sup>1</sup> Achyutamenon, Chelanat, *Kālī worship in Kerala*, p.v

<sup>2</sup> The text *Māṭṛsadbhāva*, which is a Śākta rituals text produced in Kerala on or before 14<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

<sup>3</sup> *toṭṭam pāṭṭu* means a song, which narrates the story of Bhadrakālī and demon Dārika.

<sup>4</sup> These traditional art forms are cultivated the culture of Kerala and also enriched the traditional Bhadrakālī worship.

<sup>5</sup> The word *Kāvu* is very usage in vernacular Malayalam language, which denotes the worship centers of certain deities such as Bhadrakālī, Ayyappa and Nāga devatas. The *Kāvūs* are dense with trees and they protect the nature. There is a usage in Malayalam that ‘*Kāvu iṅṅiyāl kuḷam vaṭṭum*’ means if the *Kāvūs* are destroyed, the pond will evaporated’ means when we cut of the trees of the *Kāvūs*, that will lead the shortage of water. So the *Kāvūs* should protect for the future.

<sup>6</sup> P.I, Ajithan., *Conflicting Cults of Worship of Rurujit within the Brahmanical Traditions of Kerala: A comparative Analysis*, p.3, All these temples are not isolated from each other, but interrelated. There are mythological accounts associated with each temple that bind them together. They enjoyed patronage of regional kings (*nāḍuvāzhikal*) to a great extent, and they in turn stood for the protection and empowerment of kings. The mode of Śākta worship performed in these temples is believed to be of empowering nature and the Goddess Kālī is said to be pleased with all offerings in abundance before the kings set out for the battle. So, in essence, these temples were not intended for public, but to empower the kings or for the protection of regional kingdom.

<sup>7</sup> *Nampūtiris* are known to be the orthodox Kerala Brahmins. They do not offer liquor or meat in temples. They do Kerala style of worship the deity and they mostly follow *Tantrasamuccaya* text.

<sup>8</sup> *uttasābhīmukhaṃ sāṅgam niraṅgam prāṇmukhaṃ bhavet.*

*paścimābhīmukhaṃ bhinnamiti tradhā nigadyate. Māṭṛsadbhāva* ch.IX, means if the Kālī faces of North it is *sāṅga*, if the Kālī faces to East is *niraṅga* and Kālī faces to West id *bhinna*.

Goddess Rurujit. The rituals such as installation, daily puja, *utsava* of Goddess Rurujit are described in three chapters. The auto-commentary by the author says that the rituals part of Goddess Rurujit was taken from *Māṭṛsadbhāva*.

### *Māṭṛsadbhāva*

*Māṭṛsadbhāva* is an unpublished ritual manual of Kerala discussing the ritual of Goddess Bhadrakālī along with Sapta-māṭṛs, Śiva and Kṣetrapāla. The author of the text is still not identified and the text might have produced in between 12<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. The text has twenty-eight chapters and more than 2500 verses. The topics of the text are *ācāryalakṣaṇa*, *bhūparigraha*, *prāsādalakṣaṇa*, *bimbalakṣaṇa*, *dīkṣā*, *bijāṅkurārpaṇa*, *jalādhivāsa*, *adhivāsa*, *pratiṣṭhā* (installation), *ātmanyāsa*, *pañcākṣaravidhāna*, *bhasmasnāna*, *nityapūjā*, mythological story of Goddess Rurujit, *diśāhoma*, *snapanavidhi*, *utsava*, *bali*, *grāmaavidhi*, *prāyaścitta* (expiation), *tīrthasnāna*, *mudrālakṣaṇa* and *jīrṇodhāra* rituals. There is no such detailed study available on this text, but some scholars like Dr. S.A.S. Sarma, Dr. Ajithan P.I and Dr. Maciej Karasinski wrote articles on *Māṭṛsadbhāva* and Śākta worship of Kerala. Also Dr. Alexis Sanderson, Dr. Shaman Hatley and Dr. N.P. Unni mentioned *Māṭṛsadbhāva* in their articles. This text known as the first Śākta text from Kerala and it might be the only text, which discusses the whole rituals of Goddess Rurujit in detail. But here in *Māṭṛsadbhāva*, the author does not mention the name Rurujit in the text.

The text *Māṭṛsadbhāva* is many times referred to *Brahmayāmala*. There are five different versions of *Brahmayāmala* have been discovered<sup>9</sup> and among them *Brahmayāmalatantra/Picumata* is more famous and which discusses the rituals and practices of Yogini worship. Some chapters of this *Brahmayāmalatantra* have published by Shaman Hatley and Csaba Kiss. But the author of *Māṭṛsadbhāva* is referred to *Brahmayāmala* is not mentioned earlier; it is *Brahmayāmala* from South India. There are two versions of *Brahmayāmala* have been founded from South India, which are remains in a single manuscript; one is in French Institute of Pondicherry and another one is in Trivandrum manuscript library. Both are incomplete and the one from Pondicherry has fifty-one chapters and second one from Trivandrum ends in fifth chapter. Both these *Brahmayāmalas* discuss the ritual of Bhadrakālī along with Sapta-māṭṛs. As Sanderson observes “ The *Brahmayāmala* materials derived from this source whose context is the South-Indian tradition of temple based *Yāmala* worship have also reached us without a commentary. However, we do have the *Māṭṛsadbhāva*, an explanatory work of professed human authorship that sets out to provide a summary accounts of the rituals of this tradition as found in various *Yāmala* texts, collating their teachings, which, we are told, are not complete in any one of these sources, to present a comprehensive, ordered account of the cult of the mothers. When compared to the scriptural texts of this tradition the *Māṭṛsadbhāva* differs primarily not only its lucid and generally correct Sanskrit but also in its extensive expurgation of most of the strongly *Kāpālika* elements of this tradition while in spite of this recalling the traditions roots in *Atimārga* III by, for example, describing the officiant as one who has mastered in *Somasiddhānta*”<sup>10</sup>. Here in South-Indian *Brahmayāmalas*, say that the authority to do the worship of Bhadrakālī is only by the person who are *pāraśava*<sup>11</sup>. *Brahmayāmala* also discusses the animal sacrifice for pleasing the Goddess Bhadrakālī. But *Māṭṛsadbhāva* is not mentioned about *pāraśava* and animal sacrifice. The author of *Māṭṛsadbhāva* adapted the rituals from *Brahmayāmala* and he transplanted it into the style of Kerala Tantra. He excluded the rituals like animal sacrifice and the description of *pāraśava*.

*Māṭṛsadbhāva* is an explanatory work, which discusses the special rituals such as *dīkṣā*, *grāmaavidhi*, mythological explanation of Goddess Rurujit, *ātmanyāsa* and so on. Here the mythological explanation of Goddess is worthy to note, the reason that no other text on Tantra literature of Kerala discuss the mythological explanation of any deity. Here in the story, the demon Rurutva who attacked *devas* and *devas* went to see Māheśvara to tell their sorrows. Then Brahma, Śiva, Subrahmaṇya, Viṣṇu, Yama and Indra created their own feminine *śaktīs* to kill demon Rurutva. The *śaktīs* known as Māṭṛs and their names are Brahmāṇī, Māheśvarī, Kaumārī, Vaiṣṇavī, Vārāhī and Indrāṇī. They went to kill demon Rurutva and demon Rurutva defeated the Māṭṛs. From the anger of Śiva the Goddess Karṇamoṭī was originated and she killed demon Rurutva. This Karṇamoṭī/ Kālī is known as Goddess Rurujit. The text *Devīpurāṇa* and *Varāhapurāṇa* also have the story of Goddess Rurujit and all these three stories have some peculiarities and they differ from each other, but the core element of the story is same. *Dīkṣā* ritual in *Māṭṛsadbhāva* is noteworthy that the ritual is excluded after the emergence of *Tantrasamuccaya*. The detailed description of *dīkṣā* rituals is portrayed in *Māṭṛsadbhāva*.

The architectural and iconographical features in *Māṭṛsadbhāva* are very elegant. The description of the measurements of sanctum, the features needed for the place to build a temple, the decoration style of the sanctum and exact places for the shrine are exquisitely narrated in *Māṭṛsadbhāva*. The iconographical discussion *Māṭṛsadbhāva* is also noteworthy. The measurements of each body part of the *bimba*, features of the materials to be used to make a *bimba*, different materials for *bimba* and the features of every *aṅgas* are portrayed here. Some examples are:

*tatraiśānyāṃ bhavetkūpamāgneyyāntu mahāsanam  
dakṣiṇe tu gurusthānam nairṭe cāyudhālayam.  
vāruṇyāṃ kusumasthānam vāyavyāṃ tāpasālayam  
koṣṭhākārantu kauberyāṃ kṣetrapasyeśagocare  
prāsādasya bahiḥ kuryādḡopuraṃ tatra vittamaḥ*<sup>12</sup>. These verses are discussing the architectural information.

*madhūkaṃ candanañcaiva śrīvrkṣaṇca śamīdrumam  
dvijānāṃ kṣatriyānāṃ tu praśasyante mahīruhāḥ.  
candanam saralaṃ bimbaṃ caṃpakaṃ badarī tathā  
viśāṃ khadirabījākhya śiṃśapāḥ kathitā budhaiḥ.  
śūdre sālāṇca bakulaṃ tindukaṃ varṇato drumāḥ*

<sup>9</sup> Hatley, Shaman, *The Brahmayāmalatantra and Early Cult of Yoginīs* (unpublished Ph.D. thesis), pp.3-5

<sup>10</sup> Sanderson, Alexis., *The Śaiva Literature*, p.50-51

<sup>11</sup> *pāraśava* means the one who born from *Brahmin* father and from the womb of *Śūdra* women.

<sup>12</sup> *Māṭṛsadbhāva*, 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter, 8-10 verses.

*raktacandanavr̥kṣeṇa madhukēnāthavā punaḥ.  
panasenāthavā sarvaṃ varṇānāñca vidhīyate  
tathaiva pratimānāñca varṇānāñca prakalpayet*<sup>13</sup>. These verses are narrating about the trees that can use to make the *bim̐ba*.

The text *Māṭṛsadbhāva* does not focus on the philosophical discussions, but in the chapter of *ātmanyāsavidhi*, there are some glimpses of philosophical thoughts. *Māṭṛsadbhāva* has so much description on flora and fauna. The seventh chapter of *Māṭṛsadbhāva* is discussed on *bījāṅkurārpaṇa*, there the author mentions the nine types of seeds. Not only in that chapter, there are so many places the author mentioned about different types of seeds and different types flowers for rituals. Chapter number four is narrated the iconographical features of the *bim̐ba*, there discusses the different types of trees to make the *bim̐ba*. The text also mentioned various types of wood skins. There are some small description on fauna is also in the text.

### Present Scenario of Śākta worship in temples of Kerala

Nowadays Kerala has only one published primary source available in Kerala for Śākta ritual, that is *Śeṣasamuccaya*. There are some secondary sources on the worship of Bhadrakālī: *Keralīya Kṣetra Tantra Kriyā Paddhati* and *Śeṣasamuccaya Kriyā Paddhati* are two among them. Both these texts Bhadrakālī worship adopted from *Śeṣasamuccaya*. Almost all Bhadrakālī temples of Kerala are following the rituals described in *Śeṣasamuccaya*. Rurujit temples of Kerala have some peculiarities in rituals and their ritual manual is not published yet. They follow pure Śākta worship with liquor and meat. The priest of Rurujit temples will not convey their manual of worship and peculiarities of rituals to anybody, but we can say that the worship of Rurujit in those temples is not as Kerala Tantra tradition. The priest of those temples have been transferred their knowledge through orally to the next generation. But there are some temples of Rurujit, have changed their traditional way of worshipping and now they followed the Kerala style of worship. That changed worship of Goddess Rurujit was taken from *Śeṣasamuccaya*. But there are some limitations for *Śeṣasamuccaya* that the text itself not only for Śākta worship, there are many other deities rituals are included in the text. Only three chapters discuss the ritual of Goddess Rurujit. *Māṭṛsadbhāva* is the only text, which discusses the ritual of Goddess Rurujit in detail. All elements of worship are narrated in *Māṭṛsadbhāva* in twenty-eight chapters. Present scenario in Kerala Śākta worship is that most of the temples are followed the *Śeṣasamuccaya* manual and some Rurujit temples are followed their traditional way of worshipping.

### Conclusion

Kerala has rich tradition on Śākta cult, especially on temple-based worship. There are many temples in Kerala pertaining to the Goddess Bhadrakālī, among them Rurujit temples are most famous. The rituals of those Rurujit temples are different from orthodox Kerala Tantra tradition. Those Rurujit temples follow the pure Śākta worship. The Tantric tradition of Kerala is not mentioned any animal sacrifice or offering of meat and liquor. Presently some Rurujit temples changed their traditional way of worshipping and now they follow *Śeṣasamuccaya*, a orthodox Tantric manual of Kerala. It is essential to preserve the traditional way of worshipping for cultural diversity. *Śeṣasamuccaya* is not a pure text for Rurujit worship. The text has some limitations while discussing on the worship of Rurujit. *Māṭṛsadbhāva* is the only text, which discusses the whole rituals beginning from *ācāryalakṣaṇa* to *jīrṇodhāra*. It is necessary study *Māṭṛsadbhāva* in detail to know more about the brahmanical way of worshipping the Goddess Rurujit.

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<sup>13</sup> *Māṭṛsadbhāva*, 4<sup>th</sup> chapter, 14-17 verses.