Revisiting Tantrasamuccaya: A Fundamental Text for Kerala Tantra.

Arjun KV

Department of Sanskrit, University of Kerala

Abstract

Tantrasamuccaya of *Chennas* Narayanan Namboothiri is Kerala's most influential and widely practised ritual manual. It primarily deals with temple-related rituals, from constructing a new temple to installing and expiatory traditions. It is written in the Malayalam language. The author was considered to be an authority in the fields of mathematics and tantra. *Tantrasamuchaya* is still considered the authentic reference manual in temple architecture and rituals.

The temple in *Śaiva* theology is conceived as a powerful, sacred space where various divine energies are invoked and worshipped for the benefit of all creation. Temple construction was a perfect collaboration between the *Ācārya* and the Sthapati, using the canonical texts of the *śaivāgama*-s and *śilpa śāstra* manuals. The rich temple-building culture of Hinduism seems to have been carried to foreign shores, at least in part with traders, merchants and emperors.

Tantra is very close to actual practice. Things done come first, and interpretations come later. No *Tantrika* would expect to be able to move straight from ordinary life to the most exalted stages of internal symbolism by mere thought. Some people will say The Tantra represents a thoroughgoing, practical system for manipulating and focusing human libido, enhancing it and then withdrawing it entirely from the passing and valueness phenomena of the word and directing it instead to a transcendent object.

According to *Tantra*, creation is sexual self-realisation through the activity of the goddess. *Tantra* is esoteric, and much of it is always kept secret. In all Indian ceremonies, *pooja* is the root activity. In *Tantric Pooja*, the most crucial point is that the symbolism of the whole ceremony is taken over and applied by the *pujari* to himself through an intense meditation on the significance of each act as he performs it. Innumerable works of Tantra contain references to basic pooja. The vessels and implements by the *Tantric pujaris* are often worshipped as *devatha* emblematic of the activities of the transmuted self.

Introduction

The temple in *Śaiva* theology is conceived as a powerful, sacred space where various divine energies are invoked and worshipped for the benefit of all creation. Temple construction was a perfect collaboration between the *Ācārya* and the Sthapati, using the canonical texts of the *śaivāgama*-s and *śilpa śāstra* manuals. The rich temple-building culture of Hinduism seems to have been carried to foreign shores, at least in part with traders, merchants and emperors.

Tantra is very close to actual practice. Things done come first, and interpretations come later. No *Tantrika* would expect to be able to move straight from ordinary life to the most exalted stages of internal symbolism by mere thought. Some people will say The Tantra represents a thoroughgoing, practical system for manipulating and focusing human libido, enhancing it and then withdrawing it entirely from the passing and valueness phenomena of the word and directing it instead to a transcendent object.

A temple evokes in the visitor a sense of beauty in art and life as well. It lifts his spirit and elevates him to a higher plane. At the same time, it awakens him to his significance in the Creator's grand design. It is a structure established on a site that was well chosen and considered most proper after examining and verifying its suitability from various aspects. Elaborate rules are laid out in the *āgamas* about *śilpa*, describing the quality requirements of the places where temples are to be built, the kind of images to be installed, the materials from which they are to be made, their dimensions, proportions, air circulation; lighting in the temple complex etc. The *Mānasāra* and *Mayamatam* are some of the works dealing with these rules. They are the standard texts on śilpa *śāstra* and codify the theoretical aspects of all types of constructions, specifically temple construction. *Mānasāra* is a comprehensive treaty on architecture and iconography. The universality of the *Vāstu* tradition is represented here. It is also considered as the sourcebook for consulting any doubts and queries.

According to *Tantra*, creation is sexual self-realisation through the activity of the goddess. *Tantra* is esoteric, and much of it is always kept secret. In all Indian ceremonies, *pooja* is the root activity. In *Tantric Pooja*, the most crucial point is that the symbolism of the whole ceremony is taken over and applied by the *pujari* to himself through an intense meditation on the significance of each act as he performs it. Innumerable works of Tantra contain references to basic pooja. The vessels and implements by the *Tantric pujaris* are often worshipped as *devatha* emblematic of the activities of the transmuted self.

Mayamatam is a work on the dwelling, and as such, it deals with all the facets of gods' and men's dwellings, from the choice of the site to the iconography of the temple walls. Numerous descriptions of villages, towns, temples, houses, mansions and palaces are given precisely. It indicates the proper orientation, the correct dimensions and the appropriate materials.

The six main styles of temple architecture are *Nāgaram, Drāvidam*, *Vesaram, Sārvadeshikam*, *Kālingam,* and *Varātham*.

The *Ernakulathappan* Tantric system follows strict Tantric rules. Only after the *Dehasudhi* (body cleaning based on Tantra) can the chief priest enter the Sanctum. He must do the body cleaning based on Tantra before entering the sanctum. The *Dehasudhi* is one of the critical actions in the daily activities of a temple priest. Without *Dehasudhi*, he can't start his daily temple activities. The chief did *Dehasudhi* with the help of a filled silver pot. Firstly, he wished lord Ganapati. After that, he starts *Dehasudhi* at the Mandapam. Deva's daily offering rights are reserved only for the chief priest.

Tantra Practice

Nirmalyam, or Yesterday's offering, is one of the parts of the morning offering. It is known as Nirmalya Darshana. At the time of the remains, the priest offers *Dhoopa* and Camphor. After the clearing of remains,

Deva's bath. It is known as Abhiseka. There are six types of *Dravyas* (items) used for Abhiseka. Oil, Ghee, Honey, *Pancamrutha*, Milk and Tender coconut. This order is very crucial for Lord *Ernakulathappa*.

After the Oil bath, the bushel is applied to the *linga*. Oil clear with the help of bushel. After that, Ghee is applied to the *linga*. Then, the ghee clears with the help of a bushel. It is very notable in Kerala. Only one temple uses the bushel daily, Abhiseka, because the bushel is used only on special occasions. Once Abhiseka did, then the priest gave Prasada to the devotees. This right is also reserved to the Chief Priest. One of the peculiar features of this temple is the Dhara offered in every pooja. In the early morning, the Dhara begins. Firstly, the Malar offering, with Kadali banana and honey, provides the Malar Nivedya. After the Malar offering, remove all *alamkaras*, and after that, Dhara. Usually, there is no Dhara in the Usha Pooja. But here, the matter is different. When *Etrutu* offers an extraordinary event, 1001 pot Abhisheka will happen after Nivedya *Seeveli* happens. On regular days, only Deva's decorated replica is used. Deva's decorated replica will be used with an elephant on special days. This is known as *Seeveli*. The replica is situated on the left side of the Deva. Two replicas are there. One is silver, and the other one is *Panchaloha*. With replicas there, Salagrama and Meru are also there. The moos are the positioner of *Seeveli*; otherwise, he is the replica placer at the time of *Seeveli*. The Moos can enter the *Garbagruha*; he can't step over the *Garbhagruha*. At *Garbhagruha*, the chief priest gave Prasada to the Moos. After *Seeveli*, the *Pandeeradi* offering begins.

Pandeeradi is one of the essential poojas in this temple. After the usual pooja, the Dhara begins. Then Milk abhisheka and tender coconut abhisheka. After the *Pandeeradi* offering, he only left the Afternoon offering, otherwise known as Ucha pooja. After the Ucha Dhara, the daytime Dhara will wind up. In the evening, there is no Dhara. After that, the priest decorates the Deva very well. After the decoration, Nivedya. At the end of Nivedya, the chief priest does a duty known as *Vaisyam Thooval*. Then Prasanna Pooja. After the Prasanna pooja, the *Seeveli* will happen. This *Seeveli* is known as the Ucha *Seeveli*. After this, *Seeveli*, the sanctum will be closed. Here is the end of the day time pooja.

In the evening, the prominent Pooja is known as *Deeparadhana*. It is also known as Arati. *Deeparadhana*, lighting lamps, or *diyas*, is essential to any puja or Hindu ritual. The importance of *deeparadhana* is mentioned in many ancient scriptures and has existed since the Stone Age. *Deeparadhana* will use special silver plates. After that, the night offering. Before *Nivedya*, the *Prasanna pooja* will occur at the time of Prasanna pooja, tender coconut with *Unni Appam*, Milk and *Trimadhura*. After that, *Atazha Seeveli* or Night *Seeveli* will happen. Then *Trippuka*. With the help of a *Dhoopa* plate, *Dhoopa* offers to the lord. In typical cases, after *Trippuka*, the sanctum will close. No *Darshana* will be allowed. But here, After the *Tripuka*, the chief priest will give Tripuka prasada, and after the Darshana, the sanctum will close. After the Pandeeradi pooja, the Rudrabhisheka. In Tantric texts, a very prominent space is given to the Rudra.

Shree-Kovil

The inner sanctum sanctorum is where the presiding deity's idol is installed and worshipped. It shall be an independent structure, detached from other buildings with no connections and having its roof shared with none. The *Shree-Kovil* has no windows and only one large door opening mainly towards the east (sometimes it happens towards the west, whereas a few temples have a north-facing door as its speciality, while no temples will have a south-facing door). The *Shree-kovil* may be built in different plan shapes –

square, rectangular, circular, or apsidal. Of these, the fair plan shows an even distribution throughout Kerala. The square shape is the form of the Vedic fire altar and strongly suggests the Vedic mooring. It is categorised as the Nagara style of the temple in the architectural texts. The circular plan and the apsidal plan are rare in other parts of India and unknown even in the civil architecture of Kerala. Still, they constitute a significant group of temples. The circular plan shows a greater preponderance in the southern part of Kerala, in regions once under the influence of Buddhism.

Usually, the *Shree-Kovil* is on a raised platform and has a three or 5-step flight. The steps are called *Sopanapadi*, and on the sides of the *Sopanapadi*, two giant statues known as *Dwarapalakas* (door guards) are carved to guard the deity. As per Kerala rituals style, only the prominent priest (*Thantri*) and second priest (*Melshanti*) are allowed to enter *Sri Kovil*.

Namaskara-Mandapam
Namaskara mandapas are square pavilions with a raised platform with pillars and a pyramid-like roof. The mandapa size depends on how wide the shrine cell is. The simplest mandapas have four pillars at the corners, but bigger ones have two sets - four inside and 12 outside. The texts mention pavilions of round, elliptical or polygonal designs, but these aren't found in temples in Kerala. The mandapas are used for Vedic and Tantric rituals.

Ascent
The ascent was done with the help of a *Kodimaram*. The *Kodimaram* or *Dwajasthambam* plays a very crucial role in the rise. The annual festival of the temple began with the auspicious *Kodieyttu* ceremony. Tantri had performed puja to the golden holy temple mast, keeping the ceremonial flag at its base. The ceremonial flag hoisting (*Kodiyettu*) was held in the auspicious muhurta.

The shrine is traditionally decorated with plantain, coconut leaves, flowers, traditional lamps and lights. There will be a flag-hoisting ceremony marking the beginning of the festival. Traditional performing arts, music and dance are staged during the period. Caparisoned elephants, *melam*, fireworks and *sheevali* are part of the festival. There will be A lot of cultural events and religious discourses. On the final day, *Arattu*(holy bath) takes place; the utsava murti of the deity is taken out of the shrine for ritual bathing on the last day. Caparisoned elephants and *melam* are part of the ritual. Fireworks may also be there on the final day of the festival.

In all the temples, we have a pillar in front of the *Garbhagraham* or *Moolasthanam*, known as *Dwajasthambam* or *Kodimaram*. In Sanskrit, the word *Dwaja* means 'Flag' that raises high. In the religious sense, whatever presents a man with a higher understanding and activity is a *Dwaja*. A *Dhvaja sthambham*, *kodi maram*, or *kodi-k-kambam* is a flagstaff, a common feature of South Indian Hindu temples. Two other objects grouped with this flagstaff are the Bali *Peetam* and the vehicle of the deity to which the temple is dedicated. The *dhvajastambha* (ध्वजस्तम्भ) refers to the flagstaff erected in front of the *mukhamaṇḍapa* (front pavilion) of a Hindu temple. The *dhvajastambha* is usually built within the temple walls (*prākāra*). They are traditionally made of wood, mainly teak and stone, whereas the wooden variety is often finished with a metal covering (*kavaca*). The *dhvajastambha* is a common feature in South Indian temples.

Ritual Bath

The Eighth day of the festival is *Arattu*. It is the last day. *Arattu* is the previous function of the eight-day festival. On the *Arattu* day morning, *Nirmalya* at the *Mandapa*. After *Nirmalya*, the replica was set up in the sanctum. The daily poojas go on, and after the *Ethruthu Sheeveli*, the shrine will close. Here is the wind-up of the morning session.

Arattu will happen in the evening session of the festival's last day. In the morning session, only up to the *Ethruthu* pooja is done. The ritual bath is done in the temple pond. In the *Arattu* pond, the *Pandeeradi* pooja will happen. After all the ritual bath pooja, the replica returned to the sanctum. Then the *Ucha pooja* will happen. After the Ucha pooja 25 Kalasa Abhisheka. Once *Kalasa Abhisheka* is done, then the *Ucha sheeveli* happens. *Ārāttu* is an annual ritual performed during temple tantra festivals in Kerala, India, where a priest bathes a deity's idol by dipping it in a river or a temple tank. It is mainly carried out at the end of a temple festival.

After all the festival pooja, the *Athazha* pooja and *Athazha Sheeveli* will happen. Then the last function of the daily offering is *Thruppuka*. After that, a special occasion at the Mandapam, *Pallikkuruppu*. *Pallikkuruppu* is a birthday celebration of the deity. It happens in the *Thiruvathira Nakshatra*.

Conclusion

Tantra is a broad term encompassing various spiritual doctrines and practices within Hinduism prevalent in India, Nepal, and other South Asian countries. In recent times, *Tantra* has spread beyond these regions, and its numerous traditions, collectively known as *Tantric* traditions, can be found in various parts of the world.

Tantra is frequently linked to the worship of the Devi or Shakti, the divine feminine. Because of this, the name "Tantra" is commonly used to refer to the Shaakta or Shaakteya tradition. In essence, Tantric practices guide all the many forms of Shakti worship.

Another widely held viewpoint on Tantra is seen via the prism of the three keywords, Mantra, Yantra, and Tantra, and the ideas they stand for. Tantra here refers to the actual performance of a process, including outward gestures like hand and body movements, as well as gifts like flowers, oil lamps, and scents. The recitation of enigmatic syllabic sequences known as Mantras and the use of two-dimensional mystical designs called Yantras and their three-dimensional counterparts are all part of this discipline. They are also linked with interior techniques like profound meditation.

It is important to note that Kashmir Shaivism is the name given to the theological foundation of the Shaakta or Shaakteya tradition. The name Shaivism is taken from Shiva in this context. Kashmir Shaivism, which has come to be associated with Tantra, is based on the fundamental ideas of Shiva and Shakti. As a result, both Shaiva and Shaakteya are regarded as the most common traditions of Tantra.

Tantra can be classified into two styles of practice: **Vaama** (left) and **Dakshina** (right). **Vaama**, or the left-hand method, typically involves 'transgressive' and 'violent' practices, while **Dakshina**, or the right-

hand procedure, typically involves 'legitimate' and 'non-violent' methods. The right-hand rule is *Samaya aachaara*, the 'practice of accepted convention'.

Tantra also demonstrates regional differences, such as the "Eastern" tradition that is more common in Bengal and Odisha, the "Kerala Tantra" tradition that is more common in non-Kerala South Indian states, and the "Sri Vidya" tradition. Tantra is greatly influenced by numerous traditions in Eastern India, including the "Baul" and "Sahajiya Vaishnava" traditions.

Tantra is used throughout this work to refer to a number of interconnected but essentially dissimilar religions, including Saiva, Vaishnava, Sakta, etc. Tantrism is a term Western philosophers use to describe a unique tradition that is either parallel to or utterly unrelated to the Vedic tradition. Tantrism was not previously thought of as a separate tradition. The early scholars highlighted a cult of exoteric and esoteric rituals as particularly important. However, research indicates that tantra is not fundamentally anti-Vedic because tantric rites have many similarities with Vedic rituals in terms of organisation.

To get oriented to the subject-centred discourse, it is necessary to provide a tentative working definition of tantra at the outset. Of the modern writers on tantrism, Christopher Wallis's meaning of tantra appears to be much closer to reality. Moreover, it is all-inclusive. He defines tantra as 'An Indian Interreligious movement driven by a ritual practice presupposing initiation, oral instruction from a guru, and micro-meso-macrocosmic correlations and utilising mantras, creative meditations, and sometimes sensual or antinomian means to access and experientially assimilate the divine energy of the Godhead, to achieve power, pleasure, and liberation.'

References

1. Isanagurudevapaddhati, Isanagurudeva, ed. T Ganapatisastri, Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan, 1990.
2. Kriyadipika, ed. Uliyattillathu Raman, Panchangam books, 1175(Mal.).
3. Kriyakramadyotika, Aghorasivachrya, ed. Ramasastri, Chidambaram, 1927.
4. Kiranatantra, critical edition and annotated translation, Dominic Goodall, Indological department publications, 1998.
5. Tantrasamucchaya, Narayanan Namboothiri, ed. T Ganapatisastri, Nag Publishers, 1990.
6. Tantrasamgraha, ed. With commentary, Madras Governmental Oriental Series, Oriental Manuscript Library, 1950.
7. Tevaram, ed. Gopal Iyer, T V Publications, 1985.
8. Prayogamanjari, Ravi, ed. Raman Nambiar and K. Achyutapothuval, Tripunithara Sanskrit College, 1953.
9. Brahmin Settlements in Kerala; Historical studies, Kesavan Veluthat, Sandhya Publications, 1978.
10. Tantra Literature of Kerala, N P Unni, New Bharatiya book Cooperation, 2006.
11. Kerala Samskruta Sahitya Charitram, Rajarajavarma, SSUS Kalady, Revised edition,1997.
12. https://www.indianetzone.com/52/tantric_texts_bengal.htm Bengal Tantric Studies.
13. https://indica.in/call-for-papers-thirtha-yatra-conference-on-tantra-and-tantric-traditions/Indian Tantric Traditions.