

 <p>ISSN NO. 2320-5407</p>	<p>Journal Homepage: -<a href="http://www.journalijar.com">www.journalijar.com</a></p> <p><b>INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR)</b></p> <p>Article DOI:10.21474/IJAR01/8882 DOI URL: <a href="http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/8882">http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/8882</a></p>	 <p>INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR) ISSN 2320-5407 Journal Homepage: <a href="http://www.journalijar.com">http://www.journalijar.com</a> Journal DOI:10.21474/IJAR01</p>
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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### THE FESTIVALS AND ADMINISTRATION OF VAIKOM TEMPLE – A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE.

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#### Manuscript Info

#### Abstract

##### Manuscript History

Received: 11 February 2019

Final Accepted: 13 March 2019

Published: April 2019

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#### Introduction:-

The southernmost part of the west of Malabar coast of the peninsular India is known as Kerala. It has been known by different names at different time such as Parasurama Kshetram, Malabar and Keralam. Traditionally Kerala extended from Kokarnum in the north to Capecomerin in the South. But now it stretches from Kasarcode in the north to Parasala in the south. It is bounded on the north by the State of Karnataka, on the south and east by the State of Tamil Nadu on the west by the Arabian sea. Annnamore, Wyndad, Kozhikode, Malappuram, Palghat, Trichur, Ernakulam, Idukki, Kottayam, Alleppy, Quilon and Trivandrum are the district in this state.

Kerala is not only a thickly populated state in the India subcontinent but also known for its forests, hills, forest and valleys. It is known for teak wood and rubber plantations. As elephants are available in plenty it is popular for ivory works. The Hindus, Christians and Muslims are the three major religious groups and among them the Hindus form a definite majority of about 60%. The Hindu community in Kerala is divided into a number of distinct section known as Caste. Their ritual status centre on economic prosperity, educational qualification and religious pursuits. The orthodox and conservative Hindus strictly observe the ancestral norms of conduct and religious and religious observances. The deviation from the already established system is looked upon with suspicion and superstitious dread. Anyhow it should be borne in mind that the society of Kerala is known for devotionism and religious practices. Much stress is assigned by them to religion and religious oriented activities. Religion is the outcome of man's faith and belief over God and other supernatural powers. At the same time they express their divinely and belief over God through the conduct of many rituals and celebrating festivals. To co-ordinate all the religious services and to have a concentrated centre of worship number of temples came up. They in due course led to install specific images for executing their services to God in an effective way.

That in turn led to the introduction of temples and under various rulers and the temple architecture also got promoted and developed. Under such a pretext it will be apt to have an analysis of a renowned and popular Siva temple at Vaikom in Kerala. Both Saivism and Vaishnavism are popular in Kerala. Guruvayur is a significant Vaishnava centre. The Mahadeva temple otherwise known as the Vaikkathappan temple of vaikom is a popular Siva temple, situated about 40 kms from Kottayam it deserves an analysis due to its individualistic rituals and festivals. Further the festivals associated with this temple are also quite absorbing and appealing to all including the devotees. Since it is believed that Parasurama, the founder of Kerala himself was the cause for the creation of this temple it became more important among the Keralites. Though the architectural style belongs to Kerala of the 16<sup>th</sup> century it is believed that this temple emerged during the 11<sup>th</sup> century with minimum requirements. So it widens the scope in having a historical estimate of the temple. As this is also a popular one among the 108 Siva temples of India that too

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warrants a detailed study. As the primary deity is believed to be Lord Caterer he is treated as chief among the deities available at Ettumanur and Kaduthurthy. In addition to the above this temple has its own legendary significances and they are expressed at times of festivals. The Katha Kali dance performed and arranged during the evenings in this temple too prompts the devotion of the temple in preserving the cultural traits of Kerala. It is also unique to note the existence of a school called Kshetrakalapeedam in the premises of the Mahadeva temple. This temple is treated as a “flawless art piece in the atmosphere”. It satisfies all the requirements of an agama temple. All such things encouraged the dissertations to venture into the study of the Mahadeva temple at Vaikom. This temple is also known for its distinctive ritualistic features which are alike and some of them vary in an individualistic form. Anyhow they are all carried out with all earnestness. The Prathal or Annadhanam provided in this temple, the aarattu, the vilakku festival etc, celebrated in this temple are quite absorbing and captivating. This temple’s activities are executed by the Tantris and priests with all unions and co – operation. In general this temple stands for unity integration and united action among the people. All the above things assist the scholar to have a detailed study of the Mahadeva temple of vaikom which has not been hitherto taken up for research in a historical perspective.

In Hinduism the festivals, celebrated at a particular time in a temple are also significant. They expose the social unity and solidarity among the people and they reflect the inner mind, ideas as well as the attitude of the devotees. They are arranged every year at a particular time on the basis of the planetary positions and asterisms. On the basis of the luni – solar calendar the auspicious days are fixed on the basis of the movement of the stars. Both the saivites and vaishnavites fix the days from new moon to full moon as auspicious days. The asterisms Thiruvathirai or Arudra is significant to Siva, the asterism thiruvonam is closely linked with thirumal who is Vishnu. Visakam and Karthika are connected with subrahmanya. Thus every hindu god is connected with some asterism or other. Since festivals play an important role in the religious life of hindus it becomes a must to have analysis of the festivals relating to the mahadeva temple of vaikom.

#### **Vaikkathashtami**

Like the important festivals of different places such as Arudha Dharisam in Chidambaram, the karthigai deepam of Thiruvannamalai in Tamilnadu at vaikom in kerala Vaikkathashtami is a most popular festival. It is celebrated to remember the benevolence and getting the grace of vaikkathappan, the lord siva of vaikom. During that festival siva offers a dharsan to his devotees with his consort parvathi, the jegad janani. In the earlier days it was the festival associated with lord siva and his devotee maharishi vyagrapada. It is celebrated on a Krishna paksha ashtami day in the month of vrichikom. It is an interesting festival which exhibits the cordial relationships between man and god. It also enriches the value of the deity.

#### **Weighing of commodities**

This is a specific ritualistic function observed in the vaikkathappan before the commencement of the annual festival. The particular officer in charge of weighing appointed by the devasvam board weighs all the commodities and hand over them the karyakkaran, who is in – charge of the stores of the temple. At an apt and appropriate auspicious time of a significant day, the two auspicious objects called turmeric and sandalwood weighted. This ritual ceremony, when it goes without problem, is taken as a pioneer of the successful completion of the festival without any disturbance. This specific weighting is called Kopputhookkal.

#### **Sandhya vela**

Sandhya vela is an important tradition oriented custom which precedes the announcement of the festival to the public by flag hoisting. It is an offering by the Devasvom rules. The devotees of lord vaikkathappan offer a special tribute to this. On that day the sribeli will be taken on a procession on an elephant. Recitation of Vedas is a significant aspect of it. Pratal is also arranged on that day. Special abhishekas and rituals are also conducted to the primary deity. Lighting vilakku also forms a part and parcel of the ritual. Muka sandhya vela, pully sandhya vela, perumabadappu sandhya vela and samooha sandhya vela are the important of this temple. Once these gained greater veneration but now all of them are not made available. Many of them have disappeared and few are executed for namesake. They are not all significant.

#### **Ashtami Festival**

As it falls on the 12<sup>th</sup> day of Ashtami this festival is arranged in a grand manner. This festival commences with flag hoisting in the mahadeva temple of vaikom during the morning hour. This is also done in a unique way. The thread for this pomp and proud flag hoisting ceremony is provided by the fishermen of unlassery family. This right was endowed with them by the ruler for having helped himself and his parivar to cross the lake at the time of emergency.

A ceremonial invitation is extended by a moosed riding on an elephant. The vaikkathappan and the rulers are ritually invite. The first three day features are celebrated by the local people. The Nair service society participate in the first two day activities and the third day services are executed by the sri narayanaguru dharma paripalana sangam after the sribeli ritual conducted both in the morning and night special pooja called sreebhoothapali is arranged . On the fifth, sixth, eighth and eleventh days a utsavapali is arranged instead of sreebhoothapali. All the deities inside the temple are worshipped by offering haves rice to them . This is also a rare festival arranged in this temple.

### **The subsidiary deities and Ashtami Festival**

Many subsidiary or subordinate or secondary deities are available in this renowned mahadevar temple. As they are secondary to the primary deity they are called so . There are many parivara devatas are also available in this age old temple. They were all installed by many rulers during various periods to attain personal benefits for them. In addition to the above small shrines are also available. They are administered either by the devasvam board private individuals or people's organization. The udayanapuram temple, moothedathukkavu bhagavathy, Thirumani venkitapuram, Sri Rama temple, Tekkaum cherinel , indamthuruthi bhagavathy temple, perumpallai kavu devi temple and cherama kunnumpuram Krishna temple are the temples dedicated to other gods.

Udayanapurathappan is the primary deity of the temple at udayanapuram. This temple dedicated to subramanya alias murugan is located just 2 km away from vaikom. As murugan is treated as the son of lord siva the primary deity of the mahadevar temple of vaikom, there is link between these two temples. According to legends two temples were built simultaneously. One was built at kumaranalloor and the other one at Udayanapuram. Both of them are dedicated to lord subramanya and karthiyayini . Kumaran but lord subramanya. Devi karthiyayini went and settled at kumaranallaru which was actually intended for subramanya.

### **Bhatta Dana**

This special rite was prevalent during the period of the different rulers. The local land lords were involved in it. It is actually associated with the grant by the ruler . This bhatta dana ceremony was executed on the Malayalam month of midhuna on an aaswathi day. An eminent scholar of great scholarship will be selected after testing his knowledge of sastras, Vedas etc he will be called a bhattor . So this ceremony is called bhattor kana as it is equal to that a divine celebration because of the adjudgement was made on the basis of Vedas and sastras, it is considered as a religious ceremony. It is worth to note that to get religious approval for political activities things were executed on the basis of religion.

### **Margazhy kalasa**

This margazhy kalasa is associated with a legend of parasurama . This was a ceremony associated with the birthday of the ruler of Travancore. It is particularly arranged in the month of margazhy . To adjust with the birth asterism of the ruler this ceremony was undertaken . Brama kalasas, a river pot and a big copper vessel are filled with water. 101 abishekas are arranged on each day for 10 days . On completion it would have completed 1010 kalasas of abisheka. The entire proceedings are called margazhy abisheka. On the 11<sup>th</sup> day rudra pooja is arranged. In the day next on the 12<sup>th</sup> day udayasthamana pooja is conducted in the udayanapuram temple along with margazhy kalasa. This tradition is still in vogue both in the vaikkathappan and udayanapurathappan temples . Thus it is a traditional celebration. It should be remembered that the birth day of the ruler had its own sanctity.

### **Kumbhashtami**

The Krishna paksha ashtami of the kumbhamasa of the Malayalam era. Though it is not so significant as the vaikkathashtami it is not unimportant. This festival is celebrated only day on the day of ashtami in the vaikom in procession. Then the two deities vaikkathappan and udayanapurathappan are taken to vazhamana and kullathussery and they are rested for the conduct of special rituals. The sankalpa of the procession is that the visit of the father and son to their fields will grace them. So they welcome the procession with all zeal and enthusiasm and see them retire the function with veneration. During this celebration measures full of paddy, lighted lamps and incenses are used in plenty. When they return to their original shrines the usual formalities are adhered as done in other asthamas.

### **The Thekkumpurathu Pattu**

Like the Vadakkupurathupattu, the Thekkupurathu pattu is also observed in the vaikom temple every twelve years. But it lost its significance and fervour when vadakkamkore was annexed by Travancore. Now it is only in history and due to the enmity among the two states this has ceased this practice was dropped.

Sri Vaikkathappan Cirappu is a celebration conducted by the devotees and public of vaikom. Since it was connected with the vadakkupurathuppattu it was called as Sri Rajeswara cirappu during the olden days. Today during the cirappu special poojas and rituals are arranged mainly for the maintenance of the well being and prosperity of the people. During the cirappu dance and music concerts are all arranged. Artists of various fields expose their talents to the public.

Thus the vaikkathappan temple is a renowned one due to its various festivals arranged throughout the years. They are having both legendary and belief oriented backgrounds. They also stand testimony to the native cultural pursuits. Almost all the them are executed with all piety and reverence. The festivals, which are celebrated in a customary way are also bringing unity and solidarity among people.

### **The Administration**

Every temples value and significance now depends upon its administration. As temple is a public place and as it functions for the welfare and well being of the common people it should have a sound and solid administration. In this regard it is a must to have an idea about the administration of the temple at vaikom.

In this temple to look after the rituals and festivals there is one Mel santhi. He is in-charge of all the religious observances pertaining to the temple. He is assisted by four Kil Santhis . To maintain the income and expenditure of the temple there is an accountant and he is assisted by another member. Two Brahmins are functioning as thirappavarathi as Thirkoil pravarthi . There are five Kazhakams to produce instrumental music. Five members serve as Sambandhis. Four strong room guards are also available. Five watchmen are doing their work in rotation. Two members are there to clean the vessels plates. Four sweepers are appointed to keep the temple premises neat and clean. All these members are administered by one administrative officer. Thus the vaikkathappan temple is a well administrated by one. As it is a temple which comes under the purview of the Travancore devasvam board the administration has obtained significance. The administrators play a vital role in the execution of the defectives in a specific way.

### **Conclusion:-**

Vaikom Mahadevar temple a siva temple, is a renowned temple in Kerala. It attracts devotees from different parts of the Indian sub – continent due to its traditional and ritualistic practices and also because of faith and belief over vaikkathappan. Vaikom the renowned saivite centre also known as Tekkan Kasi has become popular due to the temple of that by connecting it with parasurama and vyagrapatha. So the Bhasma or vibhudhi prasada obtained from this temple is treated a holy and sacred one. But it is felt that this temple having the characteristic features of the kerala style of temple architecture had a humble beginning in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Gradually due to the efforts of the different rulers of kerala it met with many expansion and developments. The muha mandapa with pillars. The nandhi mandapa , the madappalli and other things emerged at a later time. Ganapathy cult was also included. The annapooraneswari the Siva thandava aspect of siva, the panels from Ramayana are also made available in this temple. The image of varuna is also installed. The manyasthanam is treated as a sacred one. The namboothiris are associated with this temple largely on various aspects. The three valiya chiras or holy water nods are quid important because it fulfils the water needs and requirements of the temple. The various activities executed in this temple are tradition oriented and customary in nature . Specific set of people are entrusted with specific temple duties. It is also a temple . Since many linkage with the udhayanapuram subramanya temple. The vaikom satyagraha participated by E.V.Ramasamy of Tamilnadu with the approval of Gandhiji also brought fame to the temple . This temple associated with politics, spiritualism and social life, is attracting devoted to get their needs fulfilled. The primary deity of this place is worshipped due to unshakable faith and belief by the devotees.

This mahadeva temple is a pure depiction of the kerala style of architecture . The wooden panels, the murals paintings and sculptures available in this temple are appearing and absorbing. This temple is built on the basis of the agamas. The Garbhagriha, Muhamandapa, Nadhi pavilion, the altar, the flag mast are the significant aspects of the east facing temple . The vyagrapada sthana, the sthampa ganathy, the dravya kalasa, marghazi kalasa are few other salient features of this temple . The six steps which lead to the sanctum sanctorum symbolically represent kama, krodha, lobha, moha and matsarya. The mathrusala, thidappalli, the conduct of prathal or annadhana etc are other unique features associated with the temple . Due to the popularity of the temple many works such as astha prabandam, kuchala vriddham vacnhippattu, asthami, also are written.

This temple is also having its own Tantris and priest. The ritualistic activities of this temple are executed by members of two illams . The Monttu illam and Mekkattu illam members are associated with these activities. The members of the puttussery house are engaged in panikkottu. Even in the cooking for prathal only particular set of people alone are engaged for specific service and that fixes the adoption of the solutions for the community problems.

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