

VEDIC MANUSCRIPTS IN KERALA

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Kerala has a wonderful collection of oral poetry including Vedas and other forms of literature as well as different knowledge systems. These passed from generation to generation from mouth to mouth. After several centuries, this oral tradition began to be recorded or written in palm leaf manuscripts and other media. Vedic texts including Samhitās, Brāhmaṇās, Āraṇyakās, Upaniṣads and different Vedāngas also were preserved in Kerala first through oral tradition and later in written traditions like in manuscripts and transcripts.

Among the four Vedas, Ṛk, Yajus and Sāma were taught in Kerala. Many exegetical works related to Vedic tradition like Padapāthās and other preservation techniques of Vedic chanting like **Tāṇṭam**, were also preserved here in manuscript and transcript forms. Many commentaries on different Vedic texts also were written in Kerala in Sanskrit which were very important. The names of great scholars like **Ṣadguruśiṣya, Akkitham Narayanan Namboothiri, Bhavarāta or Bhavatrāta, Payyur Bhaṭṭās and Melputhūr Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa** are famous in these fields. Their works related to Vedic knowledge, both original works and commentaries, are available in manuscript / transcript form as well as in printed form in some cases.

Vedas, the canonical texts of Hinduism are the literary treasures of knowledge. As the name indicates it is the sacred knowledge. These Vedas have influenced Kerala's culture and various knowledge systems very much. We had a very good tradition on Vedic chanting. The Vedic tradition in Kerala is unique and self contained. Kerala is very rich in writing tradition of manuscripts also. Vedic tradition of Kerala has maintained some techniques from very ancient days to keep the memory of the chanting of the Mantrās in different modes according to Svarās.¹ They are available in Malayalam, the local language of the region as well as in

¹ Preservation techniques of the Ṛgveda Chanting of Kerala, Dr.C.M.Neelakandhan, Dr.K.A.Ravindran, Vedic Studies, SSUS, Kalady, p.12

Sanskrit. Most of them are preserved in Oral tradition and recently some of them have been printed in Malayalam script locally. Here, mention about the authors and their works both in manuscripts and some printed, related to Vedic literature is given.

1. Bhavarāta and Matṛdaṭṭa

There is a reference about the two Vedic scholars of Kerala, Bhavarāta and Matṛdaṭṭa in the Avantisundarīkatha of Daṇḍī. “Mitrañca tavaīṣa viśvabrahmarāśeh, kalpasūtraṭīkākārasya sakalavidyanadīpūravāridheḥ, trayastrimśatkratuvibhūtibhāvitakrayatridaśasya śāpānugrahasamarthasya brahmaṣerbhavarātanāmnah putraḥ tatputraṅām tatsamānamedhādhisampadām dvitīyah.....² tantrārthatattvavyākhyānacaturaścaturvedavit sarvajanamātṛbhūtakarūṅāvṛttirmātṛdaṭṭah.....³” From these verses we can assume that, there was a Brahmarṣi named Bhavarāta in Kerala who did thirty three sacrifices and wrote a commentary for the Kalpa aphorisms and his son Mātṛdaṭṭa, a scholar in the four Vedas, and the commentator of the Vedas.

According to Prof. S.Venkata Subrahmanya Iyer⁴ this Bhavarāta is the same Bhavarāta who had commented the Śrauta sūtras of Hiranyakesi and the Grhyasūtras. He opines that this Matṛdaṭṭa is the same Matṛdaṭṭa who wrote the commentary to the Kauṣītakījaiminīya grhyasūtras.

2. Ṣadguruśiṣya and Udaya

The word Ṣadguruśiṣya indicates the studentship of a person who had learned Vedas and Śāstrās from six teachers (gurus) i.e. Ganapati, Siva, Srikrishna, the Sun, Vyasa and Sivayogin’s, who gave him the ambrosia of seven branches of learning. He wrote many commentaries for the Vedas. Vedarthadīpikā commentary for the Sarvānukramani⁵, Sukhapradā commentary for the Aitareyabrahmaṇa,⁶ Mokṣapradā for the Aitareyāraṇyaka⁷ and Abhyudayaprabhā commentary for the Āśvalāyanagrhyasūtra are his important works in Vedic literature.

² मित्रञ्च तवैष विश्वब्रह्मराशेः कल्पसूत्रटीकाकारस्य, सकलविद्यानदीपूरवारिधेः, त्रयत्रिंशत् क्रतुविभूतिभावितक्रयत्रिदशय, शापानुग्रहसमर्थस्य ब्रह्मर्षेः भवरातनाम्नः पुत्रः तत् पुत्राणां तत् समानमेधादिसम्पदां द्वितीयः।

³ Avantisuntarīkathā, TSS 172, page 13, 14.(तन्त्रार्थतत्त्वव्याख्यानचतुरश्वतुर्वेदवित् सर्वजनमातृभूतकरुणावृत्तिर्मातृदत्तः)

⁴ Journal of Oriental Research, Madras, XIX, Page 161,162

⁵ A.A.Macdonel, Oxford University 1981

⁶ TVM Sanskrit Series, 149, 167, 176 and Nag publishers, Delhi 1991 (revised enlarged edition)

⁷ TVM Sanskrit Series Number 221,1968

The famous scholar Udaya, son of Narayana, from the Brahmakkula, near Guruvayūr wrote Sukhadā commentary for the Kauṣītakībrāhmaṇa. It is also known as Sadartha vimarsini. This commentary follows the Kerala version of the Kauṣītakībrāhmaṇa. It is elaborate, clear, lucid and comprehensive. It explains the meaning of each word and sentence and clarifies the ideas by quoting from other vedic texts. It gives the entire picture of the manifold sacrificial procedure with order and clarity. It is edited and published by E. R. Sreekrishna Sarma from Germany.

3. **Akkitham Narayanan Nampūtiri**, a celebrated scholar in Veda and different Śāstras of the 18th century A.D., wrote Dīpaprabhā commentary for the Sarvānukramani of Kātyāyana. It is also known as Nārāyaṇīyam. The manuscripts of Dīpaprabhā commentary are available at Vadakke Matham Brahmasvam, Thrissur.
4. **Padmapādācārya** had written a commentary for the Nirukta named Niruktavārtika.
5. **Taikkāttu Yogyar** wrote a work named Śrauta prāyaścittasamgraha.
6. **Ṛṣiputrapamesvara**, one scholar member of Payyur Bhaṭṭa family has written Jaiminīyasūtrarthasamgraha which is also related to the Vedic literature.
7. **Yogyarute Kārikā**

After the earlier texts on the Śulbasūtras of the Kalpasūtra, a work named Yogyarute Kārikā written by a sage of Taikkāttu family of Śrautins, is got from Kerala. It is a very good contribution of Kerala to the Śulbasūtra literature.

According to Dr. V. Govindan Nampūtiri,⁸ Yogyarute Kārikā give a clear knowledge about the building of citi practiced in Kerala which has many differences from that of Bauddhāyana Śulbasūtras.⁹

8. **Vātsyanārāyaṇa** has written a commentary named Padapradīpika which is edited and published by Dr.N.V.P.Unithiri from Calicut University in 1988. It contains 140 Kārikās and describes the Padapātha of the Taittirīya Saṁhitā of the Krishnayajurveda. Dr.N.V.P. had procured this manuscript from a Namboothiri family of Payyannur in Kerala.
9. **K.N.M.Divakaran Nampūtiri**, great scholar in Veda and Vyakarana, has written a commentary on Śaunakaśikṣā. The book was originally published in Malayalam script

⁸ Research scholar in the field of Śrauta tradition of Kerala

⁹ Śrauta sacrifices of Kerala, Dr.V. Govindan Nampūtiri, Calicut University Sanskrit Series No.13, 2002, Pages 108-116

from Mangalodayam press, Trissur in 1962 which includes apart from the text and Sanskrit commentary, a preface in English by T.K.Ramachandra Iyer, a Prasthāvanā in Sanskrit by the author, an Avatārikā by Perunthanam Narayanan Namboothiri, a colleague of the author and an Āmukha with detailed explanation of the author in Malayalam.¹⁰

10. **Tāṅṭam**¹¹ is a popular work followed in Kerala for the preservation of the Vedas. The word in Malayalam has been derived from the verbal form in Malayalam, ‘Tāṅṭuka’ which means ‘to cross’ or ‘to overcome’ implying the sense that the text helps to cross the ocean of doubts while chanting Ṛgveda mainly the padapāṭha. The text Tāṅṭam has three main divisions. First is Paṭṭarutāṅṭam. The word “Paṭṭar” in Malayalam is used in Kerala for the Tamil Brahmins who have migrated and settled here. The word conveys sometimes the sense related to the Brāhmaṇās other than the Nampūtiris, the local inhabitants of the region. The Paṭṭarutāṅṭam is written by the scholars Nāgadeva and Śeṣanārāyaṇa as is clear from their statements in the text:

Yajnanārāyaṇākhyasya yajvanaḥ priyasūnūnā |

Śamānam sādhu savyākhyam nāgadevena nirmitam ||¹²

Praṇamya garudārūdham harim nīlābhrasannibham |

Śeṣanārāyaṇākhyena lakṣaṇam kriyate mayā ||¹³

Paṭṭarutāṅṭam includes the topics Śamānam, Vilaṅkhyam, Naparam, Taparam, Avarṇi and Āvarṇi. All these are lists of words (padas) of Ṛgveda to determine the Padapāṭha wherever doubts may arise regarding the splitting of Padas while chanting. The work is used in other parts of India also and this is known in Kerala among the Nampūtiri’s as Paṭṭarutāṅṭam as it is written by non Kerala scholars.¹⁴

¹⁰ Preservation techniques of the Ṛgveda Chanting of Kerala, Dr.C.M.Neelakandhan, Dr.K.A.Ravindran, Vedic Studies, SSUS, Kalady, p.12

¹¹ Preservation techniques of the Ṛgveda Chanting of Kerala, Dr.C.M.Neelakandhan, Dr.K.A.Ravindran, Vedic Studies, SSUS, Kalady, p.12

¹² Preservation techniques of the Ṛgveda Chanting of Kerala, Dr.C.M.Neelakandhan, Dr.K.A.Ravindran, Vedic Studies, SSUS, Kalady, p.56

¹³ Preservation techniques of the Ṛgveda Chanting of Kerala, Dr.C.M.Neelakandhan, Dr.K.A.Ravindran, Vedic Studies, SSUS, Kalady, p.62

¹⁴ Preservation techniques of the Ṛgveda Chanting of Kerala, Dr.C.M.Neelakandhan, Dr.K.A.Ravindran, Vedic Studies, SSUS, Kalady, p.13

The other two main divisions of Tāṇṭam are **Malayālatāṇṭam** and **Samhitātāṇṭam**. Malayālatāṇṭam is particularly used in Kerala. In the beginning of the book explaining the Ac-Sandhis, Hal sandhis and Svarasandhis of Ṛgveda giving examples, wherever doubts may occur while chanting, the explanation of Sandhis in the portion is given in Malayalam language. Samhitātāṇṭam is a separate text popular in Kerala among the Nampūtiris used for clearing the doubts of the Padapātha of the Samhita of Ṛgveda. But the authors of these two texts are anonymous.

Great Ṛgveda Paṇḍits who were profound scholars in Vyākaraṇa and other Śāstrās used to write **Tāṇṭams** of their own and add to the original work in that name. Great scholars in Ṛgveda are in Kerala even now who are contributing to this field by their own innovative additions. Many of them are not published, as they remain in transcripts or notebooks with them or in their memory.

11. **Damodaran Namboodirippad**,¹⁵ a Kerala scholar written a text named Vedavikṛtivivaraṇam, is a small work describing the definition of the eight Vikṛtipāṭhas of Ṛgveda chanting, Jaṭā, Mālā, Śikhā, Rekhā, Dhvaja, Daṇḍa, Ratha and Ghana. Among these, only Jaṭā and Ratha are practiced in Kerala. It is in Verses describing the definition of each Vikṛti with a detailed Ṭippaṇī of the author himself for each verse. The work was published by Kunnamparamp Sankaran Namboothiri, a disciple of Damodaran Namboothiri, from Kashi in 1955.
12. **K.P.Krishnan Bhattathirippad**, a great scholar in Veda and Tantra who belonged to the famous family of Tantrins, Kunnathur Padinjaredathu mana, Cherpu, Thrissur, Kerala, had written the works, Trisandhā, Vedapāṭhānadhyaṇasangraha and Sarvānukramaṇīpadyavivaraṇam. These three works are included in the book Śrīkṛṣṇacintāmaṇī which contain some other compositions of the author also, in Sanskrit, related to the topics like Tantra and Prāyaścitta. Trisandhā is a long term ritual performance, extending upto eight months when conducted continuously, practiced in Kerala for memorising the chanting of Ṛgveda. The full time involvement of twenty or more scholars are needed for this. At least five scholars at a time have to chant the Veda without break from morning to evening. This is conducted in the

¹⁵ Preservation techniques of the Ṛgveda Chanting of Kerala, Dr.C.M.Neelakandhan, Dr.K.A.Ravindran, Vedic Studies, SSUS, Kalady, p.16

traditional working days.¹⁶ In Trisandhā, Samhitā, Pada and Kramapaṭhas are chanted with Svāra. Vedapāṭhānadhyaṅgraha is a small work explaining the holidays for vedic learning. According to the tradition, the Anadhyaṅgrahas for vedic learning are calculated based on Lunar calendar, not usual Saturdays and Sundays. Sarvānukramaṅīpadyavivaraṅam¹⁷ is a work describing the contents of Sarvānukramaṅī of Katyayana in 487 verses.

13. **Kothamangalam Vasudevan Nampūtiri**,¹⁸ one of the Ṛgveda scholars of Kerala, had written the work in Sanskrit named Nānābheda prakāśini recently. As the name indicates it describes the letter Na as like in Na and Na in the word Nānā, is pronounced in two ways both in ordinary usage and in Vedic chanting. The small treatise explains the examples of the different pronunciation of Na in the chanting of Ṛgveda with the rules that are followed for the difference.
14. **Dr.K.V.Vasudevan**¹⁹ has recently written a work in Sanskrit in verse form called Bahvṛcahastalakṣṇadīpikā. It contains sixty three verses in Anuṣṭubh metre describing the thirty Hastamudras used in Kerala for the chanting of Ṛgveda which is a unique feature of Kerala Ṛgvedic chanting.
15. **Suktasloka of Melputhur Nārāyaṇabhaṭṭa**²⁰ and its commentary by **Dr.K Vishnu Namboothiri**, Asso. Prof. in Vyākaraṇa of SSUS, R/c, Payyannur. All these works are included in the work 'Preservation techniques of the Ṛgveda chanting of Kerala' mentioned earlier.

Like for Ṛgveda, there are similar texts written in Kerala for Yajurveda and Sāmaveda also for the use of preserving the chanting techniques. Saptalakṣaṅam is such a text famous in Kerala related to Yajurveda. Many such texts related to the Samhitās of the three Vedas, Brāhmaṅās and Vedāṅgās and commentaries, yet remain unknown and undetected in the private collections in Kerala. It is our duty to do intensive search for them and to bring out them as good editions and publications for the use of the researchers in the field of Vedic Studies.

¹⁶ Preservation techniques of the Ṛgveda Chanting of Kerala, Dr.C.M.Neelakandhan, Dr.K.A.Ravindran, Vedic Studies, SSUS, Kalady, p.18

¹⁷ Preservation techniques of the Ṛgveda Chanting of Kerala, Dr.C.M.Neelakandhan, Dr.K.A.Ravindran, Vedic Studies, SSUS, Kalady, p.18

¹⁸ Preservation techniques of the Ṛgveda Chanting of Kerala, Dr.C.M.Neelakandhan, Dr.K.A.Ravindran, Vedic Studies, SSUS, Kalady, p.20

¹⁹ Preservation techniques of the Ṛgveda Chanting of Kerala, Dr.C.M.Neelakandhan, Dr.K.A.Ravindran, Vedic Studies, SSUS, Kalady, p.16

²⁰ Preservation techniques of the Ṛgveda Chanting of Kerala, Dr.C.M.Neelakandhan, Dr.K.A.Ravindran, Vedic Studies, SSUS, Kalady, p.16