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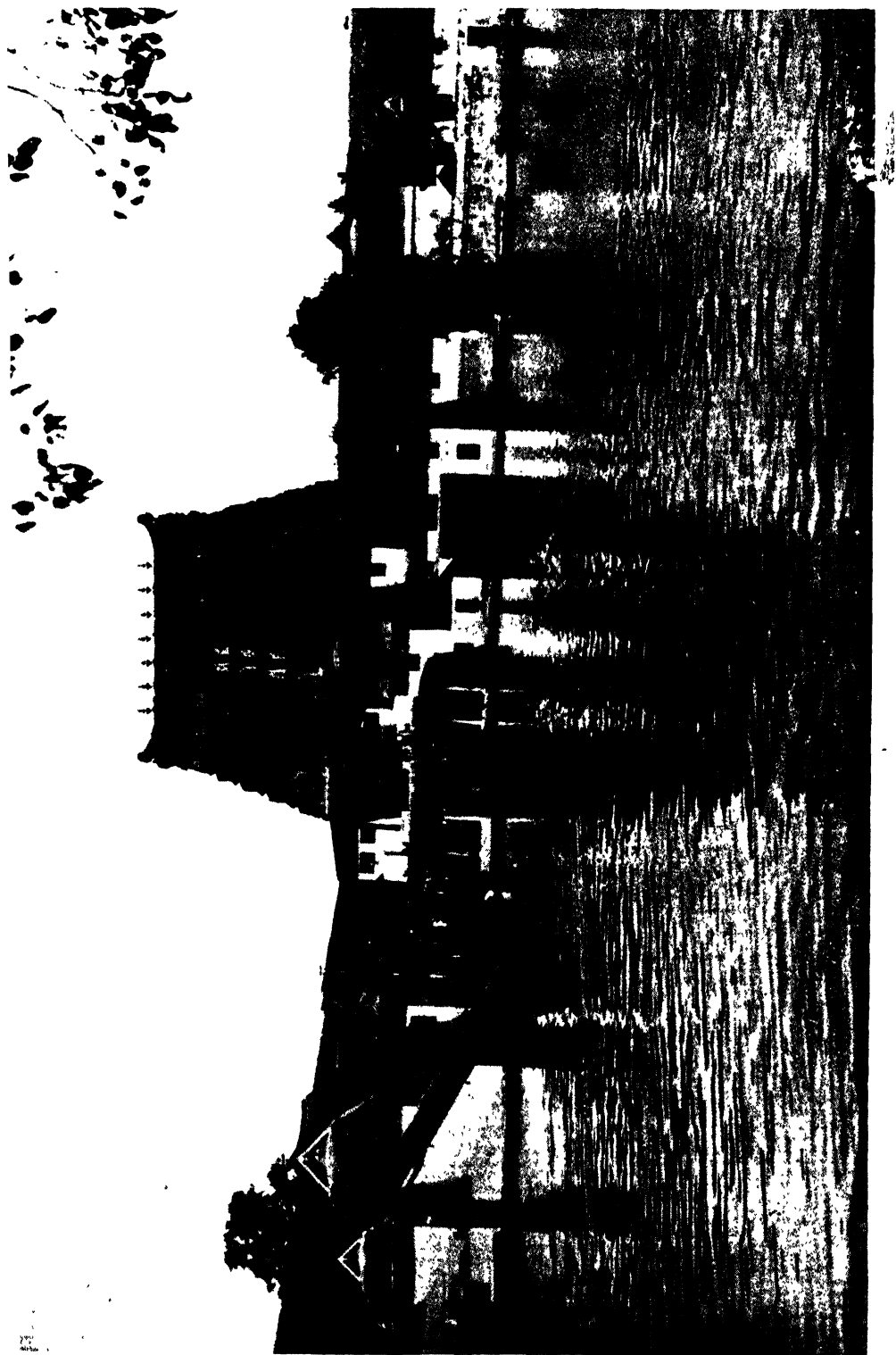
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**THE ARTS AND CRAFTS
OF TRAVANCORE**



THE ARTS AND CRAFTS OF TRAVANCORE

by

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NOTE

The suggestion for this book was made by Dr. Stella Kramrisch in 1937. On its acceptance by the Government of Travancore and the India Society, London, the compilation of the text and the collection of illustrative materials were begun. But the outbreak of the second world war held the work back. Post-war events in India necessitated alterations which caused further delay. To this was added a considerable amount of revision on account of discoveries since the inception of the book that added to and modified the original text.

It is hoped that the volume will now introduce to art-scholarship in India and elsewhere an authoritative account of a phase of oriental culture that has not heretofore been given the study that it would appear to merit. It will also provide a first text-book of indigenous art-appreciation in the coming development of art in education in Travancore and elsewhere in India, and lead the way for studies of other phases of art-activity in the State both at home and abroad.

In the turning of names and terms from Sanskrit, Tamil and Malayalam into Roman type, diacritical marks have not been used, and spelling in English has been brought as near as possible to the pronunciation of the oriental words.

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CHAPTER I

DRAVIDA AND KERALA

By STELLA KRAMRISCH

CHAPTER I

DRAVIDA AND KERALA

No miniature paintings are known from Travancore. Form, in this country, is broad and encompassing. It may comprise the intricate, the adornments of intensity. Monuments on a gigantic scale are also not in Travancore. They have the dignity of their own stature. In this beauteous, bountiful country, between sea and mountains, green in the density of high trees and fertile land, the temples—2,200 are in worship—are part of the scene. They do not exceed it. Throughout the ages, Travancore was a centre of South Indian art, contributing the work of its particular school to that of the other centres, in the Dravida country of the South-east and in the Kanarese Districts of the Deccan.

The temples, sculptures and paintings of the South Indian type now in existence range from the eighth to the eighteenth century. In this millennium, Travancore contributed to the sum total of Dravidian art its own measure, rhythm and physiognomy. These contributions were at home not only in the southernmost part of the country but also in Central and North Travancore where Dravidian form entered but had no school of its own. There, in the country north of Quilon, Kerala art had its home, which extended beyond the confines of Travancore to South Kanara in the north.

DRAVIDA TEMPLES ON A SQUARE PLAN

The Dravida temples built in stone and bricks are preserved from an earlier age than the laterite, brick and timber temples of Kerala. They may have been preceded by brick and timber constructions which have perished. The Dravida temples are represented in several of their varieties, (1) as small shrines, consisting of a cell having a superstructure (the temples of Vizhinjam, Pl. I); stairs led to it and sometimes a porch; or (2) as low, spreading structures (Pl. II) or hall temples, having a pillared interior or (3) as high structures having several storeys

(Pl. III), not in fact, only in appearance, as no interior or accessible space corresponds to the pillared and diminutive storeys of these superstructures.

These varieties of the temple, based on a square plan, are representative of Dravida architecture. The temples in Vizhinjam, of the ninth century, are akin to contemporary Chola shrines in Kaleyapatti, Tiruppur and sites in Pudukkottai. There the walls are built of very large stones, whereas in Vizhinjam the base, the pilasters and pillars in the corners and the porch, as well as the entablature and roll cornice, are of stone; the walls are of brick masonry and also the superstructure. Were there no filling brick walls, the shrine would be an open pavilion supported on pillars. Here however the shrines are closed, conforming with the square Linga shrines of South India. The superstructure, a small shrine in itself, has a square dome shape which, together with its dormer windows and finial-like portion, is solid. The walls of the small, upper temple, or High Temple, have a buttress in the centre, or a projected niche. They are overshadowed by a deep and long roll cornice (it has disappeared in the temple having a porch, and is partly broken on the smaller shrine). This heavy roll cornice, high up, has a lowering effect on the superstructure. It accentuates the breadth of the dome shape. The whole edifice moreover is given further girth, beyond the extent of its walls, by the main roll cornice which tops the cubical sanctuary and also connects it with its porch. Further down, the socle has two widely projected fillets. Their sharp, horizontal bands are interrupted in front by the rolling curves of the stair.

These buildings are set up on a very wide terrace. The intention of the architectural form, raised on a terrace, thence on a socle, and having piled on top of its walls yet another structural shape, is an effect of height which is negated by the repeated horizontals of fillets and roll-cornices, proportionately increasing in vertical sequence in their projection from the part of the building which they encompass. This exaggerated lowering effect of the horizontal mouldings the small shrines of the Dravida country do not show; it would not be part of buildings piled in the vertical direction. This particular proportion is given to the temples in Vizhinjam. Increased girth of structural form by

a protraction of the eaves and special emphasis on the horizontal parts of the architecture, the lowering and broadening of its form, are not peculiar to these small shrines; the other types of Dravida temples in Travancore bear similar accents.

The Guhanathaswami temple at Cape Comorin (Pl. II, 985—1013 A.D.) does not represent a development of the type of temples built in Vizhinjam. It is another kind of temple, larger and more ornate, sharing certain profiles with the small temples, but its plan shows the difference of its original purpose. While the Vizhinjam temples house nothing but a small, cubic space, the Guhanathaswami temple comprises a hall within its interior, and in its centre is the small sanctuary (marked by the mound shape, a modern, preservative measure, in place of what had been a superstructure). Whereas the small cubical temple, having a flat ceiling, if thought of without its superstructure, base and roll cornice, has the appearance of a dolmen raised on a socle,—such Shiva temples are known in South India—the spacious interior of the Guhanathaswami temple and other contemporary temples in South India has other antecedents. Structural halls, used as temples, of which scarcely any survive, are described in a compendium of Indian architecture, the *Samaranganasutradhara* (Ch. XLIX), of the early 11th century. This type of temple must have been widely represented in the Deccan and in South India. The Guhanathaswami temple is akin to hall temples in Pudukkottai, such as the Shiva temple in Mangudi.

Compared with the other temples of its kind, the Guhanathaswami temple has a relatively high socle. This solid sub-structure, however, projects from the wall of the temple with a series of mouldings and dark bands of shadow between them. The wall of the temple (the window openings however, as they are at present, appear to be of later date) is divided into the zone of pillars and the high portion above their capitals. The capitals project boldly and their thin tiers repeat on the wall the effect of the socle, although their band of shadows is lighter and, together with their own shape, non-continuous, forming an architectural rhythm by which the wall is divided

horizontally. To this has to be added that, in comparison with the other temples, the shafts of the pillars are proportionately low. The roll cornice with its carved attic windows and the lion frieze above are the common property of all Dravida temples of this age. The Guhanathaswami temple is built of stones; they are, as also in the other temples of this kind, of large size in proportion to the low wall. Its small height is made yet lower in effect by the horizontal mouldings being given particular emphasis. The Guhanathaswami temple rests within their embrace, closely hugged to the ground on which it is raised.

The third variety of the South Indian temple is represented by the temple of Parthivashekharapuram, a palimpsest, of which the socle goes back to the ninth century (Pl. III). The interior of a temple of this kind is on the ground floor only, a flat ceiling makes invisible from the inside the entire superstructure. Here it has three storeys. These consist on each level of an interior prism of masonry to which is attached a parapet composed of small shrines. They are aligned around the central wall and have several shapes, those at the corners being square in plan, and the one in the centre rectangular. Each has a superstructure of its own, the square corner shrines having square dome shapes similar to those at Vizhinjam. The central chapel, however, has a superstructure whose roof is keel-shaped. This parapet of chapels is a solidified cloister and surrounds a large "central shrine", this is shown not only by the temples of the Pallavas (seventh and eighth centuries) in Mamallapuram and Conjeeveram, but also, at a much later date, by the open pillared building rising from the tank of Suchindram (Pl. V). There the cloister consisting of miniature shrines is set at a considerable distance from the central 'cube' of the walls. On the top floor the High Temple emerges (Pl. III); the cloister of chapels is below its walls; these are surrounded by images of divinities and lions. The shape of the 'dome' of the High Temple, without the enrichments, is also similar to those in Vizhinjam.

Thus the shape of a temple of this kind is that of a stepped pyramid; a central, square "structure" forming its nucleus, is surrounded on each floor by a parapet, originally a cloister of chapels of different shapes, symmetrically aligned. The walls

of the central shrine are topped on each floor by widely projected eaves.

According to the shape of the 'dome' of the High Temple, the Dravida school of architecture classified its temples as Nagara, Dravida, and Vesara; the shapes are square, octagonal and round, respectively.

The Dravida temples built in Travancore, reproduced on Pls. I, III and V, are Nagara temples of the Dravida school, whereas the temple of Bananthitha (Pl. IV), having a circular dome shape, is a Vesara temple of the Dravida school. This principle of classification within the Dravida school was observed by its builders; but its nomenclature has been widely misinterpreted by modern scholars.

While the style of the architectural details of the superstructure of the Parthivashekharapuram temple dates them in the sixteenth century, the proportion of the main mouldings was, it seems, not substantially altered even where their shapes had to undergo readjustments.

The widely projected eaves of the 'trunk' of the temple show, translated and abbreviated in terms of masonry, a construction on their underside which recalls their wooden prototypes. These roof constructions, of the upper floors, differ from the roll cornice above the walls of the ground floor which has the familiar shape (Pl. II) common to all Dravida buildings. The protracted eaves, however, of the upper floors, and especially the "exposure" of their originally wooden frame, are an introduction by the local architect of an indigenous type of building into the consolidated Dravida form. These eaves change the total appearance of the superstructure by bringing into prominence the other horizontal mouldings, heavy as they already are, for the parapet on this temple is also given sloped eaves, one above its own wall, and the other by which it is joined to the wall of the central temple-prism. Below this rooflet—over the interior originally of an inner ambulatory (*pradakshina*), now, however, purely an external moulding of the temple wall—a very strongly projected fillet once more underlines the horizontal effect in which circum-ambient bands of deepest shadow share.

The devices employed by the architects of Travancore which effect a broadening of the structure are consistently introduced in the socle, walls and superstructure of the Dravida temples of various types. In this lies their contribution to the South Indian school in its consolidated shape. The cloister, on the other hand, which originally surrounded the sacred precinct—or temples of various shapes—is an indispensable part of a Kerala temple (Pl. XIV). It is, however, without 'chapels' and represents one of the several kinds of enclosure of a temple. Built of wood, its structural shape has not been taken over by translating it into stone in the Dravida temples of Travancore.

This ancient practice of architectural translation, however, was not forgotten. The craftsmen who had cut the temples in the rocks of Bihar or of the Deccan carved the shapes of the wooden architecture on the facade of their excavations, and made the interior of their temples as vaulted as those of their wooden prototypes. The same practice of literal translation from one structural technique and substance into another was followed by the builders of Travancore when they set up the *navaratri mandapa* (festival hall) in Suchindram, a stone structure, representative of the last phase of Dravida architecture (Pl. IX). Its pillars do not support a flat ceiling as is usual (Pls. VII-VIII) but a coffered one, raised above the beams by a bracket construction which has the shape of a four-sided collar ceiling. Every detail of the original wooden construction (Pls. XXI, XLIX) is correctly carved in stone. No attempt has been made to adjust the forms of ceiling and pillars. Their juxtaposition seemed appropriate to the builders to the same extent as the propinquity of pillars and large scale statues of donors leaning against them. This combination, greatly favoured in Nayaka architecture, is seen (Pl. IX) to be balanced by the curved and drooping pendant of the bracket capital. The form itself of the latter appears to have been evolved in wooden architecture, where it also has been given lavish shape in the eighteenth century in the Padmanabhapuram Palace (Pl. XXV).

It is rare, in the history of Indian art, to witness original practice and its application, the transfer from structural form

to architectural device, by the side of each other. Building and carving in wood were the contribution of the Kerala architects to the art of Travancore; to their Dravida temples the Kerala craftsmen have contributed the living practice of their country, which, it has been shown, has also modified the form itself of Dravida architecture in Travancore.

CIRCULAR DRAVIDA TEMPLES

Of greater significance and beauty than any of the Dravida Prasadas (temples) built on a square plan are the circular shrines (Pls. X-XIII). Vastu-Shastras, the traditional texts on the science of Indian architecture, known from about the sixth century A.D., treat in detail of the circular temples and their various types which were built throughout India from that age to the sixteenth century, when Shri Kumara of Kerala compiled the "Shilparatna". Outside Kerala, however, very few round temples are known to exist, although the walls of the earliest structural temple yet known (at Bairat, Jaipur, Rajputana, of the third-second century B.C.), are circular.

Only the socle now exists of the *Srikoil* (central shrine) in Perumpalutar. It grips the ground with an amply projected lowermost section (Pl. X). Subtly proportioned fillets in the higher part respond to the chamfered rim above the *upana* (lowermost moulding). Flat bands and ring-shaped volumes combined accommodate mellow shades in harmony with the curved lateral stone on either side of the steps.

The Parashurama temple at Tiruvallam (Pl. XI), of the fourteenth century, consists of a circular shrine combined with a rectangular *mandapa*. It has little to commend it except its completeness. Certain features are impeded by others. The structure shows that the rules of proportionate measurements, which the *sthapati* (craftsman) had to master, were not always successfully applied.

Free of defect is the intimate elegance of the temple of Niramankara (Pl. XII). It is raised on a circular paved disc which forms the outer path of circumambulation. The temple is a *sandhara prasada*; it has an inner, covered ambulatory in addition to the one in the open. This lies behind the circular

enclosure wall. Steps lead up to it. The inner wall of this inner ambulatory is square; it is the wall of the *prasada* proper. It is surmounted by an octagonal dome.

The innermost temple, the *Srikoil*, originally was not visible as it is today. In front of it, on each side and forming a circle in the inner ambulatory, are set up two pillars, as high as the dome; as they are seen today they end with a tenon to which originally seems to have been mortised the wooden framework of a roof over the entire building. The shape of the roof would have been conical, as on Pls. XIV and XV. That one building is placed within another, belongs to the Indian tradition of sacred architecture. When complete, the temple of Niramankara must have been similar from the outside to the circular *Srikoil* of the thirteenth century temple in Tirunandikkara which is covered by a conical roof. This type of *Srikoil* is practically unchanged in buildings of the sixteenth century such as the temple in Vaikom (Pl. XV).

The incorporation of a Dravida temple within a Kerala temple, is not the only complex shape of the temple in which the builders of Malabar showed their proficiency. A more productive welcome home was given to the circular *prasada* when it was brought back to type by becoming fused with the indigenous *Srikoil*. The shrine of Valyandayeshwaram of the sixteenth century, is a perfect solution, and its architectural quality rests on those very features by which the temple of Parthivashekarapuram had turned out a failure. The secret of the proper mixture of the Dravida and the Kerala form lies in the proportionate measuring of the building, the architectural shapes going back in both the schools to similar or identical origins.

The wall of the circular temple of Valyandayeshwaram (Pl. XIII) shows the motives of pilasters and niches reduced to a flat minimum. The wall is almost plain; it can be imagined completely covered by mural paintings. A conical roof would fit over its simple shape, the perpendicular walls forming a cylinder. Instead, however, of its crisp angle, a widely projected roll cornice throws its shadow over the walls and protects them. Above it

a circular rim, as if binding the walls, is the highest part built of stone. Extended in height by courses of bricks, it forms the socle of the brick-built superstructure. It rises with three storeys of its own. But for the *kuta* (chapel) at the 'corners', the chapels of the rampart correspond to those on a superstructure having a square section (Pls. III-V); the *kuta*, which is square in plan and placed at the corner, being replaced by an apsidal chapel, fitting into the circular parapet of the superstructure. The widely projected eaves of the second storey of the temple are not a roll cornice as on the first floor. They belong as much to the sloped roof shape of Kerala temples as the rooflets of the temple in Parthivashekharapuram. In Valyandayeshwaram, however, their angle and the width of the moulding are adjusted to the moulding of the rampart and to the vaulted roofs which are ante-fixed to it. So they are all part of the total form of the superstructure, with its outline gradually swinging upwards to the finial. Its shape may be described as a stepped cone in which the storeys forming the steps are silhouetted as curves against the sky, one in feeling with the curvilinear sides of the steps which lead to the innermost sanctuary.

Amongst the temples built by the Dravida school of architecture from the tenth to the sixteenth century, the circular sanctuaries are of the greatest interest. Although the Vastu-Shastras give considerable space to circular temples, it falls far short of that given to the temples built on a square plan. Throughout India, extant circular temples are few, although the most ancient of all, the one in Bairat, was a circular temple. The circular temples, forming a group within the Dravida temples, are not only represented by a relatively large number in Travancore, but show also varieties in plan and elevation. Excepting the temple of Tiruvallam, each of the circular temples has a perfection of its own; intimately delicate as in Niramankara or ponderous and majestic in Valyandayeshwaram. Buildings like these are the work of local genius, allied in their stylistic traits to contemporary temples in the Dravida country, but not copied from these august monuments. Although the sequence of styles is all there, it but little affects the essential quality of these temples. The stylistic conventions are accepted

and employed at their proper place. They do not carry with them any compulsion; the degree to which they are employed, the selections made from them, are local contributions. This may best be seen in the mouldings of the socle. In all the temples after the tenth century, whether square or circular in plan, the socle is variously divided into three zones of mouldings. They clasp the building firmly, and impart to it a rooted stability. The richer shapes of the Dravida socles belonging to the various ages are eschewed. The reason is not that the Travancore temples are smaller, as a rule; for even small and early Chola temples, like those of Kodumbalur in Pudukkottai, rise from lotus petalled and other complex, heavily rounded and obliquely projected bases. A late and otherwise ornate structure like the *gopuram* (gate tower) in Suchindram (Pl. VI) is based on a relatively plain socle consisting of three major mouldings. While the angular mouldings prevail up to the fourteenth century, those of the subsequent periods incorporate various torus (*kumbha*) and cyma (*padma*-lotus) shapes (Pl. XVII). The latter, even though carved in the likeness of petals, are discreetly subordinated to the evenness of the general effect. The mouldings of the socle are broad bands; however different their particular details and proportions in the single buildings, they hold the body of the building with a sustained calm. This is more obvious even on the circular than on the other temples. On bases of this particular quality rest not only the Dravida temples of Travancore; those buildings which are built in the indigenous manner of Kerala are similarly supported (Pls. XV, XVI, XIX). Whether built according to the Dravida or to Kerala tradition, the smooth and steady continuity of the mouldings of the socle is most fully one with the total structure if the building is circular (Pls. XII, XV). There, its self-contained, capacious and steady sweep is one in nature with the curves which distinguish the wall paintings of Malabar (Pls. LXIV, LXXII, etc.)

KERALA TEMPLES

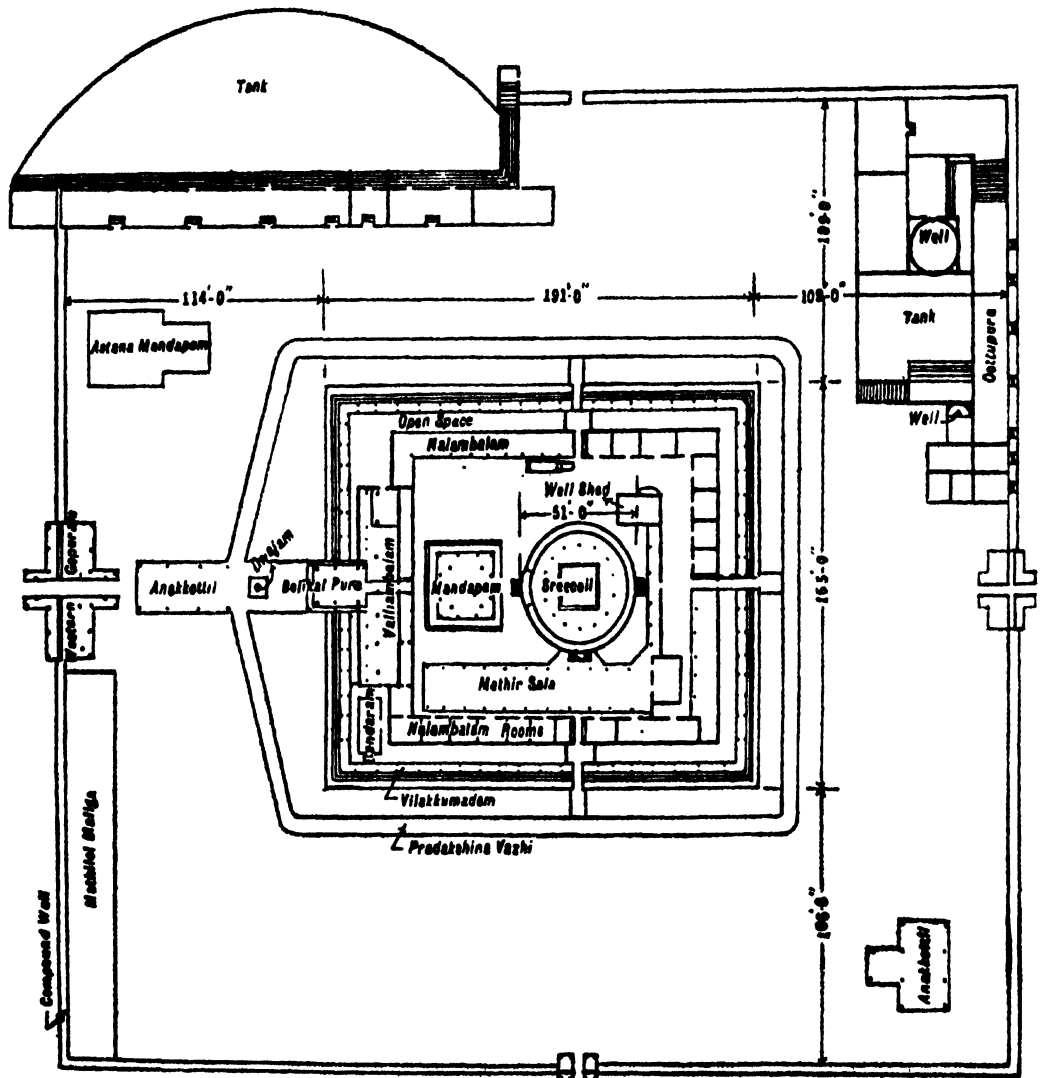
The share of the indigenous tradition of the architecture of Malabar, the ancient Kerala, in the temples of Travancore may be gauged by comparing a temple in Dravida style with one

built in the Kerala manner. The walls of the Niramankara Temple (Pl. XII) built in the fourteenth century and those of the *Srikoil* (sanctuary) at Vaikom belong to the same family. The difference lies in their roofs (although the Niramankara temple apparently had a pitched roof of timber, its *garbhagriha*, the innermost sanctuary, is domed). The indigenous temples are four-sided or circular; the latter shape is possibly the more ancient; the *garbhagraha*, however, is always square (plan on p. 14; vertical section on p. 15.).

In their plan the indigenous temples in Travancore are complete to this day. The extant buildings, however, do not seem to be more ancient than the thirteenth century. Many a *Srikoil* is raised above steps which are inscribed (Pl. XVI) and whose carvings together with the inscriptions prove them to be earlier by centuries than the present shrine which is a reconstruction identical in plan with the original building. Similarly, the entire site plan of these temples of the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries is to be thought of as faithfully following the prescriptions and practice of earlier centuries.

Within a rectangular cloister, the main building lies on the East-West axis. Although the *Srikoil* is not placed in the exact centre, it can be approached from the four directions (see plan) and dominates the assemblage of buildings by its high roof (Pl. XIV). Cloistered temples are, however, not confined to Malabar. Pallava temples in Mamallapuram and Kanchipuram; Jain temples in Rajputana and other parts of India, the temples of Kashmir and those of Mysore are similarly enclosed. This plan of the temple precincts is an ancient one and has its beginnings in the enclosure by which a sacred field was demarcated prior to a temple being built on it. Within the sacred enclosure its contents were housed and enshrined. Nowhere else in India is this plan of the temple so living a reality. Filled with the indigenous shapes of its buildings and shrines, the plan of the Malabar temples is a vital form of religious architecture, of all-Indian importance. In sanctuaries similarly planned the Buddhists worshipped in Gandhara, in stone-built shrines. The corresponding structures in India have perished; they were built of wood and bricks. Their plan, however, has survived, and is a

living form of architecture in Malabar. What is equally important is that, such as they are to-day, the temples were built not only from the thirteenth or even from the tenth century onward; but it is to be assumed from an age unknown in a shape at home in Kerala.

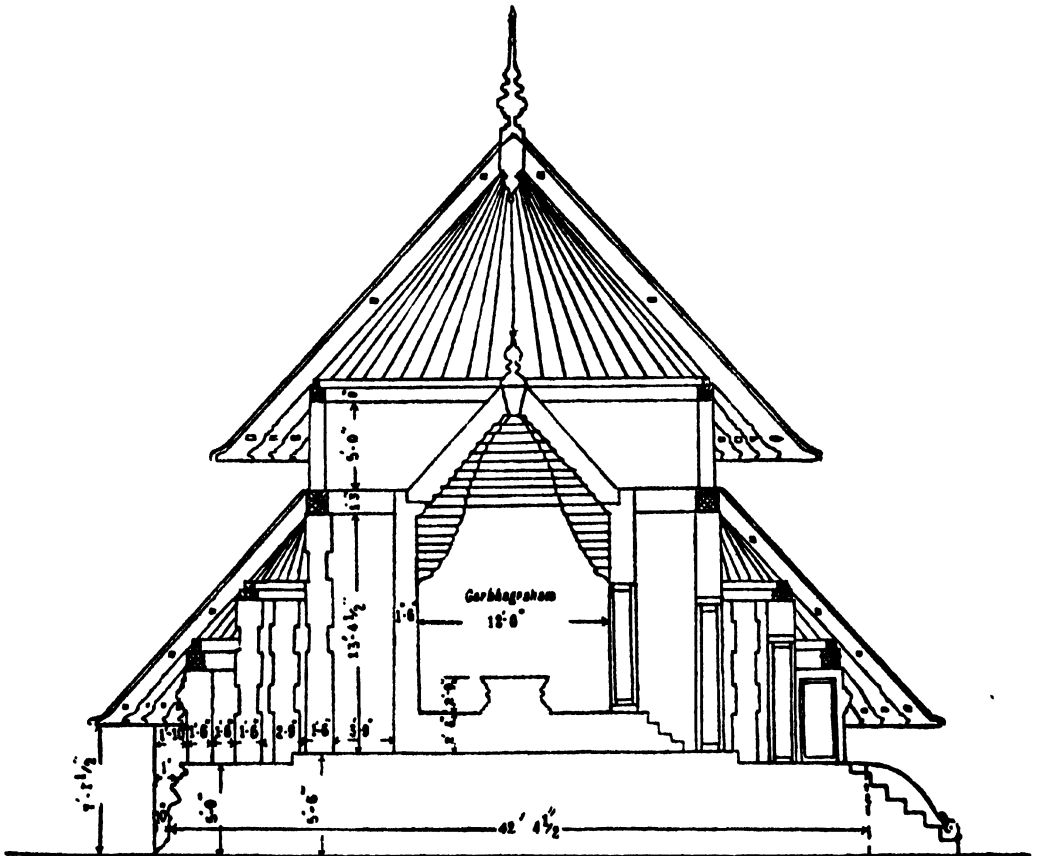


Plan of Temple in Ettumanur (A.D. 1542).

The character of this shape is in the roof, and, where the walls are of wood, in their construction and carvings. Where, however, the walls are of stone or brick, and plastered, it is in their paintings. Though these are widely different from those in

Ajanta, one thing at least they have in common: they cover the entire available wall space (Pls. XVI, XVIII). This is true of the carvings also (Pl. XVII) where the architecture is of timber; but all their inordinate wealth is comprised within or covered by large and pure shapes: The broad cone of the roof of the *Srikoil*, the oblong and triangular roofs of the surrounding halls (Pl. XIV) cover under their wide eaves a wealth of figure and colour, which, if exposed or removed from these lids and receptacles would have a forlorn splendour and involved intricacy.

The roofs as a rule are covered with thin tiles. Their construction and form (Fig. on p. 15) was thought out and planned, proportionate in all its parts. The various kinds of rafters, for example, their length and thickness, and those of their parts, were calculated as forming the hypotenuse of the respective



Srikoil of Temple in Kumaranallur

rectangular triangle of posts and brackets, etc. The proportionate thickness of the hip-rafters, for example, of a ridged roof over a rectangular building is equal to the diagonal of the square section of the rafters which are bolted to the sides of the top beam (according to 'Vastuvidya', chapter X).

The various joints have each a proper name and employment; the science of wooden construction secured the greatest precision, stability and durability to the building. A simple and ingenuous construction such as that illustrated in Fig., p. 15, shows the framework of the roof, planted in the ground and not resting on the walls of the building, so that at the same time the roof has a firm support and the interior of the temple is replete with an impeccably spaced rhythm of concentric, pillared colonnades.

Single or double roofs (Pls. XV, XVI) are alike in the compelling purity of their proportions and the effect of lightness with which they invest the otherwise low structure. The portion of the building covered by sloped roofs, for example in Fig., p. 15, is more than four times the height of the visible perpendicular wall of the temple. To such heights proportionately not even the highest superstructure of any temple of India, outside Malabar, ever rose, the superstructure being as a rule not more than double the height of the walls of stone or brick temples (Pls. III, V, VI, XIII). The wall, however, is very low in proportion to the girth of the temple, and the total height does not exceed to any extent if at all the height of trees and palms whose verdure is its wider enclosure.

The circular *Srikoil* has a clear-cut stereometry; its simple shape comprises sumptuous detail. The balance of these two conceptions is rigorously drawn. The architectural shape as a whole remains unaffected by the frenzy of devotional imagery which is carved on its brackets, struts and uprights (Pl. XVIII) on the outside, and on the ceilings (Pl. XXI) inside the building. Similarly also the continuity of the paintings, their covering every wall space, is accentless like an intricately woven tapestry in which the building is clothed (Pls. XV, XVIII). This conception of the 'painted temple' exists now only on the Malabar Coast. It must have been a widely represented type of sacred architec-

ture in India, not only with the Buddhists, etc. in the interior of their cave-temples but in the whole South of India, at least. Certain Dravida temples are classified as *abhāsa* in Vastu-Shastra, the texts on architecture. This name may be derived from the glowing radiance of the paintings which covered them. But whether paintings or carvings, however exuberant in detail, they are subordinated to the architectural shape of which they are an integument. They do not dissolve it, however flamboyant their details may be (Pl. XVII, XVIII). Despite their small scale, their compactness gives dignity to the Kerala temples. It is also in the well weighed combination of simple stereometrical shapes, distributed over the broad basis of the entire temple precinct within the enclosure (Pl. XIV). The planning of the site, the spacing of elemental stereometric shapes, the perfection of orderliness within the enclosure of the temple reflect the order of the cosmos in whose likeness the temple is conceived. It is engulfed by untrammelled, luxurious nature, and has absorbed it, integrated within the simplicity of its order, in the innumerable carvings and paintings.

The reduplication of the roof, the addition of a second storey of the superstructure, not only add height but also provide further opportunity of embracing an even wider range of images. This is not a secondary consideration with the builders of these temples. The work of building the temple gives liberation (*moksha*) to the builder or patron (Vishvakarmaprakasha, VI. 10); but even though a person has not himself built the temple, but merely comes to see it, by the sight of it he is freed from all sins and becomes pure (Vishnudharmottara, III. LXXXVII. 63). Seeing the temple with the look of Knowledge is one way of achieving reintegration. It is thus necessary to show clearly all that is to be seen. It is not shown to the outsider; beyond the enclosure of the temple only its ordered simplicity is visible; entering its gate and circumambulating the *Srikoil* its contents are revealed as images, painted and carved.

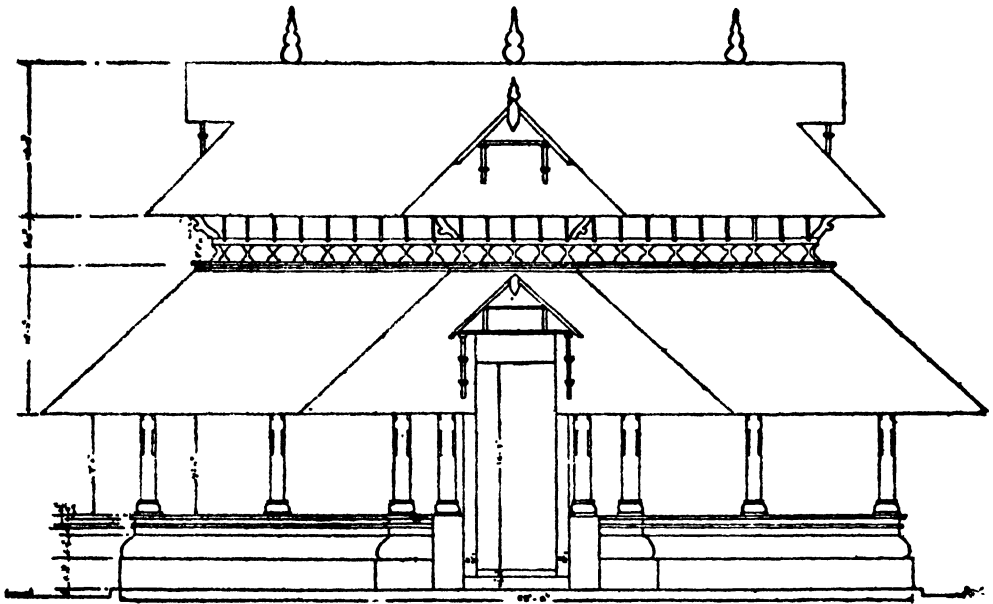
Attention has frequently been drawn to the similarity of certain Nepalese structures and the buildings of Kerala. No influence should be seen in the affinity of these buildings. In both

the countries the perennial Indian tradition is living; both are rich in wood and use it. The reduplication of roofs while it serves a purpose in domestic architecture—though it is hardly employed in Travancore at the present—becomes a quality of the sacred building and a means of display. Temples having a square plan and a double or triple, sloped roof exist in stone-form in Kashmir from the eighth century, but also in Gop, Kathiawar, of the Gupta age. Vastu-Shastra also classifies these temples and names them after mountain peaks, Himavan and Malyavan or simply Shringavan if there is but one peaked roof (V. Dh. III, LXXXVI).

The Kerala temples are also built, however, not only on a circular plan; when they are square or rectangular, their roof is constructed on similar principles. One of its shapes is the foursided pyramidal roof (Pl. XVII), more severe and less impressive than the conical roof with its wide, all-embracing curve, and the other is a ridged roof (Pls. XVIII, XIX), single or double. It has a particular shape in Kerala, alike in sacred and domestic architecture. It has a hipped end on each of its two sides; but the ridge of the roof, running breadthwise, is extended beyond the hipped end, and carries with it the uppermost part of the roof which thus forms a widely projected gable, above the hipped end (Pls. XXII, XIX, XVIII and Fig. on p. 19). In this 'open' attic manifold carvings are introduced on the buildings belonging to the temple, whereas in domestic architecture the verge of the gable overhangs less and serves the purpose of protecting a latticed roof light from the excess of rain, wind and sun (Pls. XX and XXII).

The ridge of the roof, as in the Nair house, Pl. XXII, if made of light wood, has a tendency to sag and produces a slightly concave sky-line. This slightly concave outline is retained in the curve of the eaves of temple roofs (Pl. XVIII) whose construction is more solid. If the concave curve, however so slight, was introduced to redeem an all too stark rigidity of angles, the convex curve, such as might have resulted in this kind of roof construction, as it does, for example, in the rural houses and temples of Bengal, found relatively little favour in Kerala.

The buildings of ancient India represented in reliefs and paintings belonging to the centuries before and after the beginning of this present era, in Central India, the Deccan and South India, have ridged roofs; most of them are curvilinear, and even where the roof is peaked, it approaches the shape of a dome in sections. The gables or windows of these buildings once more are curvilinear, arched in the vertical section. In South-Indian Vastu-shastra they are known as Nasas ('noses'); a very large projection in front of the superstructure of a North



Gopuram of Ettumanur Temple

Indian temple has the name Shukanasa or Shukanghri. The first part of these composite words refers to the parrot, whose beak is curved; Anghri denotes however a pillar, and while pillars are carved in the Shukanasa of ancient stone temples, the pillars of the Kerala gables appear to answer more closely this term.

Conical, pyramidal and ridged roofs on extant temples in Travancore, from the thirteenth century over more than half a millennium show a consistency of architectural form; mainly constructed of wood, the base of the building is of stone while the walls may be of wood, brick or of stone. The simplicity of these shapes houses the Gods on earth. The temple here is truly

the house of God (*devagriha*). The shape and plan of these temples may be as ancient as the first temples built in India. Although they are related in plan to other temples built of stone in various parts of India, their shape distinguishes them through all times. Near to the soil of the country and to the heart of its people, the temples of Kerala took into their pristine shape the motives of contemporary Dravida architecture. They are employed discreetly (Pl. XV) and altogether subservient to the indigenous form.

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It is seen not only in the history of Indian architecture that an indigenous and compact form persists when a fully elaborated style, impressive in its grandeur, is also being followed. The architects of Travancore built as well as any Dravida architect from the eastern part of South India, and being closely allied to them, offered their own contribution in a form truly of that school yet consolidated in a way no architect in the Dravida country would have devised. They gave shape to the branch of Dravida architecture in Travancore while at the same time the Kerala architects built in their own way, and being familiar with all the adornments of the Dravida school, employed them also at times and always judiciously in the temples. Rooted in their tradition, the craftsmen were competent to subordinate the highly elaborated mode of Dravida building to the solid simplicity of their original mode of construction. So it is not a question of the Dravida style having been imported in the wake of political constellations. The Dravida school of architecture in Travancore is a school within the Dravida tradition and strong in its own way of giving shape to it. Dravida buildings exist today not only in Dravida-desh (country) itself but also in the Kanarese districts of the Deccan where, in fact, the temples are several centuries older than the earliest structural temples of the Pallavas in Mamallapuram and Conjeevaram.

In Travancore, the earliest monuments yet known are in the Dravida manner; they date from the eighth century A.D. and this school attained its fullest development in the subsequent centuries as much on the east (Dravida) as on the west (Kerala) coasts of South India. It is not likely that this style was

imported into South Travancore in the eighth century and stayed on while it followed every phase of the Dravida school. Far from it, the Dravida school was as much at home in South Travancore as it was in Aihole or Pattadakal. These two regions are the south-westernmost and north-westernmost branches of that particular school of architecture which is known as Dravida; it had a different fate in these two regions. In the Kanarese districts its efflorescence in the fifth to the eighth centuries was followed by a fusion of this school with the North Indian tradition of architecture which had co-existed with it in Aihole, Mahakuteshvar and Pattadakal during the earlier centuries. Subsequently the two styles were fused in the Chalukyan monuments.

In Malabar, on the other hand, a building tradition existed truly at home in that country. Its origins lie far back, and in this sense Kerala architecture is aboriginal. The Dravida school of architecture had its style already formed in the sixth century A.D. No buildings of this age stand today in Dravidadesha; they have survived in the Kanarese districts. It is to be assumed that this potent school had more than one centre, and, most probably that of South Travancore was formed more or less at the same time as the others so that the extant temples have their past in their own country, South Travancore, and also further to the north, in Travancore. Unaffected in its integrity, though not aloof, the 'aboriginal' school of architecture continued, equally productive.

The unexpectedness of two forms of architecture in one country, serving the self-same Gods and forms of worship, would be less were the two schools of equal stages of architectural form such as had been the North and South Indian styles of Aihole, Mahakuteshvar, Pattadakal, and also in Kurnool. In Travancore, however, the Kerala type of building is pristine, homely and dateless; the Dravida buildings are more stately and subject to all the changes of style which the development of a school of architecture implies.

Thus two well defined types of form co-exist; the one undatable and unaging, the other full of possibilities which

mature in the course of centuries, and finally disintegrate. That two such forms of art, however, may co-exist and be used by the same people, at the same time, has been seen in the history of Indian terracottas from the days of Mohenjo Daro to the present. In the history of Indian architecture, however, Travancore occupies a unique position over roughly a millennium. A similar co-existence of architectural types might have prevailed in Bengal in the Pala and Sena periods.

If, in some of the later temples, built in the manner of Kerala, the *Srikoil* is not a detached structure but combined with a hall or room in front of it (Pl. XVIII), the building is less pure in form, more rich in movement and more closely allied to contemporary palace or domestic architecture. But its deep shadows, the paintings and carvings, and the bells suspended all around, cast over it an enchantment to which no human dwelling would aspire. Carved barge-boards, drop ornaments, pinnacles and finials show this type of wooden architecture allied not only to that of Nepal; wooden churches in Norway, Russia and the Balkans are members of the same family.

In their interior the temples as well as the attached structures, such as the halls for theatrical performances (Pls. XIX, XX), show the most varied and complex roof constructions. In the Kuttanpalam of Harippada the heavy span roof is underpinned by solid pillars on which rest strong beams; the weight of the roof is thus taken off the wooden lattice, which forms the walls admitting air and light. The refinements in timber roof-framing are equal to those of Gothic buildings, though they are different in purpose and shape.

A roof within a roof, above a building within a building, such is the stage raised on a pedestal of its own, where its pillars support a flat roof having a *padma* or cyma like sloped edge. It is carved on its lower side alike to the roof of the *mandapa* (Pl. XXI) preceding the *Srikoil*. A more intimate and solemn stage it would be difficult to conceive. This theatre hall admirably serves its purpose. Its exterior but reticently shows the mystery and fulfilment which it holds. Its pitched roof and overhanging eaves are a protective cover.

KERALA HOUSES AND PALACES

The Nalukettu and Ettukettu Nair houses, having four or eight roofs, and the corresponding number of wings, sets of apartments or rooms, appear to have been built in conformity with Vastu-Shastra from the days of the Vishvakarmaprakasha and the Brihat Samhita. While the temples are built of wood, brick and stone, the houses were built originally in Malabar of mud, light woods and thatch. The temple, the palace and the house, in Travancore, represent degrees in the drawing on all the resources of structural knowledge and symbolical reference. All the resources are activated in building temples; many are left untapped in the building of palaces, and the reticence is even greater when constructing dwelling-houses, for what belongs to the Gods is not meet for man, be he even the King. Certain subjects, for example scenes of war, death or sorrow in the stories of the Gods and the Asuras should not be represented in houses (Mayamata, XVIII), and certain degrees of realisation and their contents, such as the supernatural, should equally be excluded (Vishnudharmottara, Part III, Ch. XLIII).

The range not only of the subjects but also of the wealth of carving is restricted in the palaces and the homes of later centuries, and a sage economy of motives is practised by the builders. Most of the wood work in the houses built from the eighteenth century is purely structural, but a few symbolical shapes are introduced such as the *vuali* (mythical animal) which supports the built-in seat (Pl. XXIII) and shows it to be a *simhasana* (lion-seat); or the lotuses in the caissons of the ceiling or at the juncture of their joists or beams (Pl. XXVIII 1). The rest of the wood-work, the curves and crockets of braces, the rod or cable-shaped battens, add the weight of their form to the interior, mellow with the play of light and shade on coffered ceiling and curved edge of the collar-like roof, and to the inside of the eaves (Pl. XXIII). The main accents, however, are those of the structural disposition of pillar and beam, door and overdoor (Pl. XXVIII 2; 3) of vertical and horizontal, and the main contrasts are between the flat surface of the boarded wall, and the volumes of shade and shaped wooden form. Sumptuous, yet airy and sober is the entrance hall of a building of this type (Pl. XXIII).

Its ceiling however appears almost bare if compared with that of a temple *mandapa* (Pl. XXI). There the architecture is but the ground on which thrives a wealth of carvings; each composition, each image, however, follows in its spacing the architectural discipline, and has its definite place in a hierarchy of symbols, each in its proper position. The Nine Planets (*nava-graha*) or the guardians of the eight regions around Brahma in the coffers of the ceiling (Pl. XLIX); Ramayana scenes in panels or in the shape of brackets or as enrichments of mouldings (Pl. LI); further down yet, the ends of the roof terminate in Naga shapes (Pl. XXI). The latter can also be seen on stone ceilings of the temples of central India, in the tenth century, and painted Navagraha ceilings are the rule in *mandapas* of Hindu temples in South India and of Buddhist temples in Ceylon, at the same time when these images are carved in wood in the *mandapas* of temples in Travancore. No parallel can, however, be quoted of the Ramayana scenes as brackets and mouldings below the ceiling; they are, however carved as friezes and panels in the stone temples of South India (Punjai, Tanjore District, etc.).

These themes are set off against an array of carved symbols (Pl. XXI) which form their background. Such luxuriance is more than the eye can discern at a glance. The knowledge which the devotee has of these several shapes and their meaning simplifies the task of the eye but by itself would not suffice to give to each carving its due effect in the whole. This is being done by the distance from the eye of the devotee, the darkness in the recesses, and the gradual emergence of shapes so that those of a more particular significance are carved in front and against a background of symbols of general validity. It is seen but dimly or in places only where the light of day or of oil lamps throw into relief one or the other carving of the background. Such knowledge and recognition however have their place in the temple; they would be out of place in the daily use of the house where everything serves an immediate purpose in straightforward shapes. How varied these are depends not only on the size of the house and the wealth of the patron but even more on the various usages to which they are subservient. The skylight, for example (Pl. XXIV), in the central hall of a Nalukettu (four

wing house) has the shape of a shaft, is sunk into the hall from the ceiling, for it is not only the light that is conducted into the hall but the rain as well, and the water is collected in a spacious sunk basin below the rectangular opening in the ceiling. Basin and floor are built and paved with stone slabs. This 'water and light' room is set in a wholly ingenuous way. There are many more of these purely Kerala shapes and effects of interior architecture which solve practical problems imposed by a special climate, light, and mode of life.

In the palaces, the self-same ingenuousness within a tradition of long standing indulges in greater display (Pl. XXV). The railing-louver wall admits light and air, diffused and tempered, within the hall. The upper part having the louver effect is curved outward; sinuous and strong studs through which pass the planks of the louver, link the eaves of the roof to the railing wall below. The wall so formed is built up in a vertical and a horizontal pattern, full of light; its larger and upper part moreover is not perpendicular but swings outward towards the frame of the ceiling which rests on solid pillars; they are the only verticals in the hall, between floor and ceiling. The whole interior but for them is like a wide basket, shady, cool, full of the movement of light and air. Much careful work has been bestowed on the pillars with their floreated brackets and pendants. It appears not wholly congruous, if the pillar is seen by itself, and not as immersed in the particular space of this hall; a part view (Pl. XXVI) shows it better fitted for its task although the details lack strength (Cf. Pl. VIII, where the same may be said about the *datura*-flower pendants above the capitals; but they should not be singled out as they play their part in the organisation of the volume of the entire pillar in which are also enclosed the large figures of the patrons; Pl. IX).

A falling off from the comprehensive vision in which each detail is subordinated to the whole and plays its part (as for example on Pl. XVII), is not unusual in buildings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; at that time however the Western European influence had become a tempting and also a weakening factor (Pl. XXIX). Although present on the Malabar coast from the sixteenth century onward, it did not diminish nor did it

distract the artistic output for a long time to come; there was no scope for its entry or assimilation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This is the more noteworthy, as it was at that age that Westernisms were largely accepted in the paintings of the Mughals. The paintings of Malabar, however, remained free of Western influence even where they were executed in the Mattancheri Palace which the Portuguese presented to the Raja of Cochin about 1555 A.D. It is only in the second set of its murals, which were painted after the Dutch restoration of the palace, within the eighteenth century, that Western influence immobilized partly and also stimulated the power of these compositions. This happened at the same time as the weakening of the architectural consistency in some of the wood work of the palaces of Travancore. The carved gable porch, for example, of the entrance to the Padmanabhapuram Palace (Pl. XXVII) though it is free of any Western motif and delicate in the carvings of the barge board, yet lacks in harmony between the gable and the pillars.

Temples, palaces, and houses built in the indigenous, truly original manner of Malabar are intimate structures. They hold their wealth within, protected against the outside by not only walls, roofs and their overhanging eaves, but also by the cloister of the temples. This reticence of displaying to the outside what is so richly held within, preserves to temple and palace alike the humility of the work of man. It is embraced by the natural beauty of the country, is close to its own earth and water, and cannot be alienated from them. Inwardness and intimacy distinguish Kerala buildings at all times from the Dravida temples, heavy structures, rich in display. Both found their local builders. Travancore not only contributed its own version to Dravida architecture in its buildings; its clearest survey is given in Vastu-Shastra in the Shilparatna, a compilation by Shri Kumara of Kerala. Many more treatises and their commentaries composed in Kerala prove, in addition to the monuments, the importance of this school. Its main monuments are in South Travancore. It is improbable that these temples and their images are the work of imported craftsmen, whose work would have been modified by the architecture of Kerala.

Kerala architecture comprises temples and dwelling houses, which latter until the middle of the 16th century at least, were built of mud; the local convention required that houses of wood and stone were built only for Kings and Gods. Everyone else had to live in mud houses (i.e. temporary structures).

The Nair houses thus, in their own detailed interior decoration, are adaptations of the palace. Their plan, however, whether in four or eight wings, must have been customary also when impermanent materials were used for those buildings. The plan of the house belongs to it; it was not transferred to the temple, which, being the house of God, fulfilled a function different from that of the houses of man.

The original distinction between these two abodes is made for example by primitive people such as the Chenchus who live in caves; they build a round bamboo hut for their Gods.

While distinguishing the houses of men from those of the Gods, it should not be forgotten that the house of God is a house, and shows, adapted for its particular purpose, such shapes as are peculiar to the ephemeral houses of the country where both are built. The circular *Srikoil*, the shape most particular to Kerala, while it has no prototype in the houses of Brahmins and Nayars, has its roots in Kerala. Circular buildings are set up by some of its primitive peoples. The Ullatas ensconce the bride-to-be in a large round building made of leaves, where she chooses her husband. These religious and ritual buildings are partly themselves of a temporary nature, set up for a definite occasion and soon destroyed; but the practice is living and not forgotten. Such structures as well as the circular and conical huts of the Malapantarams are amongst the contributing shapes to the circular *Srikoil* and its conical roof.

While these circular buildings, as well as the sheds generally used as places of worship, are connected in shape and purpose with the Kerala temples, the megalithic practice of setting up dolmens—though extensively represented in Travancore on the one hand and having contributed to the shape and structure of the Hindu temple elsewhere in India—found no entry into the Kerala temples of Travancore. The flat-roofed Gupta temples

in Central India, and, to a certain extent, the Dravida temples generally of the earlier period, show integrated into their own shapes and technique those of the megalithic structures. But this component was not contributed to the Dravida temples in Travancore particularly. Wherever the ethnical roots lie of the elements that contributed to the Kerala temples, the simplicity and consistency of their shapes is part of the scene and nature of the country and truly its own.

CHAPTER II

**ARCHITECTURE IN
TRAVANCORE**

By R. VASUDEVA PODUVAL

CHAPTER II

ARCHITECTURE IN TRAVANCORE

The standard works on the architecture of the Malabar Coast are:—the *Manushyalaya Chandrika*, the *Tanta Samuchchaya*, these two being of the 15th century A.C.; and the *Silparatna* of the 16th century. All three are peculiar to the Malabar Coast, and record the principles of the science of architecture in the country.

These principles have, from ancient times, been embodied with special distinction in the numerous temples of Travancore, in a succession of eras from the rare but striking cave temple of the 9th century A.C. Dr. Kramrisch has made a scholarly comparison of the two main styles, the Dravidian and the Keralan; I shall deal in some detail with the features of sacred and domestic architecture in Travancore.

TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE

The component parts of a temple in Travancore are, from the foundation upwards, (1) the *upapitha* (pedestal), (2) the *adhishtana* (base), (3) the *stambha* (pilaster), (4) the *prastara* (entablature), (5) the *griva* (neck of the dome), (6) the *sikhara* (cupola), (7) the *stupa* (pinnacle). Up to the *prastara* there is no structural difference between the temples of Kerala and those of the Dravidian style of the south-east coast. The difference that strikes the eye is in the upper portion above. In the Kerala-style temples the wooden roof is covered with copper sheets or tiles, and ornamented with perpendicular or tilted triangular gables. The heavy and almost continuous rainfall on the Malabar Coast necessitated some deviations from the Dravidian style in the construction and angles of the roofs, though without completely eradicating or transmuting the designs prescribed by the *sastras* (ancient canons of art).

Generally, all the old and important temples in Travancore have been built on prominent sites, as laid down in the *sastras*;

at the top of a hill as at Chitalar, or at the foot as in Tirunandikkara, or by the side of a river like the temples of Aranmula, Mulikkulam, and Tiruvattar, or on an eminence like the Janardana temple at Varkalai, or by the side of the sea, like the temple of Kanya-Kumari at Cape Comorin. Most of the temples face eastward; but some are turned westward, and a few to the south.

Ordinarily in a temple in Travancore, as in the rest of Kerala, there is a central shrine, called the *Srikoil*, which may be square, oblong or circular in shape, consisting of one or two storeys over which a sloping roof is built. Within it is the *garbhagraha*, the cell where the image of the deity is placed. In front of the central shrine is situated the *namaskara mandapa* (hall of prostration) square in shape and built with pyramidal roof. Surrounding these is a corridor or pillared hall known as *nalambalam* or *chuttambalam*, the outer portico of which is the *balikkalpura* containing the *balikkal* or altar, with a flag-staff, or *dwaja stambha* in front of it. The outside of the *nalambalam* is laid with 5 to 9 rows of lamps fixed over a masonry base and wooden frame-work known as the *vilakkumatam*. On the outside of the whole structure there is a paved processional path.

In the case of large and important temples there is, in addition to the above, a separate edifice known as the *kottambalam*, for *koottu* (dramatic performances, and for recitations of Puranic stories); this corresponds to the *natakasala* (drama hall) of Dravidian shrines. In the case of many, where there is not a separate *koottambalam*, the front side of the quadrangular corridor round the central shrine is used for the purpose.

Every temple has a well, situated generally on the north-east corner, which supplies the water required for bathing the image and for preparing food-offerings to the deity. A portion of the corridor round the central shrine is used as a kitchen, called the *madappalli*, another for feeding Brahmins, and a third for storing rice, oil, ghee and other articles required for use. Smaller shrines dedicated to Shasta, Parvati, Ganesha or other deities, are also found generally in each temple. Images of Nagas

(serpents) set up around a banyan tree for worship are also a feature of Travancore temples, as of the rest of Kerala, where in many cases a *kavu* (sacred grove) of tangled moss or shrub, meant to be the resort of serpent gods and goddesses, occupies a place on the south-west corner. All these are enclosed by a rectangular wall, in the centre of each side of which, at the four cardinal points, are entrances surmounted by *gopuras* (towers); and where these are not found, gateways are built for passage into the precincts of the temple. In some of the most important temples of the State there is a rectangular structure known as the *anakkottil* constructed with a high roof in front of the flag staff to accommodate and shelter from sun and rain the elephants used in religious processions.

Most of the temples in Travancore having the indigenous gable style of architecture were originally constructed entirely of wood, and such of the stone temples as exist are, as Dr. Kramrisch has pointed out, close imitations of the wooden ones. "The temples and other structures with the gable roofs lack both the costliness and grandeur of the Dravidian structures, but they are neat and simple, with provision for admitting plenty of light and fresh air; and in these respects are undoubtedly superior to the costly edifices of the Dravidian style. This indigenous style is peculiar to Malabar, and indeed the like of it is not known to exist anywhere else in India. The chief characteristic of this style is that wood enters largely into its construction"—Travancore State Manual, Vol. I, p. 165.

In point of size and the effect arising from it, the temples in the indigenous gable-style of architecture are not in the same category as the lofty structures of the Dravidian style. They are low in elevation, but some of them are of great extent. The pediment is generally of laterite, but wood work with singular neatness enters largely into their composition. The Shiva temples at Vaikom (Pl. XIV) and Ettumanur are the finest examples of this style of architecture.

"In the Dravidian type of temples the main shrine is in the centre, and other accessory buildings stand inside a long rectangular or square enclosure divided by a high cross wall into

courts which, according to their importance, may amount to as many as seven. The court inside each *prakara* (wall) is entered on each side by lofty and massive *gopuras*, large or small according to the importance of the temples. The lower portion of these *gopuras* is generally of cut stone ornamented with pilasters and niches or projections. Massive wooden gates with panelled work and studded with ornamental nail-heads are placed at about a third of the depth of the passage from the front. The superstructure of these *gopuras* consists of several storeys, and they are generally of brick-work equipped with niches and projections corresponding to the cut stone basements and ornamented with plaster figures, often illustrating stories from the Puranas. The upper portion of these *gopuras* is pyramidal in shape with a *stupa* or a series of *stupas* (pinnacles). The principal shrine of the temple stands near the innermost or central court. Its plan consists of a small square or rectangular cell or chamber called the *garbhagraha* in which is installed the image, and is enclosed in another square building leaving a covered *pradakshina* (processional path). In the front of the *garbhagraha* is a passage or chamber called the *ardhamandapa* with lofty piers inside. In front of this combined *garbhagraha* and *ardhamandapa* is the *mahamandapa* (perhaps the *mukhamandapa* of Dravidian shrines), which is a pillared building with ornamental basements or steps on the sides and with entrance doors walled up. Besides these *mandapas* there are raised platforms for decoration of the deity during the festive occasions. Two colossal figures of *Dwarapalas* are generally found one on either side of the front entrance of the inner shrine or by the sides of the *ardhamandapa*. These serve as gate-keepers or bodyguards to the central deity. An ornamental base surrounds these buildings. Fine perforated stone windows are often seen on the sides of the ante-chambers. In front of the sanctum of a Shiva temple is the Bull (*nandi*) and *Garuda* (bird) in the shrine of Vishnu, these being the *vahanas* (vehicles) of the respective deities, with the *balipitha* and *dwajastambha* (flag-post)." Transactions of the Ninth All-India Oriental Conference page 1100.

This style of architecture is sharply distinguished from the northern style by the fact that its tower or spire is straight-lined

and pyramidal in form, divided into storeys by horizontal bands and surmounted by either a barrel roof or a dome derived directly from the ancient wooden architecture. The central shrine originally stood alone, but in later times it was enclosed in an immense walled court usually including numerous subsidiary temples, tanks and sculptured halls or cloisters. The quadrangle is entered by lofty gateways (*gopuras*) which in later temples overtop the central shrine and so spoil the effect of the architectural composition ("History of Fine Art in India and Ceylon" page 129). The Sthanunatha temple at Suchindrum (Pl. V) and the Nilakantaswami temple at Padmanabhapuram have vast quadrangular enclosures and lofty superstructures overtopping the central shrines, and sculptured corridors of large dimensions, and are two of the surviving examples of Dravidian style of temple architecture in the State.

The temples are the most ancient monuments in Travancore. The oldest of them is the cave temple at Kaviyur, belonging to the latter half of the eighth century A.C., if not earlier, as suggested by its close resemblance to later Pallava work. This cave has the usual orientation of a Shiva shrine, its entrance facing the setting sun. It is scooped out from the sides of two massive boulders nearly 12 feet wide on the summit of a low hillock. The floor of the cave is a few feet above the natural ground level and is approached by a flight of steps hollowed out of the rock. The cave is 19 feet 8 inches broad and 8 feet 6 inches high. Two pillars, 8 feet 8 inches in height, divide the breadth of the cave into three openings, two of which are 5 feet broad, the other being only 4 feet 8 inches. The central shrine is a square cell measuring 8 feet each side and has in it a cylindrical rock-cut Linga. The rectangular hall in front of this sanctum measures 19 feet 8 inches by 5 feet, and contains, one on either side of the doorway, 2 niches 6 feet 5 inches broad and 6 feet 3 inches high, mounted on 2 feet pedestals, containing three rows of plain band ornament, flanked by pilasters 6 feet 3 inches high and 11 inches broad.

Almost to the same period belongs the rock-cut Shiva temple at Tirunandikkara in south Travancore. This temple is excavated on the southern slope of a hill which lies eastwards. At the

southern extremity of the cave is a cell facing east containing a Linga. In front of it is a hall measuring 18 feet in length and 8 feet 3 inches in width. The south side of the hall contains a verandah which measures 19 feet 3 inches in breadth. It has two pillars in the centre and two half pillars at the ends. A modern brick wall provided with a top and window has converted the hall, verandah and the cells into a closed chamber.

An ancient monument belonging to a slightly later date, the ninth century A.C., is the old Jain temple at Tiruchanattumalai in the village of Chitaral in south Travancore. On the top of the hill there is a natural cave formed by an overhanging rock resting upon another. This cave has been altered by masonry work into a temple with a *mandapa*, a *verandah*, a *balipitha* and kitchen. The central shrine, which is the original cave, is divided into three chambers, at the upper right of which is the plaster figure of Padmavati Devi, in the middle Mahavira Tirthankara, and in the proper left Parsvanatha Tirthankara. On the top of the overhanging rock immediately above the central shrine was built a brick *gopura* which, being in ruins, is now rebuilt.

Among other ancient temples in the State there are eleven (at Trikkakkara, Tirumulikkulam, Tiruchengannur, Tiruvanandapuram, Tirukkadittanam, Tiruvanvandur, Tirupuliyur, Tiruvalla, Tiruppatissaram, Tiruvattar and Tiruarammala) sacred to the Sri Vaishnavas, who have sung their glory in their hymns. Similarly, there are a large number of temples such as Suchindram, Bhuthappandi, Vaikom, Ettumanur, Kandiur, Tiruvidakkode, Tirunandikkara, etc., dedicated to Shiva. The structures of most of these temples have in course of time undergone great changes; and what remains of the ancient edifice is mostly the central shrine. As an instance of an ancient and important temple that has undergone architectural modification not conforming to any well-thought out design or principles is the Vishnu shrine of Parthivasekharapuram (ninth century A.C.) (Pl. III) which has a distinctness of style in that the *vimana* (roof) of its central shrine containing the *garbhagraha* dominates the whole temple structure. It is reminiscent of the early Chola style of architecture.

An important temple, the parts of whose ancient edifice are even now preserved, is the Guhanathaswami temple at Cape Comorin. Its original structure, erected in the time of the Chola King Raja Raja I (A.C. 985 to 1013) consisted only of the central shrine together with its front *mandapa* without the hall which is a later addition after the middle of the eleventh century A.C.

Judging from architectural style, a temple which could be assigned to the thirteenth century, is the Parasurama shrine at Tiruvallam near Trivandrum, built entirely of granite from the foundation to the ceiling with a superstructure. It is a round shrine with a rectangular *mandapa* in its front. Within the spacious compound of this temple enclosed on all sides by two *prakara* walls of stone are shrines dedicated to Brahma and Shiva.

The central shrine of the ruined Shiva temple at Neeramankara (Pl. XII) near Trivandrum is presumed to belong to the fourteenth century. In the centre of an open ground a circular stone wall encloses a rectangular shrine containing a Linga. The central shrine is built of laterite; and between it and the circular *prakara* wall there are pillars, two on each side of the four sides. The roof which covered the central shrine and the inner *prakara* (corridor) was made of wood and thatch. What is now conspicuous in the edifice is the *sikhara* over the *garbhagraha*. The structure of this temple appears to bear a close resemblance to the Watta Dage of Ceylon, and consists of an *adhishtana*, or pedestal, made up of five or more mouldings of different shapes and sizes. Above the pedestal is a circular wall of almost the same height as the *adhishtana*. The wall is recessed in front of the building to less than a fourth of the circumference, and the recessed portion of the wall maintains the curvature of a circle, and is in a line with the circular row of pillars inside. The top of the temple is covered with a conical roof surmounted by a finial.

The biggest of the temples which still retain their grandeur in spite of successive works of repair and renovation is the Sthanunathaswami temple at Suchindram (Pl. V), situated in

a spacious court enclosed by high walls with a covered *pradakshina* (Pl. VII) surrounding a number of minor shrines, *mandapas* and smaller buildings. The temple faces the east, and has on that side an outer gate surmounted by a lofty *gopura* of seven storeys crowned with six pinnacles. The lower portion of this *gopura* is of stone, and the superstructure of brick is covered with brick and stucco figures plastered and painted. The entire *gopura*, particularly the jambs of each of the doorways, is tastefully decorated with excellent sculptures. This *gopura* is stated to have been built about 1545 A.C. Though many of the earlier structures of this temple do not now exist, there are parts which are attractive to a student of ancient history, the oldest of them being the rock with many inscriptions on the south-west corner of the Kailasa shrine. Other structures architecturally important are the large hall called the *Chempakaraman mandapa*, the *Chitrasabha*, a pillared portico erected near the *dwajastambha*, and the Garuda and Nandi *mandapas* on the east side. Of these, the *Chitrasabha* was built in 1410 A.C., and the *Chempakaraman mandapa* was in existence prior to 1471 A.C. Both of these are built of monolithic pillars cut into groups of slender columns and provided with elaborate brackets.

The Shiva temple at Ettumanur in North Travancore is a good specimen of the indigenous style of temple architecture of the sixteenth century. Its central shrine is circular in shape, surmounted by a conical roof covered with copper plates with a stupa of copper gilt at the top. In front of the *garbhagraha* is a raised platform, the *mukha-mandapa* (front pavilion), square in form, where the Brahmins sit for prayer and perform prostrations and where the image of a *Nandi* (bull) is placed. Beyond it are corridors or pillared halls all round the *garbhagraha* and the *mukhamandapa*. Other details are as already set out. The whole edifice is rectangular in shape, and on its exterior has columns of lamps fixed on a wooden framework covered with metal trellis-work. Just beyond the flag-staff, or in a line with it, and a few feet away from the place for lights, is the circumambulatory path, paved with stones, for taking the image of the God in procession round the temple building and for the worshippers to take their devotional rounds. Midway between

the flag-staff and the *gopura* is a covered shed known as the *anakottil* where the elephants take their stand in a line on occasions of temple procession.

An important temple which has a close resemblance to the one at Ettumanur, and belongs almost to the same period or probably a little earlier, is that of Vaikom, which has the same architectural features and is bigger in size.

But the most architecturally notable of the temples in Travancore is the Sri Padmanabhaswami shrine at Trivandrum, in the construction of which both the indigenous style and the features of Dravidian architecture are happily blended. From an engraved inscription in Sanskrit and Malayalam characters, on the base of the *mandapa* inside, it is seen that the temple was reconstructed from the *vimana* down, and the work was started in 1729 A.C. Unfortunately part of the temple caught fire in the year 1934; but was rebuilt exactly in the manner of the old. It is a splendid monument, showing at its best the fusion of the Dravida and Kerala features of architecture referred to by Dr. Kramrisch. The Travancore State Manual (Vol. I, page 166) has a detailed description of the temple which is summarised below:

“This temple stands in an elevated part of the town. The area covered by its enclosures is 570 x 510 feet or 290,700 square feet or about 7 acres. It faces east and is surrounded by massive fort walls. A handsome flight of stone steps on the eastern side shows the gentle eminence of the temple site, the front portion of which is covered by a huge *gopura*, or tower, pyramidal in shape and built of granite and brick on the model of the lofty *gopuras* of the East Coast temples. This tower is about 100 feet in height and has 7 storeys with window light-openings in the centre of each of them. The stone basement of the tower is covered with elaborate sculptures and the masonry above with ornamental work of Puranic figures, the top having seven gold steeples or turrets. Underneath the *gopura* is the main gateway leading to the temple, well protected by a number of massive doors and guarded by sentries. Between the gateway and the inner shrine there is a fine broad open corridor in the form of an oblong supported by 324 stone pillars and covered with a

terraced roof, the walk of the God's procession. On one side it is 450 feet long and on the other side 350 feet. It is 25 feet broad. The two rows of granite pillars and the stone ceiling above are decorated with fine sculptures. Every pillar has the figure of a Nair girl bearing a lamp in the palms of her hands joined together and raised above her waist. The top of each pillar is surmounted by the head of a unicorn in the mouth of which is a loose ball of stone. This *mandapa* is also used for feeding large numbers of Brahmins every day. At the four points of this oblong corridor, but not connected with it, stand four stone platforms, from which the people witness the God's procession during the important festivals in the temple. They are used on ordinary days for the reading of the Puranas, or the recital of Puranic stories on special occasions by a class of people called Chakkiars. On the south of the southern part of the corridor is a house dedicated to the performance of the chief State ceremonies. North of the oblong are the cooking apartments of the feeding house attached to the temple. Beyond this magnificent corridor or covered walk is the flag-staff of gold, which is about 80 feet in height and circular in shape tapering towards the top and holding Garuda, the God's favourite riding animal. This flag-staff is a fine teak log covered with a series of copperplate rings, gilded thickly on the outside. South of this flag-post and connected with the corridor is the *Kulasekharamandapa*, containing most impressive stone sculptures of the early eighteenth century. Between the flag-staff and the inner shrine is the space containing the altar. The inner shrine is rectangular in shape, and consists of two storeys, and is ornamented with gables, an essential characteristic of the Travancore style of temple architecture. Outside the inner shrine, but within the enclosure, there are smaller shrines dedicated to Krishna, Kshetrapala, Shasta, Narasimha, Vyasa, Shiva, Ganesha, Rama Sita and Lakshmana, and others. The outer walls of the central shrine are covered with mural paintings depicting various scenes out of the Puranas. The central shrine with the halls and *mandapas* inside, are enclosed by a rectangular structure on the outside of which columns of lamps of brass are fixed."

A structure unique in its shape and conception, and also remarkable in construction, is the *Garudamandapa* at Tiruvalla, one of the 13 places sacred to the Sri Vaishnavas and praised by the two saints Nammalvar and Tirumangai Alvar. It consists of a three-canopied pyramidal roof decorated with triangular gables having widely projecting eaves and built gracefully, tier upon tier, showing prominently the gable roofs covered over with copper sheeting. As a distinct architectural specimen it has a great value, as the like of it is not found anywhere else in India. It is presumed that the structure was built on the model of an older one in the nineteenth century.

DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE

The standard treatise for the construction of houses in Travancore is the *Manushyalaya Chandrika*, a work devoted exclusively to domestic architecture. According to it, "before commencing the building of a house the site has first to be chosen for which rules are laid down as in the case of the construction of temples. A house constructed on ground sloping to the east will bring prosperity, while poverty will ensue if it is constructed on ground sloping westwards. If the ground slopes towards the south-east and the house is situated in the north-west, there will be loss of wealth. An edifice on ground sloping to the south will cause early death of the members thereof; while in the reverse construction quarrelsomeness will result. A house built on the north-east side of a slope will be productive of everything in abundance. A house built on the left and behind a Vishnu temple, on the right of a Shiva or Buddha temple, or by the side of a Shasta temple, will cause calamity to the occupants; but if built on the opposite side, will bring prosperity. Houses should not be constructed near temples, paddy-fields, hermitages, sea, ocean, hills or cow-sheds. If constructed near temples they should be lower in height than the religious edifice."

The old houses in Travancore invariably consist of four rooms joined together in a rectangular form, facing the cardinal points of the compass, with a yard in the centre inside. These structures are called *nalukettus*, i.e., four buildings. The

Shilpasastras mention various kinds of houses, among which this style of construction was originally adopted in Travancore for the sake of convenience, as each joint family was living in one house, unlike the houses in streets found in other parts of India. The *nalukettu* was constructed in the centre of a compound, and may have more than one storey. Travancore abounds in timber; and in the construction of the houses, wood therefore played a very conspicuous part. The basement and foundation of the structures were built of laterite mostly, and the other portions, such as the columns, eaves, the gables, the overhanging roof and the balconies, were built of timber.

The rules prescribe certain dimensions for house constructions to be settled on the basis of the extent of land on which they were to be built, but these need not be given here.

Most of the houses in Travancore have for centuries been built in enclosed gardens. Ibn Batuta, writing in the fourteenth century, observes: "Everybody has here a garden, and his house is placed in the middle of it, and down the whole of this is a fence of wood up to which the ground of each inhabitant comes." These houses were the *nalukettus*, each consisting of a rectangular structure, sometimes tiled but generally with a thatched roof, comprising a central courtyard; the structure being divided into four main rooms and four corner rooms, and the courtyard being connected to the outside by four corridors arranged in swastika form. The building invariably faces the rising sun. The entrance to this is at some little distance, and consists of a door in the centre and a strong gateway. The gate is simply constructed and the surroundings are exceptionally neat and tidy. The general plan and other details of the structure of a house are determined in strict conformity with the principles of "Vastu-Shastra" (treatises on architecture) and based on astrology. The selection of the site for the house is guided by the influence of the monsoon. For a serpent grove or religious shrine, a square plot just in the middle of the south-west portion is considered the most auspicious. The western portion of the house is the granary, while the rest of it is partitioned into rooms. The northern portion comprises the

storeroom and the kitchen at the western and eastern extremities, with the dining-room in the middle, while the western and eastern portions are kept as open halls for gatherings on important occasions. Behind one or more of the rooms above-mentioned is a kind of enclosed verandah. Another type most commonly met with consists of a portion serving as a reception hall, the other portions of the building corresponding in details more or less with the quadrangular edifice just described. Very rarely do we come across houses where the two types are combined.

The houses of the poor classes consist generally of one or two small, dark and ill-ventilated rooms with a kitchen at one end and a verandah either in front or on all sides of the main building. The woodwork of the building is solid and substantial, and is in many cases beautifully carved. The walls are generally of laterite, brick or mud, and the roofs in olden days were thatched or tiled. As part of the dwellings in the same compound, there are frequently seen a cattle-shed, an excavated bathing-tank, an outhouse for Brahmin visitors, and a small edifice for the family deity.

An ancient and historical monument which has preserved the indigenous architectural features is the old Palace at Padmanabhapuram. All the buildings in it are elegantly designed and display a simplicity of architectural style characterised by pointed gables, dormer windows, and long corridors. The earliest of the structures was built about 1335 A.C. The most noteworthy edifices are the entrance hall (*poomukham*), the council chamber (*mantrasala*), the *natakasala* (theatre hall), the *puja-mandapa* (place of worship), the Saraswati shrine, and above all, the *upparikka* (storeyed building) which contains well preserved mural paintings described later in this book. The secular and religious structures in it are enclosed by a square stone fortification of about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles perimeter, built for the defence of the Palace and the buildings within.

From about the latter half of the nineteenth century there has been a marked decline in the construction of houses and

palaces in the State. Civil architecture as a fine art became almost extinct, and there was a general indifference towards the perpetuation of ancient architectural styles and designs. The result was that buildings after European styles came to be constructed. Among the public buildings which still preserve the indigenous style with its characteristic gable roofs, the Government Museum and the Golf Pavilion call for special mention. The residential houses and public buildings which came to be constructed in the early part of the twentieth century are also not characterised by any distinct architectural features or style. But with the accession of His Highness Sri Chitra Thirunal in 1931, a very necessary renaissance of art has been brought about. Koudiar Palace, the residence of His Highness, is a monument of the best eastern style of architecture, improved in the light of modern requirements of health and sanitation and also of stateliness and dignity. Though this Palace has none of the architectural pretensions of costly edifices elsewhere in India, it is imposing in its simplicity, elegance and neatness.

CHAPTER III

SCULPTURE IN TRAVANCORE

By R. VASUDEVA PODUVAL

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SCULPTURE IN TRAVANCORE

The art of sculpture in Travancore is as old as its architecture, and has remained essentially the same throughout the long period of its history, whatever distinctions in the conception and expression of forms may be noticed by connoisseurs and students of history. The arts of representation occupied in Travancore a subordinate place to its architecture. Sculpture in particular was designed only as a decorative element of an architectural scheme, and was therefore determined by the canons and exigencies of the architectural setting of a building. Within these boundaries however there has been a conscious artistic striving for creative expression in plastic arts in which are reflected the religious enthusiasm of the people and their taste for decoration and embellishment.

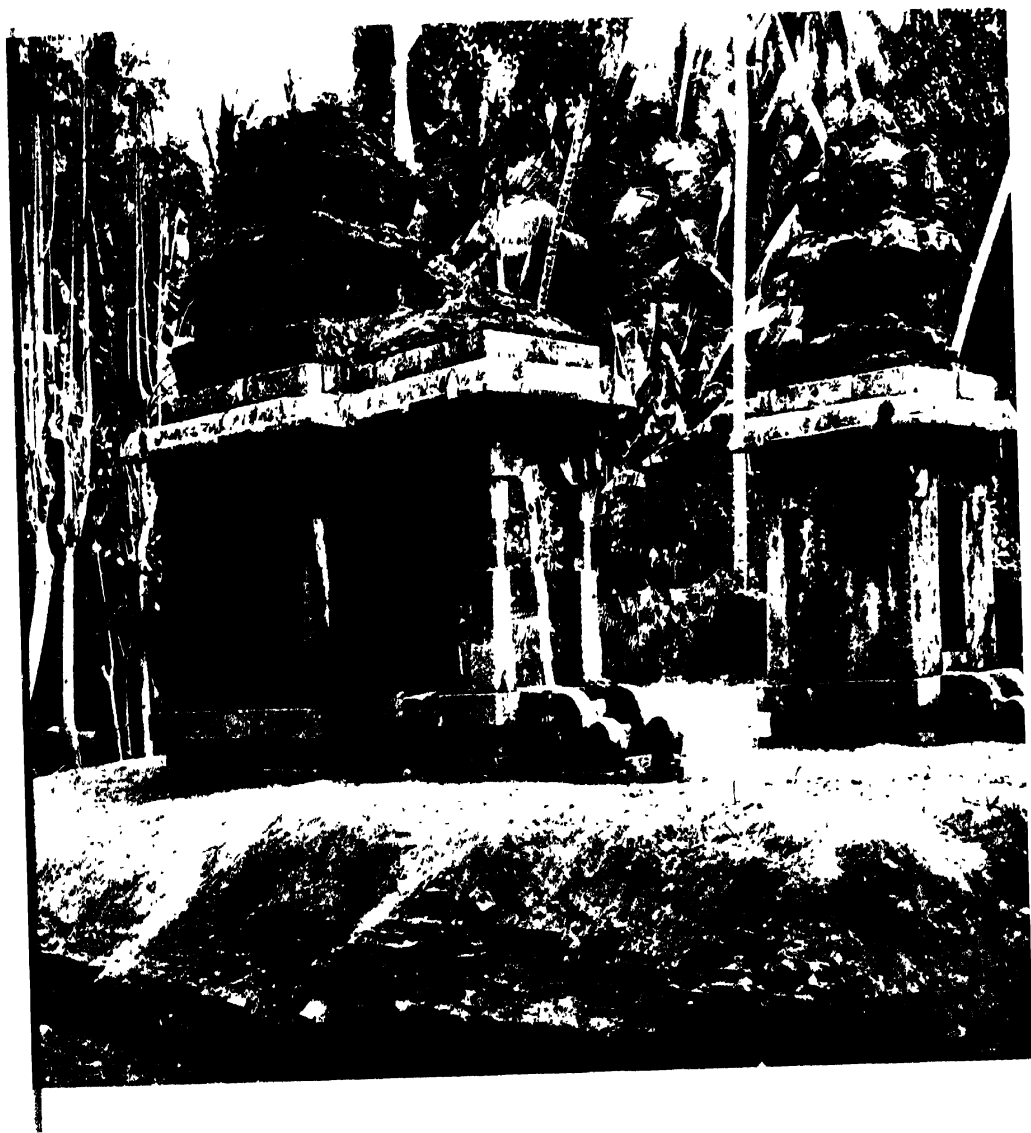
Most of the earlier sculptors were artists, not merely carvers; and they always created something new and original in stone, the best material for sculpture as it has the quality of permanence. The earliest specimens of sculpture in stone are the three figures found in the Cave Temple at Kaviyur, which belong to the eighth century A.C., if not earlier. The first is that of a *Dwarapala* (guardian) in life size in the niche to the left of the entrance of the cave. His head-dress is tall and conical. From beneath it his hair falls in picturesque curls on his shoulder. He leans on a formidable club around which a cobra has entwined itself. He has no *yajnopavita* (sacred thread); and the ornaments that are worn by him are the *karnakundala* (ear-ring), *hrinmala* (necklace), *udarabandha* (girdle), the *bahuvalaya* (wrist ornament), and the *urusutra* (hip-belt). The other figure is different in look and pose: he has his hands crossed on his breast, and stands with head slightly bent in a deferential attitude. His hair is a tangled mass knotted in the middle, and the ornaments that adorn his person are the same as those of the *Dwarapala*. Both the figures

are tall and well-built. The third one is a standing life-size figure of a bearded man. He wears his hair in the top-knot fashion peculiar to Kerala. The ears, though damaged, show signs of having been decorated with ear-rings. He has no *yajnopavita*, and wears only a lower cloth reaching down to his shins. He holds his arms akimbo, and his left hand rests on his hip and holds a jug-like vessel with an oval body, a long stoppered neck and short thick spout.

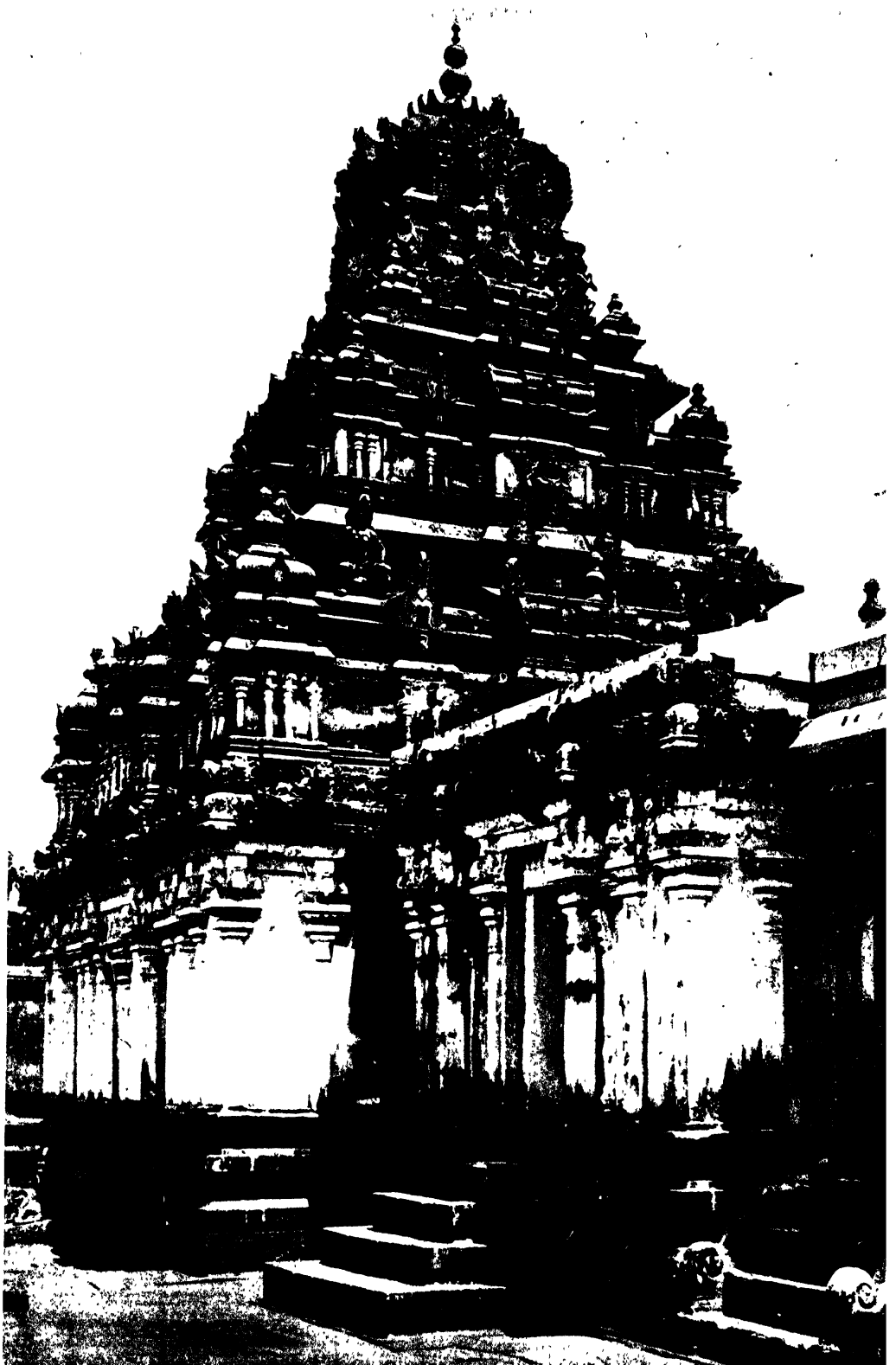
Belonging almost to the same period are the rock-out reliefs at Vizhinjam near Trivandrum, bearing a close resemblance to later Pallava work. Owing to age-long exposure to sea-wind, sun and rain, the figures are considerably weathered. They are tentatively identified as Durga on Mahishasura on the left side, and a male and female figure on the right. Their pose is calm and meditative.

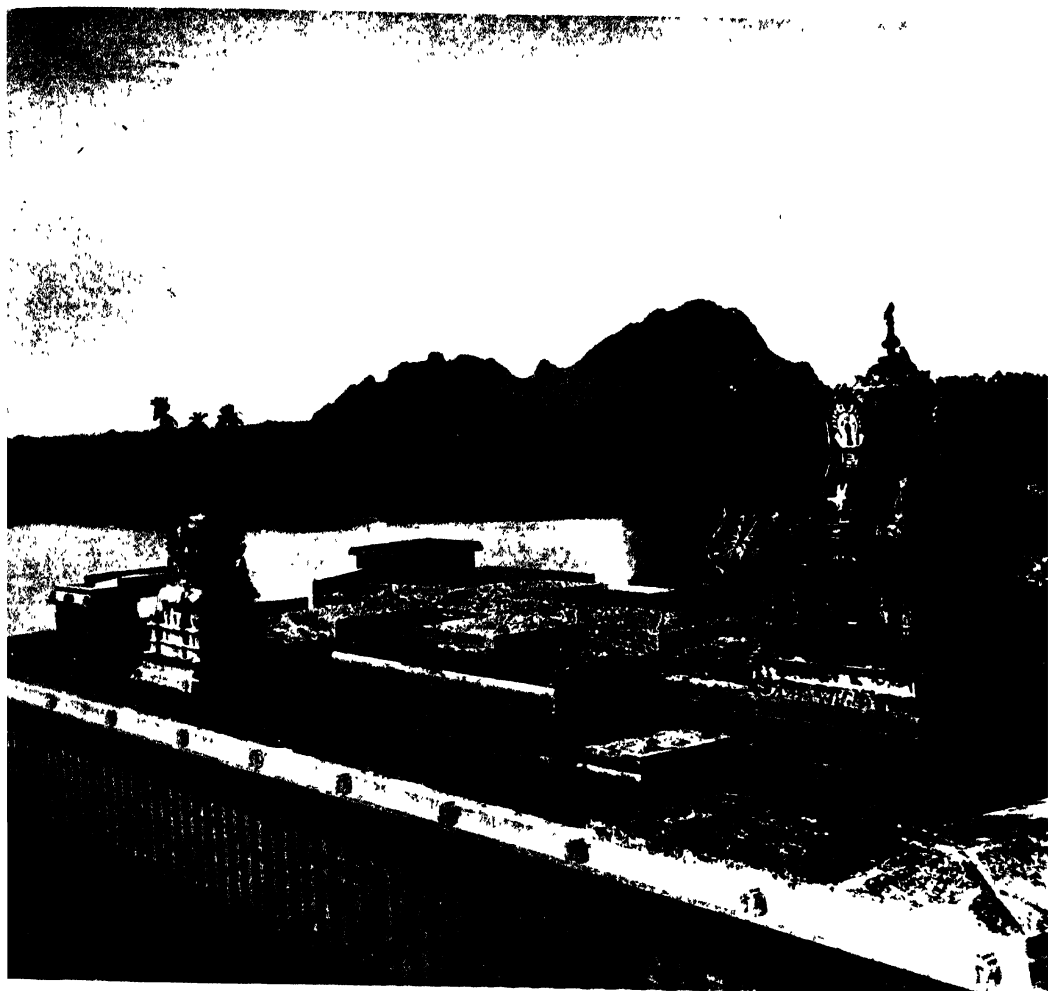
Five stone images of the Buddha discovered by the Archaeological Department in Central Travancore (Travancore Archaeological series, Vol. II, Page 121-125) are fine examples of ninth century sculpture. All of them are seated images of Buddha in the *yogasana* posture. The first is known as Karumadi Kuttan, from Ambalapuzha, in whose figure the *ushnisha* (top-knot) and *jwala* (flame) on the head, and traces of the upper cloth passing over the chest, are very prominent. The second is the Buddha image at Mavelikara which has become an object of worship by the people of the locality. On it the *ushnisha*, *jwala* and the upper cloth worn in the *upavita* sacred thread fashion are clearly visible. The third is the image at Bharanikkavu and is executed very elegantly; the upper cloth, particularly the many folded part of it, passing over the left shoulder and lying flat on the chest. The fourth one is from Maruturkulangara, and is now placed on the road-side near the Taluk Office at Karunagappally. The fifth image, without its head—was discovered at Pallikkal in the Kunnathur taluk, and is preserved in the Government Museum at Trivandrum. The cloth worn is shown running over the ankles, chest and shoulder, its folded portion being thrown on the left shoulder and descending down the chest.

PLATES I TO XXIX
ARCHITECTURE

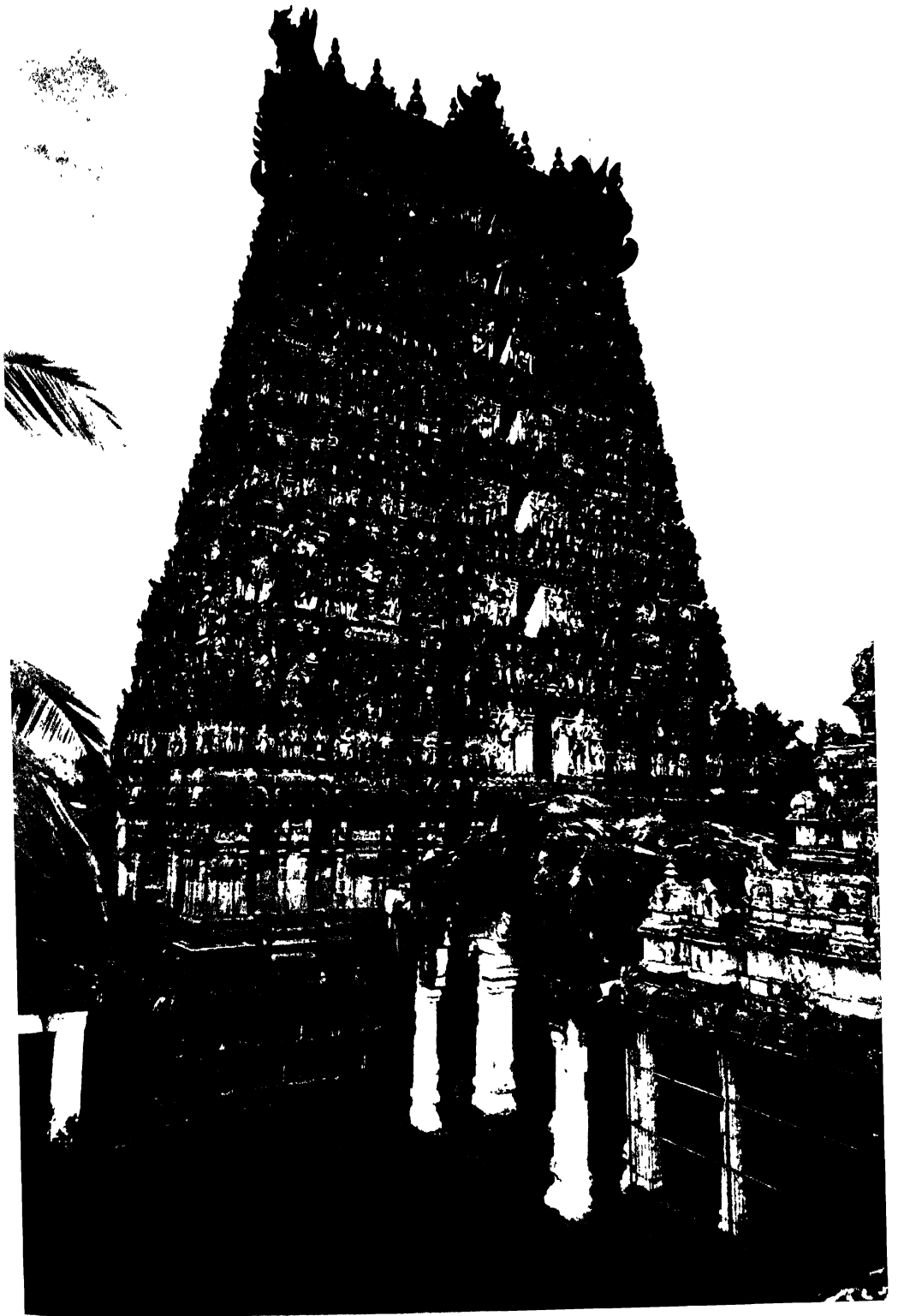




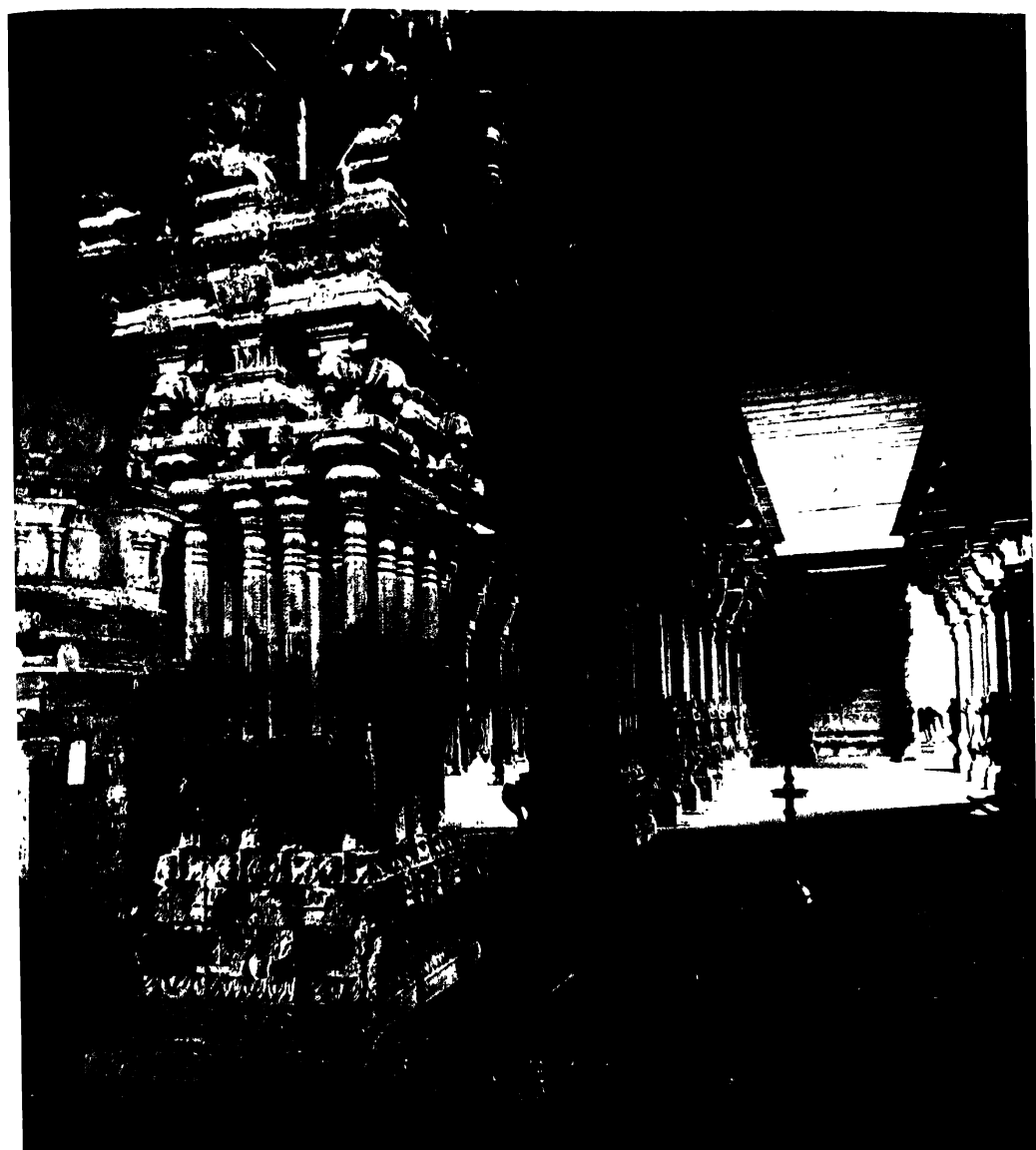








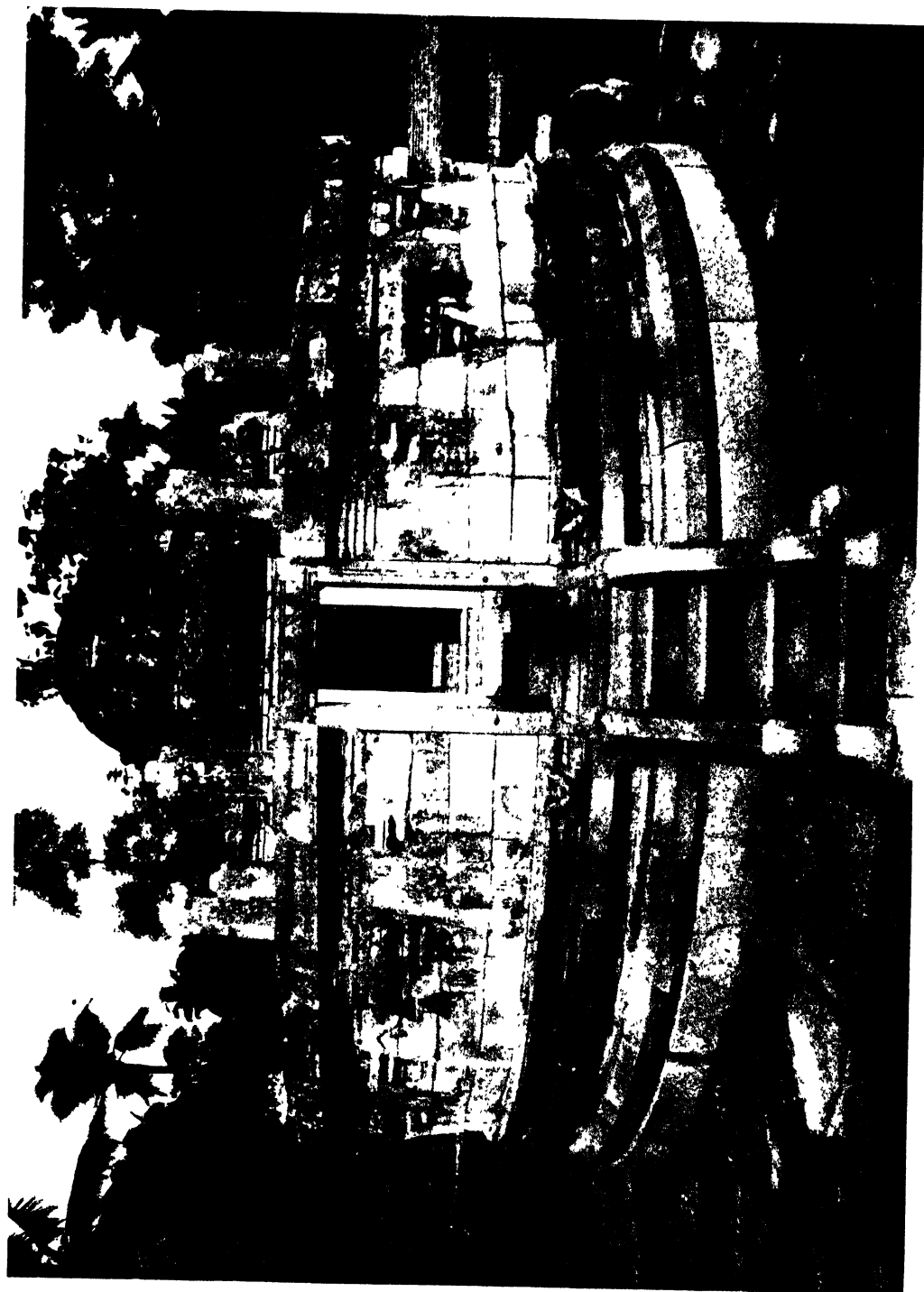






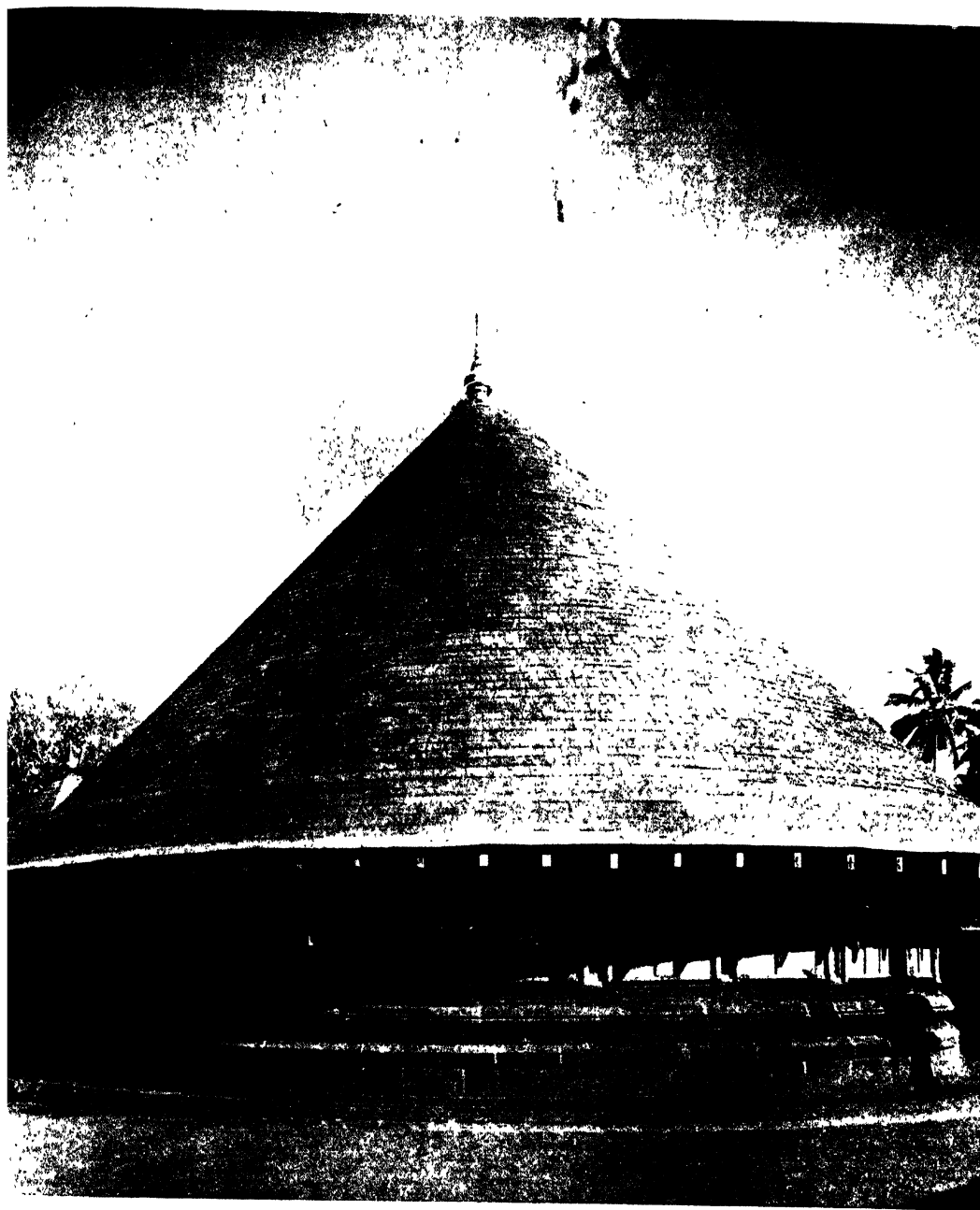




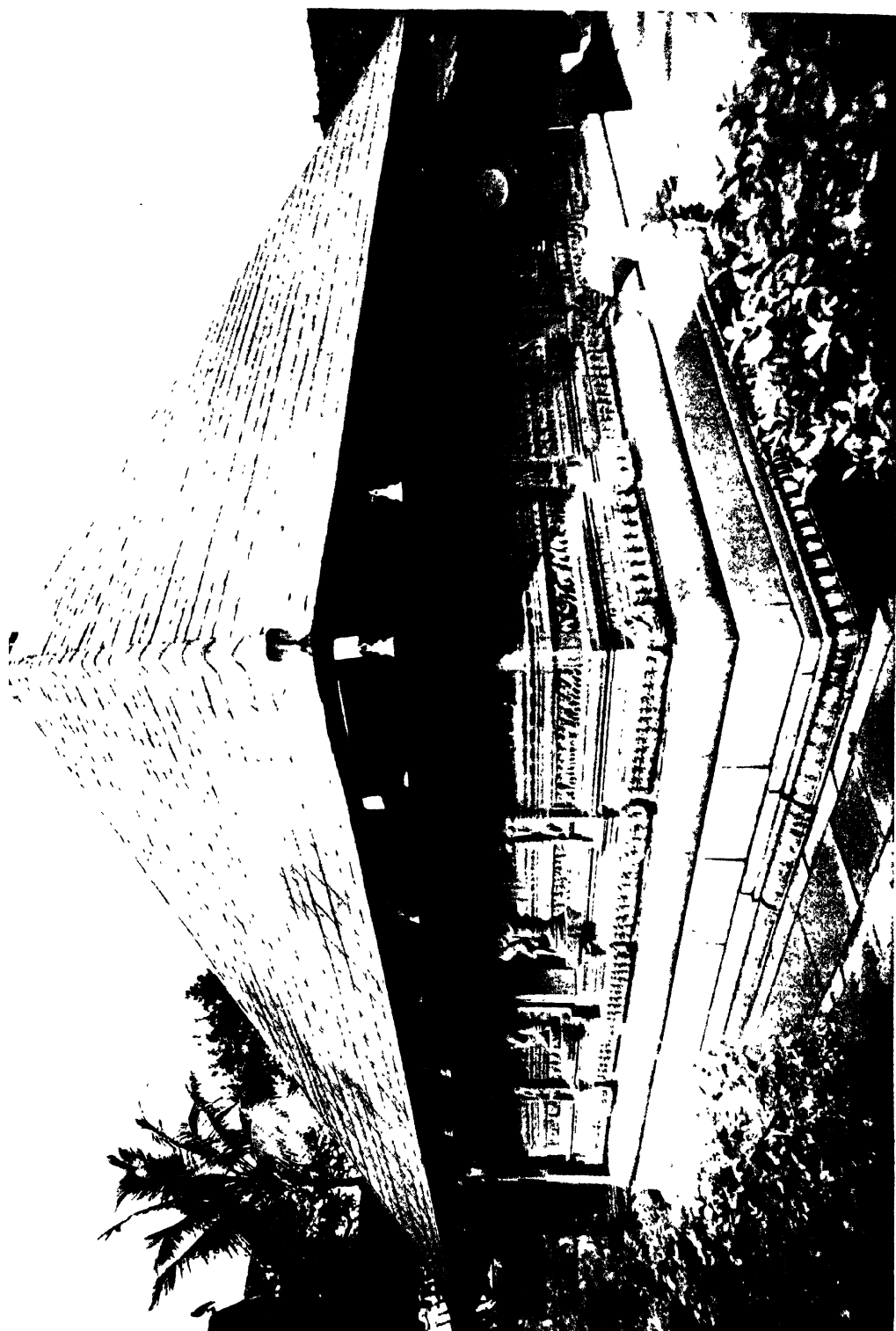


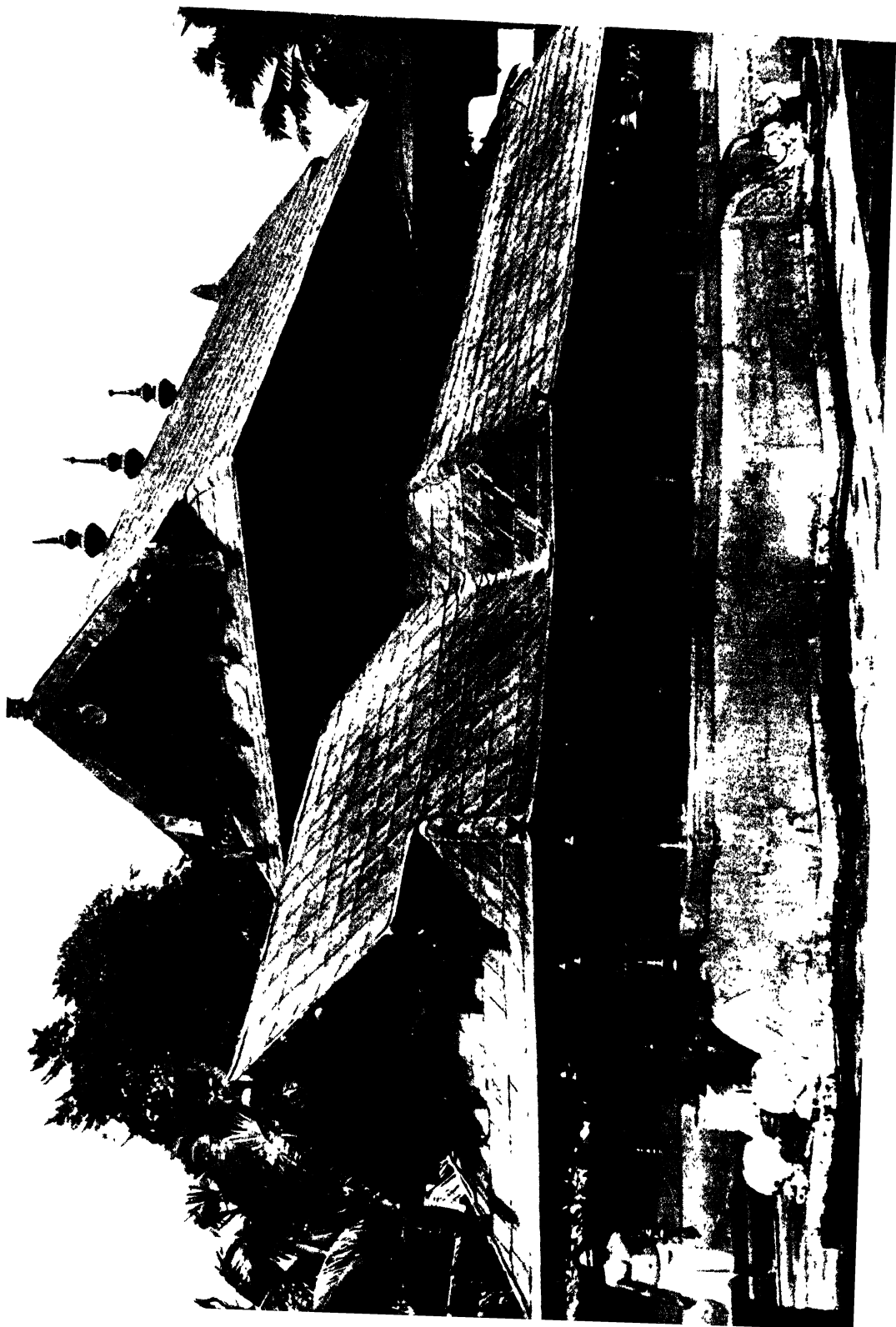


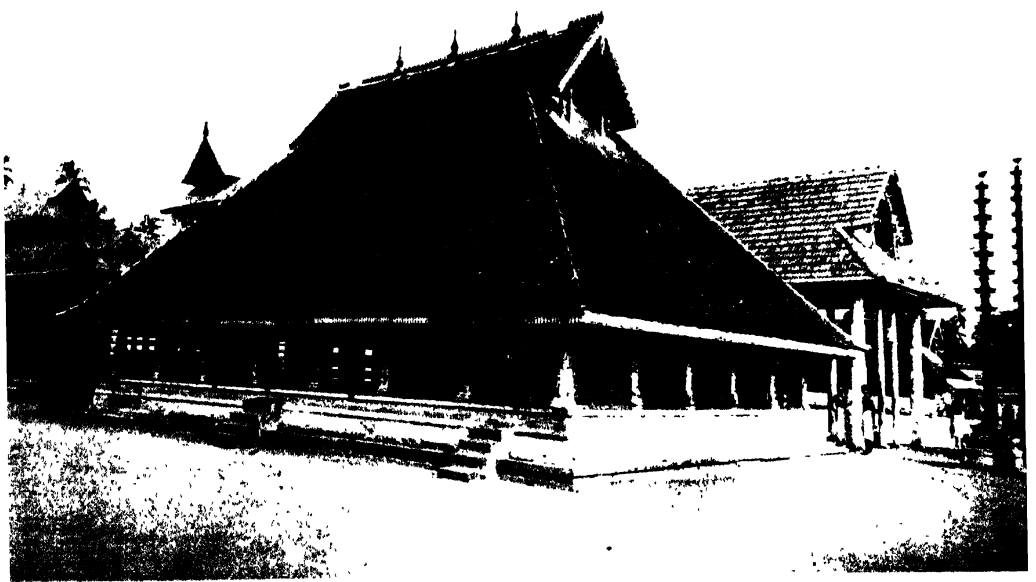


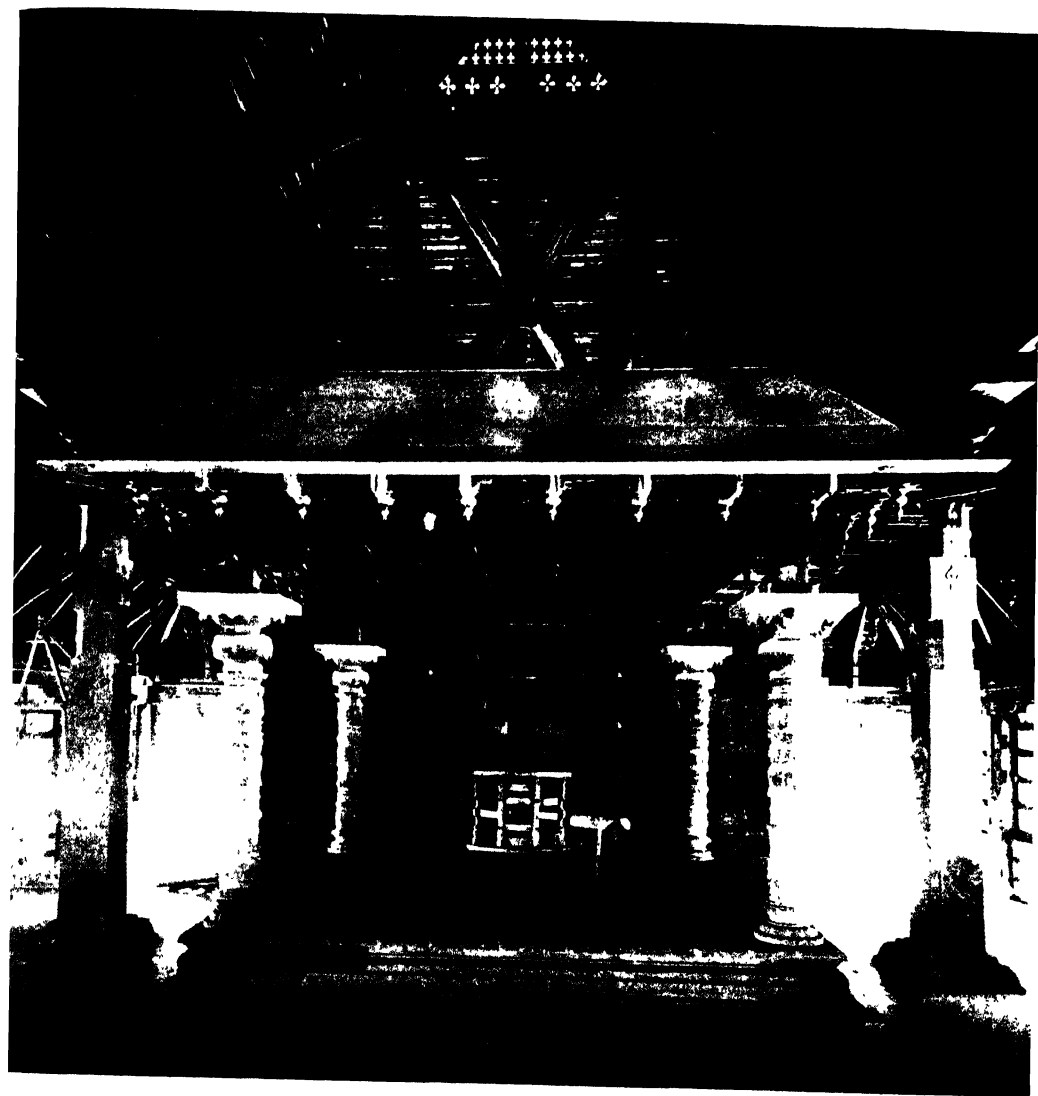


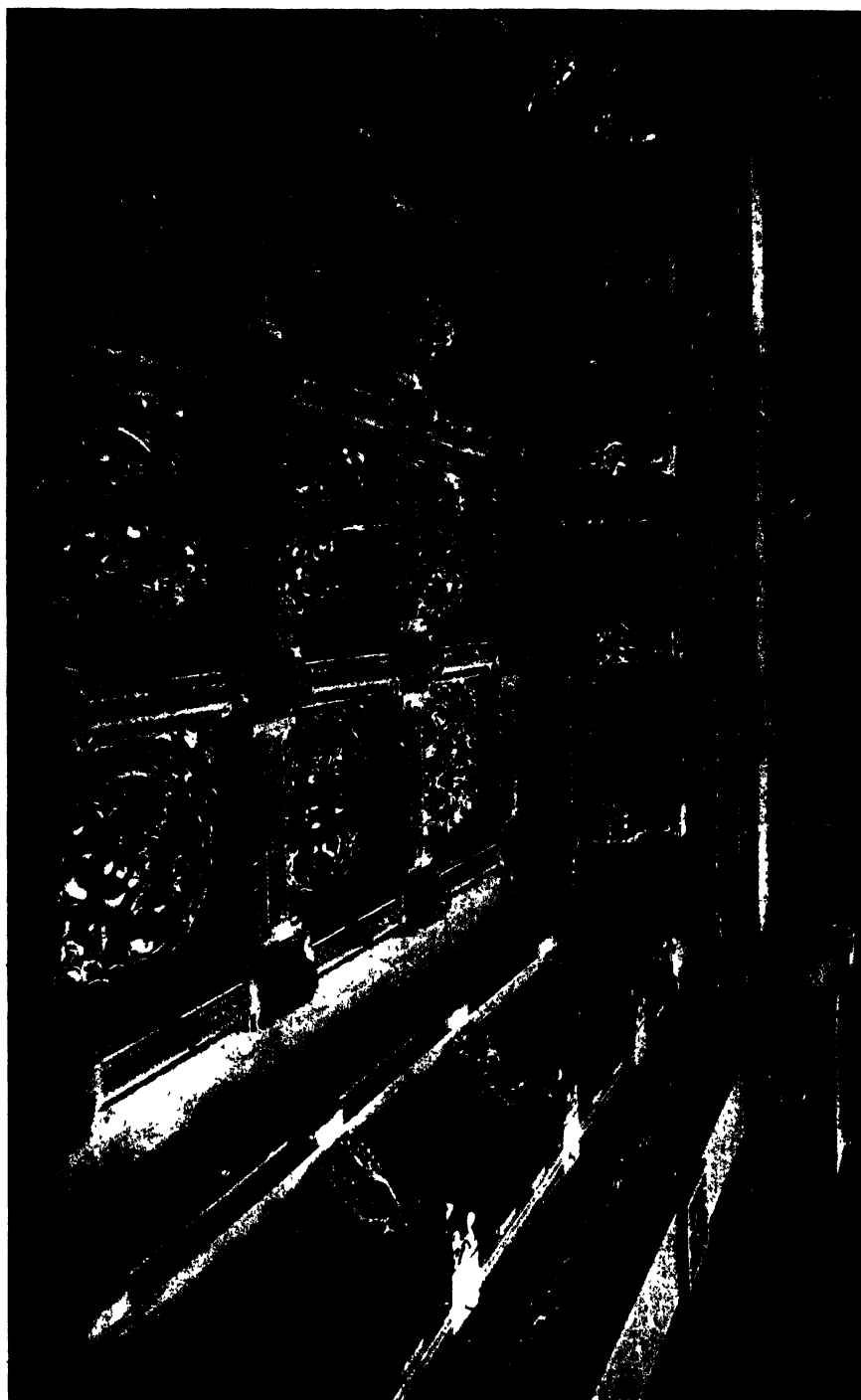






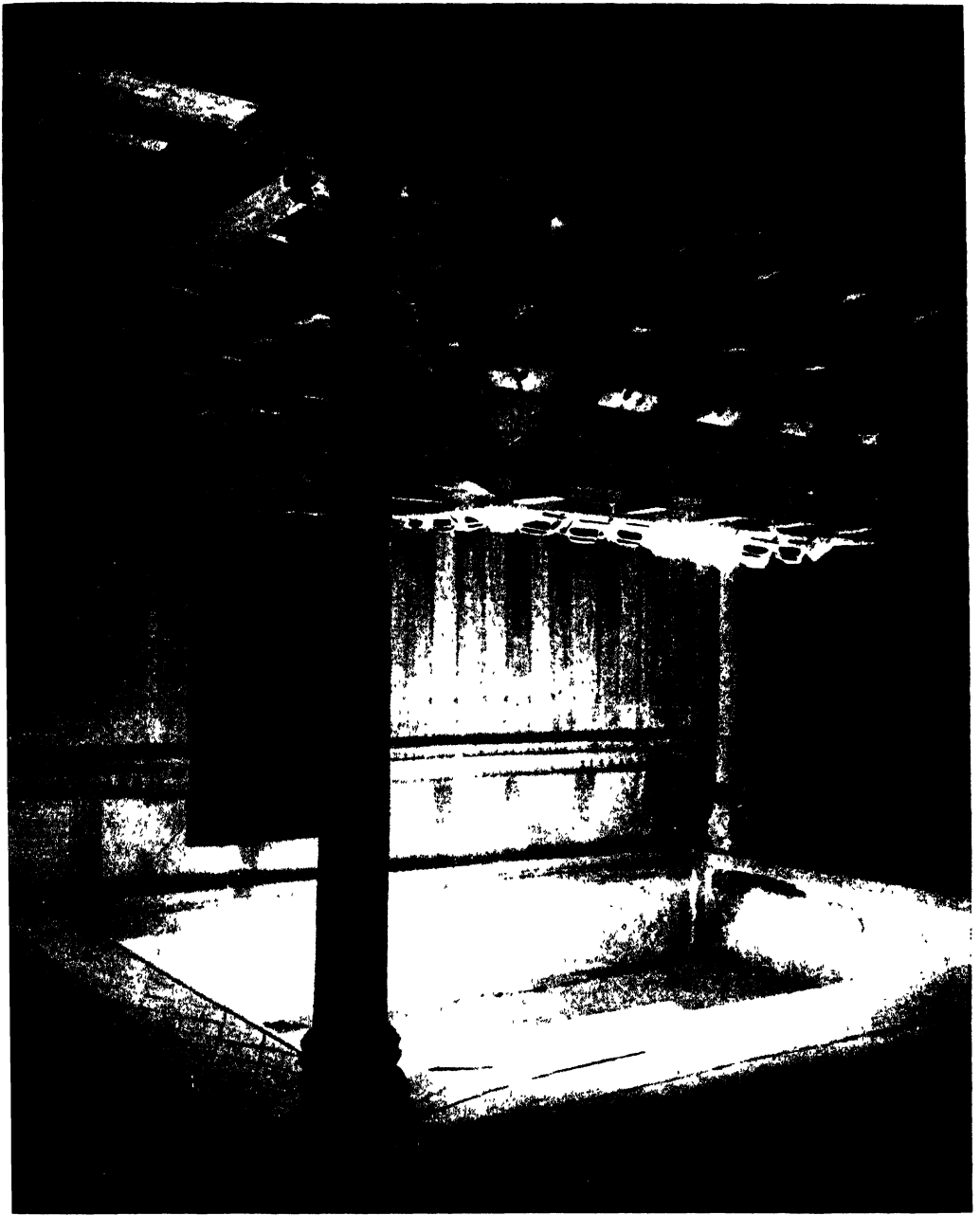


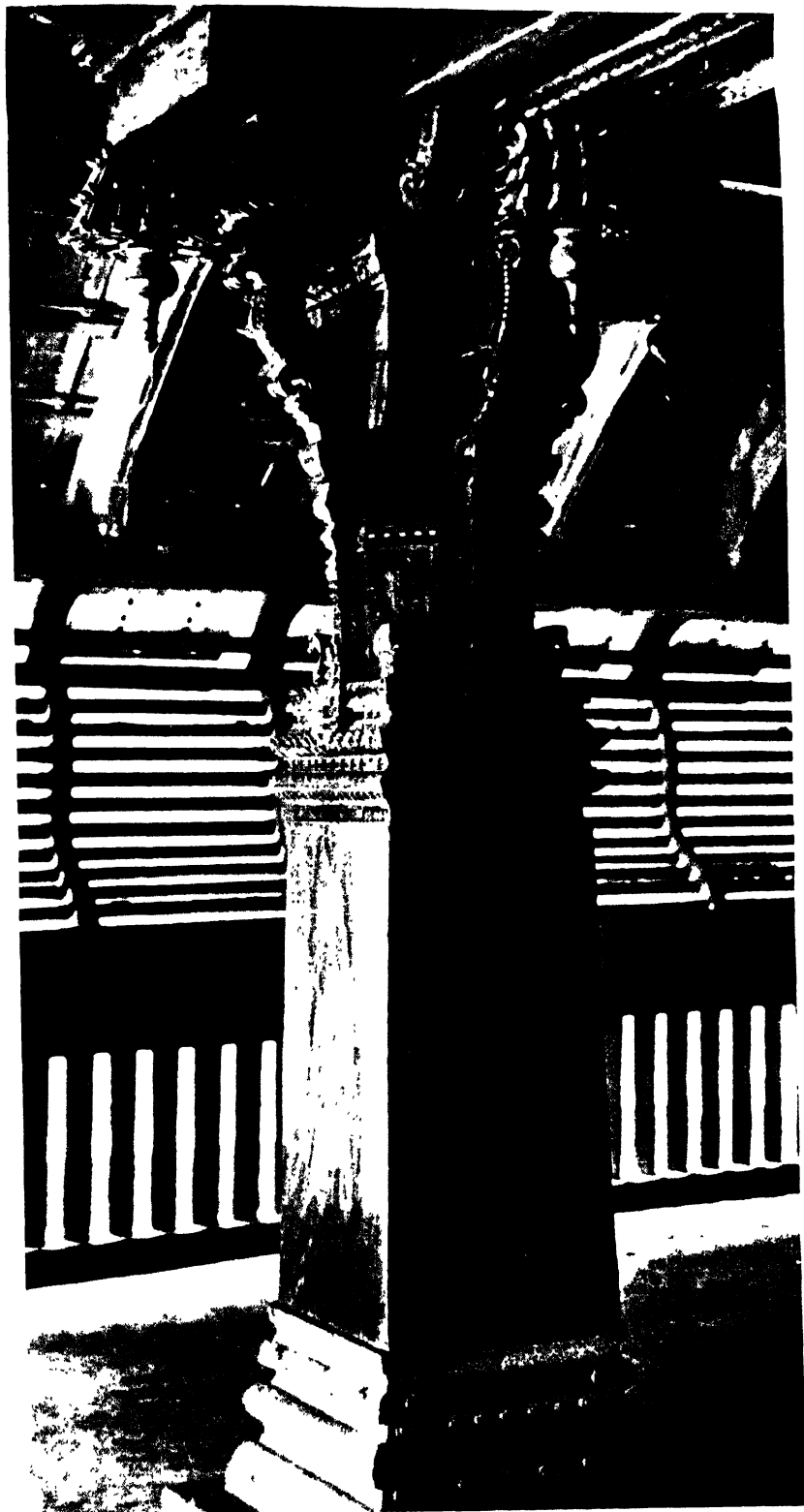




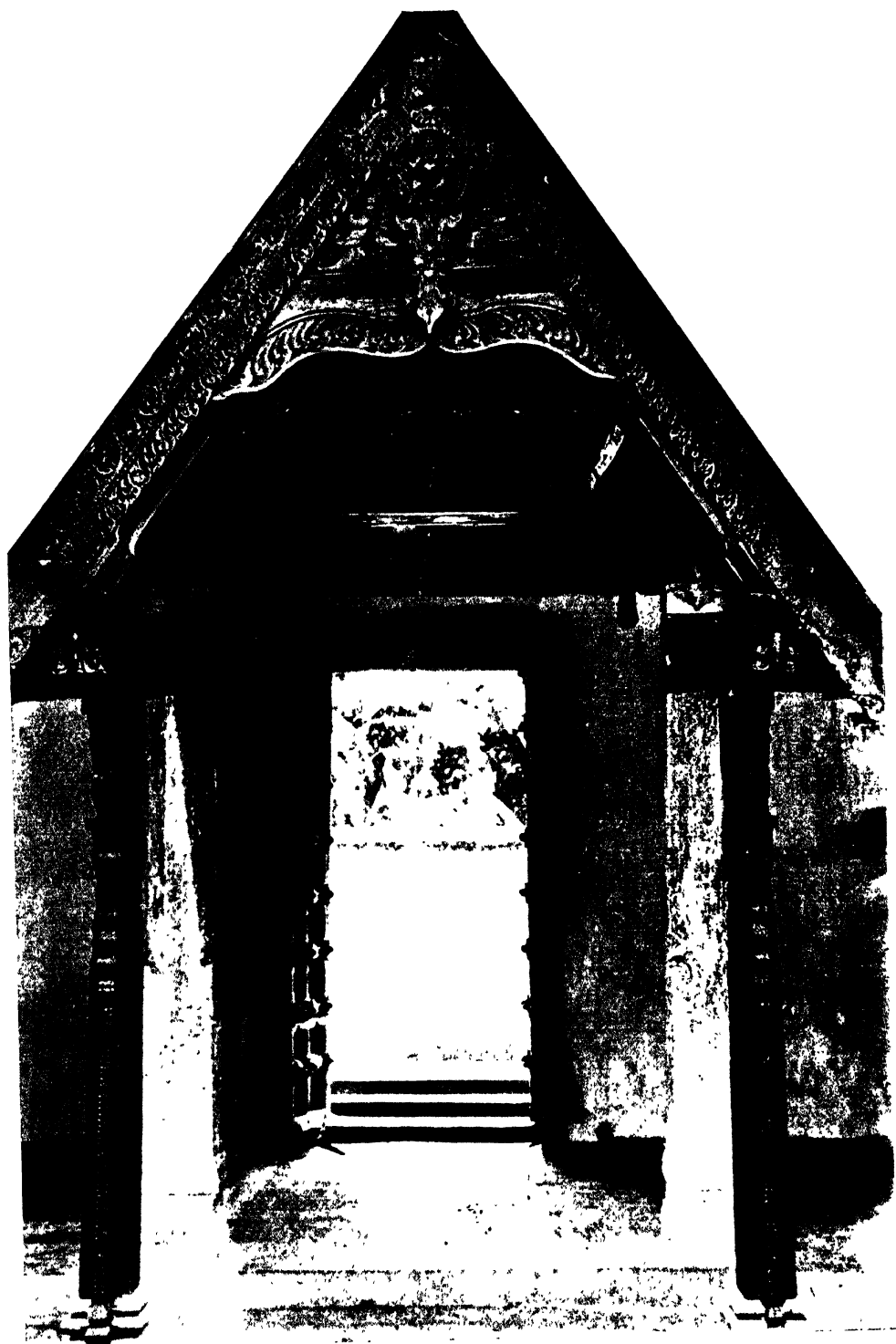


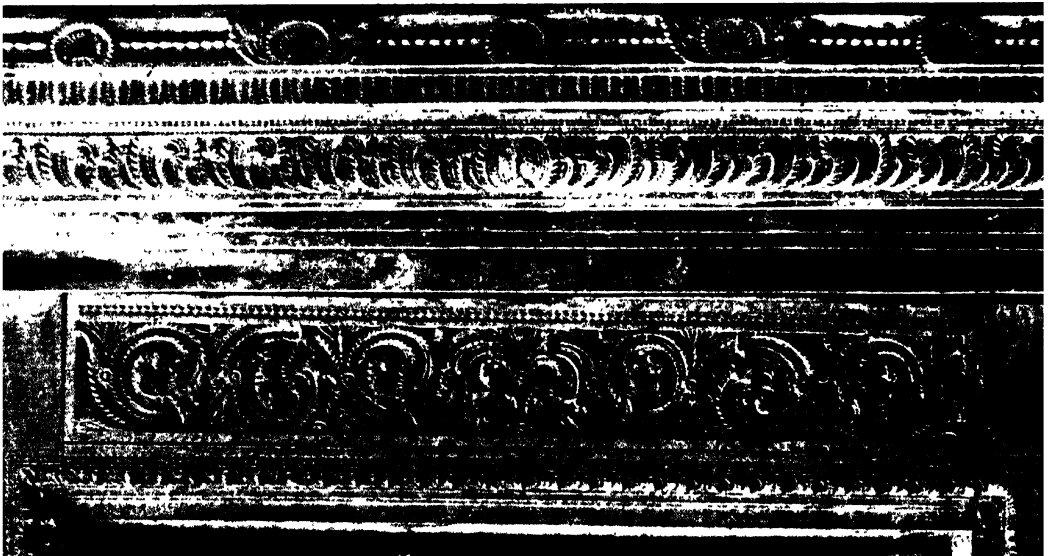
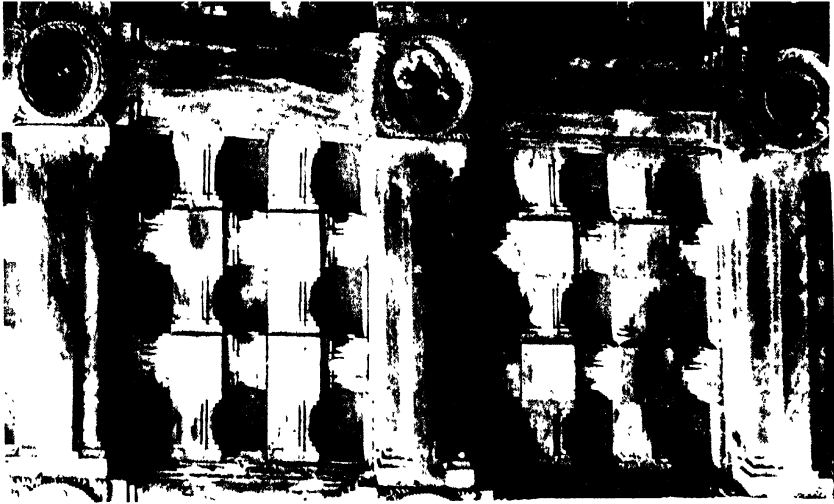


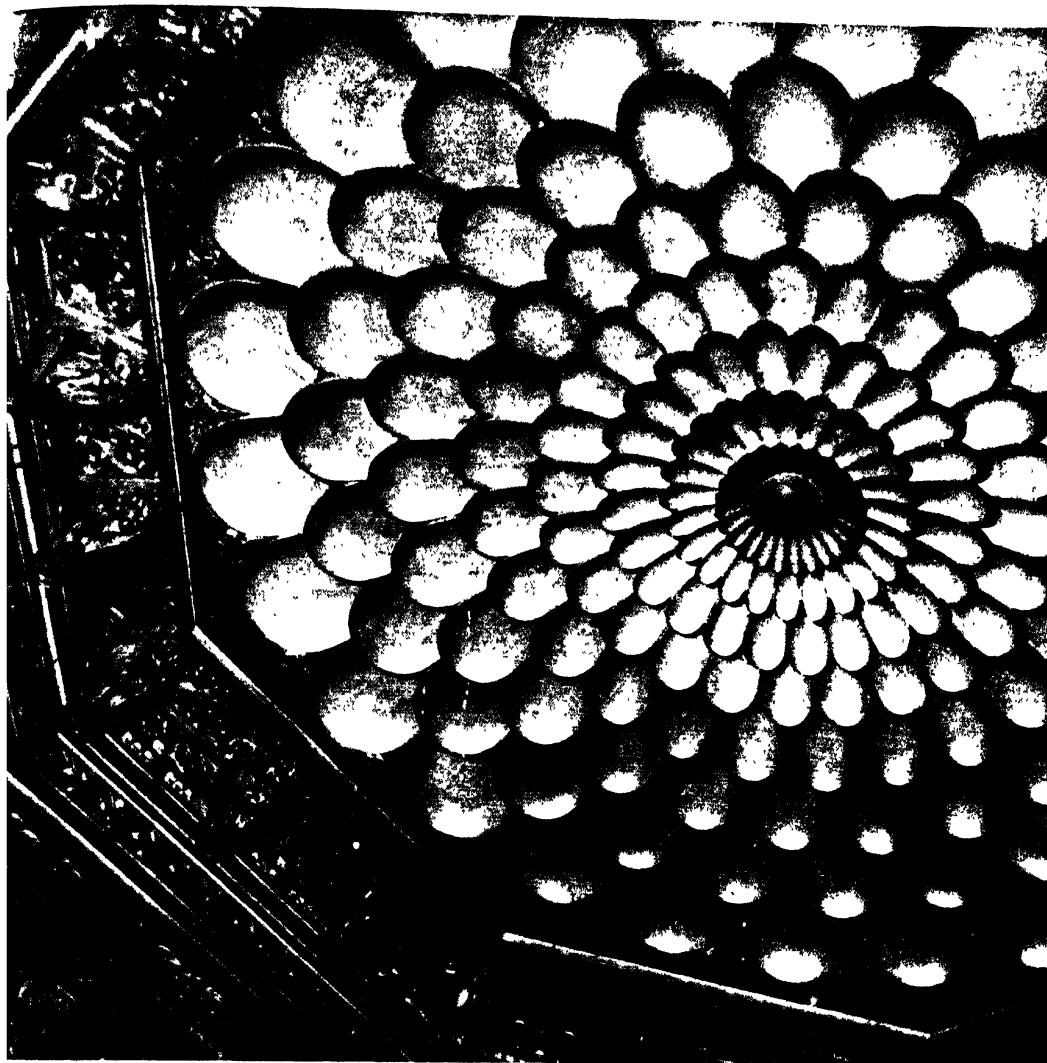












To the same period belongs a group of Jaina images carved on the overhanging rock of the Bhagavati temple on the Tiruchanattumalai at Chitalar, Vilavancode taluk, in South Travancore (Pl. XXXIII). They are the figures of Jaina Tirthankaras and of Padmavati Devi. The cropped head, the hanging ear-lobes, complete nudity, the contemplative mood, the yogic *padmasana* (lotus-seat) posture and the *simhasana* (lion-seat) with the figures of fly-whisk-bearing *yakshas* (semi-deities) *vidyadhara*s (demi-gods) and other *devatas* (deific attendants) are particularly noteworthy. The image of the Tirthankara, seated in yogic *padmasana* posture on a *padmasana*-seat has a triple umbrella over him. On either side is a *yaksha* or *vidyadhara*, each carrying a fly-whisk. Above the head of the left *yaksha* is a *deva* (celestial being) depicted as flying in the air, offering worship to the Tirthankara below.

Next to this figure, on its left, stands Parsvanatha Tirthankara, a tall and graceful figure, perfectly straight and stark naked, whose eyes indicate deep trance. His head is sheltered by a three-headed cobra. Near it, on the left, stands Padmavati Devi, who wears a *makuta* (head-dress) on her head, and two big *kundalas* (ear-rings) in the ear-lobes. Her right hand is lifted as if to hold a flower, and the left rests on the hip. She is clothed only from the waist down. A seated figure on the left hand of Padmavati Devi has a lamp-stand on the right and another on the left, and also two fly-whisks similarly placed, just above the lamp-stand. These two objects belong to the *ashta-mangalyas* (eight auspicious articles). The image on the right in the next illustration is seated on a *simhasana*, the back of which ends on either side of the figure with a rearing lion. On the right and left there are the *yakshas* bearing fly-whisks in their hands. Over their heads are Devas holding their hands in a supplicating posture. The face of the Tirthankara is peaceful. The figure of Padmavati Devi stands upon a *padmasana*. Like Durga, she has a lion as her vehicle, shown on her right. On the right stands the figure of a temple attendant carrying something in a bowl in her left hand. On the left of the Devi stand two short male figures in reverential

attitudes. The Devi has her right arm bent and lifted up, and on it she has a parrot.

Six other Jaina images (three seated figures of Mahavira Tirthankara, a seated figure of Parsvanatha, another of Parsvanatha standing, and the sixth of Padmavati Devi) are found in the Nagaraja temple at Nagercoil. The images of Parsvanatha and Padmavati Devi and one of the images of Mahavira are sculptured on the pillars in the *mandapa* in front of the central shrine. The standing figures are all sheltered by a five-hooded cobra, their arms are hanging down and their feet close together. On the head there is no *ushnisha* or *jwala* as in Buddha images. All the images are seated on the *simhasana*; and the *yakshas* carrying whisks are shown in front of the Prabhavali (halo) surrounding them.

Images of Mahavira Tirthankara, Parsvanatha and Padmavati Devi, of the same period, are also found in the rock-cut cave temple at Kallil near Perumbavur, in North Travancore. The unfinished image of Mahavira Tirthankara, which is carved in half-relief on the facade of the rock-cave, is seated on a *simhasana* in the usual *yogasana* posture. Over his head is the triple umbrella and on either side of the back stands in reverential attitude the figure of a Gandharva, holding a *whisk* in his hand. On the right is the stone figure of Padmavati Devi having a metal mask. On the left of Mahavira is the figure of Parsvanatha with its back turned towards the wall. All these images, generalised in type and having a conventional shape, are iconographical models illustrating established traditions. They have however lively and expressive faces though they are shown in a tranquil pose.

The Guhanathaswami temple at Cape Comorin, erected in the time of the Chola King Raja Raja 1st (A.C. 985-1013) has some admirable specimens of stone sculpture (Pl. XXXIV). Above the easternmost niche of the south wall of the main shrine there is a group of sculptures in which the central figure is Ganesha, carved under a finely wrought floral device. To the immediate left of this image are a mouse and a goblin blowing a conch. Two demigods, one beating a drum, and the other holding a plate of offerings on its head, flank the deity on the

right side. There is a *yali* canopy over the top which is excellently carved. Above the second niche on this wall is a figure of Dakshinamurti (aspect of Shiva), sitting with his left leg folded at the knee and the forepart of the right leg hanging down so as to rest on an image of Apasmara (demon). The left hand, which is stretched out, is supported by the left knee, while the right hand shows the *chinmudra* (gesture of explanation) posture. The second right hand holds a *parasu* (axe) and the corresponding left hand an antelope. Two sages flank the image on either side. Surrounding a portion of the head of the figures is a *prabha* (halo), while exquisite floral work adorns the whole group. Above the niche, in the middle of the west wall, is carved the figure of Yoga-Narasimha (Vishnu as man-lion). This is partially mutilated. In the central niche of the north wall is an image of Brahma holding a garland of *rudraksha* (rosary) beads in his right hand, and a *kamandalu* (water pot) in the left. There are four flanking figures of Gandharvas (flying celestials) armed with sword and shield in this niche.

The ancient Vishnu temple at Trikkadittanam in Chengana-cherry taluk in Central Travancore has two *yali* panels with sculptures, belonging to the 11th century, and depicting two distinct types of ancient dances, *Kudaikkuttu* (umbrella dance) and *Kudakkuttu* (pot dance). The Kudaikkuttu panel is a good piece of workmanship and represents a dancer exhibiting his skill on the dais of a covered *mandapa* (assembly hall) with an attendant standing to his left and holding an umbrella. Two other attendants provide musical accompaniment on a *mridangam* (drum) and cymbals. Five *hamsas* (swans) are engraved on the roof of the *mandapa*. In the *kudakkuttu* panel the pose of the dancer is more vivacious, and the attendants are portrayed with more realism as seen from the agile bend of the drummer's body and the watchful pose of his head. The head of the dancer is dressed in the *karandamakuta* (bowl-shaped crown) style. Two pots are seen in equilibrium on the extended left and the bent right arms of the dancer, while three or four pots are seen dangling to be caught and thrown up in succession.

Two other panels depicting dancing figures presumed to belong to the 12th century A.C., and also two figures of *dwarapalas* carved with realism and vigour in black granite, are found in the ancient temple at Trivikramamangalam, 3 miles east of Trivandrum. The principal figures of the scene are dancing women, three in the central group and one each on the sides with attendants, beating the drum and cymbals. Like the dancing scenes in the Trikkadittanam temple, these also are carved on a *yali* panel shaped in the form of an arch and fixed to a flight of steps leading to the central shrine. The two *yali* panels are fine examples of the wealth of intricate ornament generally found on the balustrades of the ancient temples of the State.

Specimens of 13th century stone sculpture are rare; but a row of *bhutaganas* (goblins) and animals such as elephants and lions, and miniature floral scrolls encircling bearded faces of men, carved in convolutions, and an image of Parasurama with four hands, two of which hold the conch and the discus, and the other two the *parasu* (axe) and *hala* (plough), found in the temple of Tiruvallam, three miles south of Trivandrum, may be taken as typical examples. These show the remarkable exuberance of the creative fancy of the artists who made them.

An exquisite image of Vishnu, (Pl. XXXV) still preserved in the ruined Shiva temple at Neeramankara, two miles east of Trivandrum, may be regarded as an example of 14th century sculpture. This stone image is a *Yogasthanakamurti* (aspect of Vishnu) and has four hands, the back right carrying a wheel and the back left holding a conch. The front right hand is in the *abhaya mudra* (protection gesture), and the left rests on the hip in the *katyavalambitha* (hand to hip) pose. The *kiritamakuta* (conical cap) is supremely graceful. Across the chest is seen a *yajnopavita* (sacred thread) and round the neck are worn *hara* (necklace) and other necklaces. *Keyuras* (flat armlet) and *kankanas* (wristlet) the *udarabandha* (girdle) and anklets are also shown. The figure stands on a stone pedestal placed on a *padma-pitha* (lotus seat). Spiritual majesty is the fundamental characteristic of this sculpture.

The Sthanunathaswami temple at Suchindram (Pl. V) is in some respects the most splendid monument of the State, conspicuous for extent and lavish abundance of sculptural ornament belonging to the 15th and 16th centuries. The temple is crowded with stone images of various Gods and Puranic figures which constitute a splendid array of statuary in keeping with the imposing dignity of the architectural design of the temple. Much of the sculptural embellishment is found on the base of the *gopura* (tower) and in the *mandapas* (halls) inside, and also on the granite stone pillars cut from single blocks of stone. The dignity and massive simplicity of these pillars is heightened by their lustrous polish. Lotus, bead, leaf, creepers and palm-flower ornaments have been skilfully and profusely employed in the pedestals, shafts and capitals alike of the various pillars. On the architraves and capitals of pillars, moreover, the lotus, water-lily, and the trumpet shaped flower, as well as the thorn-covered fruit of the *durdhura* plant have been made subservient to their design; the proportions of the pillars are wholly equal to bearing the ponderous weight which they are made to support. The skill of the sculptor in handling such massive blocks of stone has supplied in two instances no less than 32 minor pillars in a single composite pillar, and in two other cases 24.

At the centre of the entrance into the lowest storey of the *gopura*, almost on the lintel of the gateway, are seen attractively carved images of Shiva and Parvati, seated on *Nandi* (bull), flanked by Vishnu, mounted on *Garuda* (bird vehicle) on the left, and Brahma riding on his vehicle, the *Hamsa* (swan) on the right. Equally attractive are the figures of Vishnu in the centre with the flanking figures of Indra with his *vajra* (weapon) and lotus; and also Varuna holding a sword and a noose. The panel of Maha-Vishnu and Lakshmi has Vishnu in sitting pose, holding the conch and the discus in his hands, and with one of his left hands passed round the back of Lakshmi who is seated on his left thigh; the right leg is hanging down. Similarly, the image of Bhikshatanamurti (Shiva as mendicant) in another niche, holding a drum and an axe, receiving alms from the hands of a woman whose left hand is engaged in

picking up the garment loosened from her body and fallen below the waist, is a notable piece of sculptural workmanship. In it a dwarf carries on his head the vessel of alms collected; the face of Bhikshatana (Shiva) is turned away from the woman.

An important piece of portrait sculpture found in the temple which belongs to the sixteenth century A.C. is that of Vira Udaya Martanda Varma, a Travancore King, depicted with all the signs of his royal status, and holding a sword in his right hand and a dagger in his left. The figures, probably of his nephews, are carved on one of the pillars of the Chempakaraman mandapa. These are marked by an elaborate elegance of workmanship showing the details of drapery, as well as an intricate lacing of all the parts in a rhythmical co-ordination of the body as a whole. Designed originally as decorative parts of the architectural scheme, and to fit into an architectural setting, these sculptures are also splendid examples of lavishly ornamented statuary.

Closely resembling the sculptured figures of the Suchindram temple, are the sixteenth century stone images on the pillars of the *mandapa* leading to the Nilakantaswami temple, Padmanabhapuram, of Karna, Parasurama, Kankalanatha, Venugopala, and others. These figures seem to be modelled after those in the Suchindram temple, and like them are full of vitality.

The sculptures of Kulasekhara Perumal, Sundaramurti and Cheraman Perumal, carved on the pillars of the Nandi Mandapa in the temple at Keralapuram, are good examples of seventeenth century sculpture. The donors of these pillars were private individuals; and it looks as if they were designed and introduced as part of a well-planned scheme by King Vira Ravi Varman to whom has been attributed in an inscription the construction of the Mandapa in 1607 A.C. These images are of the same style as those found in the temples of the adjoining districts of Madura and Tinnevely, where temple building and sculpture received great patronage under the Naika rulers. The figures of Cheraman Perumal and Kulasekhara Alvar are embellished with ornaments, and among those clearly delineated are the

diadem or crown (*makuta*), ear-ring (*kundala*), bracelet (*kankana*), armlet (*angada*), *udarabandha* or girdle on the waist, and the *nupura* (foot ornament). In both the figures the right hand holds a sword. The image of Sundaramurti expresses simplicity, devotion and self surrender.

The Sri Padmanabhaswami temple, Trivandrum, has preserved the latest relics of the best traditions of stone sculpture in the State, and is the receptacle of some of the finest examples of the sculptor's art of the 18th century. Both the Siveli Mandapa and the Kulasekhara Mandapa are embellished with a large variety of figures. The top of every pillar is surmounted by the figure of a unicorn; and the roof, the rafters and the beams are studded with designs and images worked with great artistic skill. Each of the pillars has in front the figure of a woman, holding a lamp in the palms of her hands, carved out of a single block of stone. Some of them are wrought in high relief, and represent mythological figures. All the images are compact and confined within the space determined by the block of stone out of which they are carved. The Kulasekhara Mandapa, in particular, is the storehouse of the best pieces of sculpture, and contains representations of various deities, especially of Vishnu and Shiva. The figure of Vishnu is a very fine example of statuary. The image is in a sitting posture. On its left is his spouse Lakshmi. The God holds in his hands the *shank* (conch), the *chakra* (wheel) and his other emblems; and at the back is a towering canopy made of a tree with numerous intertwined branches covered with flowers and fruits. Here and there on the branches monkeys, parrots and squirrels are depicted eating the fruits. Another interesting seated image is that of Vigneshwara (Ganesha) with his portly belly and stout but diminutive limbs. On his sides stand three Brahmin priests, performing *puja* (worship), one holding *nivedya* (food offerings) in his hand. The figure of the priest performing *puja* is a masterpiece of realistic art. Various other Puranic scenes and figures are also executed with scrupulous finish, such as Markandeya embracing Shiva, Krishna playing on the flute with the Gopis dancing, the incarnation of Vishnu as Vamana (dwarf), Kaliyamardana (Krishna trampling on a

serpent), and various scenes from the Ramayana such as the presentation of Rama and Lakshmana to Vishvamitra, the departure of Rama with his brother and wife to the forest, the abduction of Sita, the fight with Bali, the setting fire to Lanka by Hanuman and the fight with Ravana, etc. The story of the Bhagavata is also depicted in small reliefs. Trees, bushes and animals, such as parrots, squirrels and monkeys, are carved with remarkable life and grace.

The more conspicuous of the sculptures in the Padmanabhaswami temple have vitality, and at the same time possess poise and restraint. They are the latest examples of archaic conventions half naturalised, and bear testimony not only to native traditions but also to outside influence.

No noteworthy examples of sculpture seem to have been produced subsequent to the plethora of artistic output in the construction of the Trivandrum temple in the early part of the eighteenth century. This is largely due to the cessation of temple-building in the State, caused to a great extent by the wars for preservation and expansion in the latter part of the eighteenth century.

CHAPTER IV

THE FORM OF THE SCULPTURES

By STELLA KRAMRISCH

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Ageless and consistent in the simplicity of their shapes, the Kerala temples of Travancore are the standard by which all its other works of art are to be measured. Composure and amplitude distinguish its Dravida temples. These qualities particularly belong also to the stone carvings of Travancore; although they are but few in number, they are representative of South Indian sculpture from the eighth to the sixteenth century. No knowledge, no accomplishment has been withheld from them: at each phase the sculptures in the extreme South-West of India hold their own within this school. They are moreover imbued with certain qualities which, though not absent from Dravida sculptures outside Travancore, are not as conspicuous as they are in the Travancore sculptures.

THE STONE SCULPTURES

The rock-out figure of a donor or chieftain, in Kaviyur (Pl. XXX) is closely related to Pallava *dwarapalas* and other figures of the Dravida country. Its pose in particular has its equal in the figure of a Pallava chieftain in the rock-cut Shiva Temple of Kunnandarkoyil in Pudukkottai. In style and type of costume there is nothing to distinguish this carving from any of the east coast, were it not that the accoutrements are simpler and adhere more to the body of the figure with its surging stance and commanding restraint; it is full of movement which, though almost invisible but for the slight bend of the right knee, the even more slightly raised ankle of the left foot, makes the figure erect with proud attentiveness, reticent and rock-bound. Its composition, of cylindrical volumes, heavier towards the top, is held up by the vertical cylinders of the legs whose straightness is underlined by the ends of the scarf; they fall symmetrically on either leg and as far down as the short loin cloth.

Another figure, of a bearded Rishi in the same cave has none of the sculptural quality of the Chieftain's shape; its

animation is more on the descriptive side. The naturalism of this figure is familiar to Pallava art; it is assigned its place in a relief like that of the Descent of the Ganges in Mamallapuram, where the shape of the emaciated Rishi is poignantly part of the array of figures with which this relief is replete. The many possibilities within Pallava sculpture are represented also outside the central school. One would, however, expect amplitude and calm, a generous spacing of lines and planes in the stone sculpture of Travancore if the figure of the Chieftain, as their representative, stands at the beginning of its history.

A hitherto unidentifiable relief, to either side of the entrance of the cave temple of Tirunandikkara, though unfinished, has all these qualities of Pallava work (Pl. XXXI). It would thus appear that the rock-cut sculptures of Kaviyur and Tirunandikkara in the eighth to ninth century represent a continuation and form part of the "Pallava" school.

These Hindu sculptures carved in the rock are followed in the ninth century by a group of Jain reliefs, cut in the Chitalar Hill (Pl. XXXIII), and by images of the Buddha, from Mavelikara, carved in the round (Pl. XXXII). These hieratic images have a breadth which relieves their dogmatic tedium. The images of Padmavati Devi, moreover, of which Pl. XXXIII shows but little, have all the ripeness and leisure of images of the Goddess carved throughout India in the ninth century.

The same qualities, however, of breadth and calm of form, where they do not rest on a state of inner realization of high tension, are easily substituted by a wide-spread emptiness of ponderous expanses. This danger was not avoided, and weighs on some of the carvings, such as the central image of Brahma over the central niche on the north wall of the Guhanathaswami Temple at Cape Comorin; it belongs to the eleventh century (Pl. XXXIV 1). The carvings on the tympanum of this "massive door" are of the greatest interest even though, or because, their total effect does not do justice to the care bestowed on the consistent imagery of the shapes carved therein. Their composition is traditional. A *makara* at the springing line of the arch spreads its foamy, curly tail beyond the frame of the

“massive door”, thus forming a broad triple arch. The *makara* is the foremost monster of the sea, all that is turbulent, potent and productive in the sea has gone into the making of its mythical shape. Untold wealth proceeds from its wide-open jaws; pearls in strings and festoons and valiant sprites,—man’s fighting spirit—, armed with shield and sword; hardly discharged as yet from the monster’s formidable jaws, they rush exultantly, and turn against its deathly, pearly rows of teeth. Other more portly and sedate creatures, provocative in their gestures, seated on its haunches, spur it on. All these sprites in their paradoxical mood of elation and attack, issuing from, or swallowed by, or joy-riding on, the monster of the deep, are carved against a background of foaming curls and preciously wrought jewellery in which are shown the movement and wealth of the primeval waters. In them, together with their fertility, are born, the dangers of life and their conquest; the joy of being part of this turmoil which ascends from the deep, from the monster of the sea, the *makara*, and is swallowed by it, in symmetry. Between beginning and end, above, in the centre, on the apex of the arch, Krishna is carved. He is shown victoriously struggling with serpents; they form, as it were, a halo around him.

The agitation in this carving is in the rich foam of scrolls on the outer edge of the arch. But the shapes that fill it do not convey by their form the frenzied life which their appearance and associations evoke. A turgid torpor makes slight and slack what should be tense and telling in modelling, curve and angle.

The facility in carving traditional symbols made their form frequently sink below their meaning. This is seen in some of the architectural embellishments of the temples, and is even more conspicuous in the wooden constructions abounding in reliefs. These lesser carvings were the work of competent, though not of inspired, craftsmen; they helped towards a reading of the context of the symbols but without appealing to the total sensibility of the devotee. Such shortcomings are not to be assigned to a definite period, and one should not conclude that the eleventh and twelfth centuries in Travancore marked a lessening of artistic power. No major work of sculpture of

that age being known, the lesser carvings on the temples are supplementary evidence on various levels of the craftsman's application.

In the carvings of the Guhanathaswami Temple, however middling their quality, a frenzied intricacy is shown. More clearly than in the carving reproduced here, this is seen around the image of Virabhadra on another Ghanadwara of the Guhanathaswami Temple, where waves of plants and birds appear as if tossed by an inner storm; it throbs in the wood carvings, preserved from a later age (Pls. LII-LIII) and represents a component of the stone sculptures, as much in the eleventh as in the sixteenth century. It is comprised, in the most competent examples, in the width of their modelled planes.

Far from marking a falling off in the course of centuries from the attainment of the Pallava type of sculptures, the power of the sculptures of Travancore is seen at its highest level (Pl. XXXV) in images of subsequent centuries.

Fluctuations in the quality of the reliefs may best be judged where allied subjects are represented, as on Pls. XXXIV 2 and XXXVI. A dancer, female in the earlier carving, male in the later, between two musicians, is the subject, poorly spaced in the earlier example and unconvincing in the movement of its figures, however pretty and ornate the dancer in the panel on the right may be. The later carving has rhythm in the powerful action of the *kudakuttu* (*kuda*-pot, *kuttu*-dance); it is carved on the lateral panel of the stair of the Kidangur temple and several centuries younger than the Trivikramamangala relief. Even so, in relation to the panel, the carving is none too well spaced, and the pots so deftly juggled by the dancer have not been utilised by the sculptor for a balanced distribution of the figures on the ground. Its upper part is blank.

In the earlier panels (Pl. XXXIV) 'pearl' festoons, delicately carved, clog the reliefs at the bottom of the temple, on the stair, as well as above the door. The architectural symbols are the same, *kirttimukha* variations (the Face of Glory) form the upper end of the arch of the steps; elsewhere it occupies the

position which Krishna holds on the apex of the arch in the Guhanathaswami temple. The "Face of Glory" has many components, one of them being that of the *makara*, first of water-monsters, another the lion, first of the wild beasts, the solar animal. Its face is also that of the mythical creatures, *shardula* or *vyali*, whose rampant shape is shown twice, on either side of the stair, once, standing on the head of an elephant, and again, diminutive in size, issuing from the proboscis of the *makara*. This particular place is usually—from the first century A.D. in the Kushana sculptures of Mathura—reserved for the sprites, the *ganas*. The range of the multiple meaning of these symbols and their synonyms was ingrained in the craftsmen and formed an ever ready vocabulary of mythical compositions. In their execution all craftsmen participated. When, however, a great task was entrusted to a sculptor equal to it, an image of the nobility of the Vishnu of Niramankara is the result (Pl. XXXV). In this image of the fourteenth century the spirit of Kerala has found a complete form through the medium of Dravida conventions. Broad and weighty, but without heaviness, are the body and limbs of this image. The magnificence of the image is in its proportions, where the high pillar of the crown attracts wheel and conch; symbols above the hands of the God, they surround the majesty of his face. This halo, in which the outer arms partake, swings around the upper part of the image and is traversed by the counter-movement of the lower arms which lead back to the total pillar of the God's upright stance, clad in scarves and ornaments. There the ascension of the halo is prepared in narrower, inverted arches. They span the God's powerful form; ripples of radiance in the shape of folds of raiment cling to his legs. In the upper part of the image the ornaments are convoluted vortices on chest, arms and crown; in the lower part they gleam in the flowing waves of ribands and draperies.

Few of the innumerable images of Vishnu have succeeded in showing him as the pillar and support of the cosmos whose radiance is that of the sun. The unknown sculptor of the image of Niramankara obtains this aim with means not purely sculptural. The folds, bows and bustles are pictorial elements;

the modelling of the body has some of the ease of the Chieftain's figure in Kaviyur. It is made planear; and yet, what volume of inhaled breath is hid in that chest and dilates the shoulders and make the face replete with supreme power! The gaze of the eyes is charged with it, and the broad mouth tastes its radiance.

It appears as if not only in the physiognomy of the form of this image but also in that of its face,—its proportions more square than elongated—the Kerala artist contributed a vision of his own. Power in the glance of the eyes and squareness of face are peculiar also to the Chieftain's figure (Pl. XXX) and might be specific traits of the physiognomy of the figures of Kerala sculpture.

The temple town of Suchindram, accomplished in architectural form, Dravidian in style, and Kerala by the application, contains amongst its many sculptures some of a nobility and livingness of form which, two centuries earlier, distinguished the Vishnu of Niramankara and at a distance of eight centuries at least, made the Chieftain in Kaviyur the gate-keeper of the future of Travancore sculpture.

In the large relief of Vishnu Trivikrama (Pl. XXXVII), the architectural frame and the panel of figures are of the same cast. The pilasters, though not specially devised for flanking this particular composition, yet keep pace in their sections with the drama enacted by the figures of the relief, and accompany its stages. Taken by themselves the pilasters are as elegant in their proportions as they are logical in their detail. No surface is empty and none is overwrought.

The Trivikrama composition has many famous predecessors in Badami and Mamallapuram about a millennium before its time; some of mediaeval date, in Osia, Rajputana, for example but none of the later reliefs on a scale and comparable in vision to the Suchindram relief.

The power of the God's step, the magnificent distortion of the leg darting upward and accompanied by the dancing gesture of the arm is as daring as the estrangement of the three arms and their weapons on the right side of the relief from the

body of the God. In their rotating movement they seem to burst forth from behind the leg, an aggrandised continuation of the horizontal axis of the arms on the other side. This other side of the image does not take part in the cataclysmic upheaval; there the God is nothing but beautiful and young—his club and arm provide the support of his stride. At the bottom of the relief, Bali, and Vishnu in his dwarf shape,—their contract confirmed by the rite of pouring water over the hands of the baby-shaped dwarf—; and rueful Bali, on the left, while they tell the story, also round off the feat of the great God. The region into which it reaches is light with the rhythm of the clouds; they accompany His great movement, and serenely subside in ordered rows when the celestials emerge and render homage to the God. Their heavenly counterplay to the great commotion which reaches to their sphere is devotional, their movements embody the music of the spheres. It pervades the pattern of the clouds.

While so surpassing a vision and its adequate form are not common among the carvings of Suchindram, nor in any other temple, the average quality of sculpture in the sixteenth century is high (Pl. XXXVIII). Uninjured by iconoclasm and unaffected by foreign form, stone sculpture in Travancore—and not only in the South of the State (Pl. XXXVIII illustrating a relief from the Kerala type of temple, in Vaikom; Pl. XIV)—maintained a high level of which Dravida art was the substratum and the illumination of the Kerala craftsman its actuality.

THE METAL IMAGES

The substratum remains Dravidian in some of the few metal images dating from the eighth to the sixteenth centuries. While certain local peculiarities are to be seen on each of the earlier images, these do not suffice to give them particular distinction. The eighth to ninth century image of Vishnu (Pl. XXXIX)—its attributes and hands similar to those of the Niramankara image, Pl. XXXV, and probably also of Pl. XL. 1—follows the Pallava school in its own humble way. In this lies its significance, for the Niramankara image, which was carved in stone about half a millennium later, is based on the very same idiom of form which, having kept pace with the centuries and the change

brought about in the various centres of South Indian sculpture, had developed a perfection of its own; not only are the attributes and the pose identical—images of Vishnu of this variety are known as Varadaraja in the Tamil country,—but the right hand of the Travancore images is not shown with its palm outward and pointing down; a round object rests on its palm and the fingers are bent towards it. Apart from this iconographical sameness, the heaviness of the ankles, justified in the stone sculpture, is even more conspicuous in the earlier metal images which also show an insistence on symmetrical parallel lines of the drapery, folds, etc., especially in the vertical direction. Similar, in the earlier metal figures and the later stone images, is also the *upavita*, the sacred thread, in its wide lateral curve, drawn towards the right arm of the stone image and passing over it on the metal images (Pls. XXXIX, XL 1).

In both the metal images the relation of accoutrements and body is of one kind if held against Dravida images from Tanjore, etc., in the Tamil country. The modelling of the body is summary, the ribands and ornaments relatively stiffened, and on account of their linear definition they appear more as devices laid on the body, than that they accompany its modelled shape as subordinate volumes. These are differences of degree. It is, however, the adherence to a particular selection that makes the images and the fourteenth century stone sculpture of Vishnu the work of a distinctive sub-school. The head of the small copper figure (Pl. XXXIX), however, follows the Dravida proportion; it is relatively very long; it is being carried indifferently as in most of the cult images of Vishnu. This applies also to the other metal image whose eyes are inlaid with rock crystal. Little is gained by this device, the mere material does not give greater radiance to the stereotyped if broader oval of the face. In neither of the metal figures has the craftsman done more than be correct in his work so that the image was fit to be worshipped. No direct vision made him see Vishnu, the support of the Universe. The copper image (Pl. XXXIX), though somewhat crudely executed, coheres in its form and has its own dignity, whereas the more sumptuous figure is sleek in its modelled parts, and for the rest shows a goldsmith's application to details,

petty and sharp. Such minutiae, unconnected with the modelling, rarely seduce the Tamil worker in metal, and especially not during the Chola age. At that very moment, however, love of detail misled many an image maker in Bihar and other provinces of Northern India in a way similar to the conscientious pedantry of the image, Pl. XL. 1, from North Travancore.

Metal images, especially on a small scale, travel easily, and are carriers of the teaching of the various schools. The bronze images, supreme achievement of the Dravida school of the Tamil country, dominated the output in metal images in South India. None of the other Southern schools attained to its refinement.

The Suchindram bronzes (Pl. XL. 2) give the likeness of inspired faces. When at their best, the sculptors of Travancore were particularly successful in giving shape to the far-seeing, beyond-looking gaze, not only in metal but in stone; while their delineation of individual likeness follows the typology of the Dravida school. In subsequent centuries images are manufactured in a broad patois of corresponding Tamil prototypes (Pl. XLII). Pedestrian and smug, they are far below the indigenous sensibility of other work in metal, and seem to have found favour with a certain class of patrons.

Far between though the few extant metal images are they show the range of this branch of art for about a millennium from the eighth century. Images as those of the Naga and Nagini at Nagercoil represent but one variety whose popularity did not stand in the way of metal work of a different order of Kerala form. Its supreme achievements are the *dwarapala* (door-keeper) figures in Trichur in Cochin.

The rafter shoes rescued by chance from dissolution, and now in the Travancore Museum (Pl. XLI), show one of the many uses to which metal-work had been put in wooden architecture. Some of the shapes in stone architecture, such as occur on the Buddhist railings in Barhut, in the second century B.C., might originally have been of metal, affixed to the wooden construction, and subsequently translated, together with it, into

stone architecture. The many medallions for example, having lotuses or various figures for their subjects, may have been metal discs on the wooden original. The rafter shoes, far from being homogeneous in the combination of their various motifs, show three distinct types assembled and overlapping. The lotus discs are cast in one with the rest of the rafter shoe, but this is true also of the images of the Gods, current types of Shiva-Nataraja, etc., which, together even with their pedestals serve as adornment and also secure a more firm hold of the rafter shoe. The third element, the band of scrolls, the one a series of curls, the other a continuous arabesque of flowery plumage, are at home particularly in Malabar, where the former pattern can be seen in stone carvings (somewhat broadened in its version on Pl. XXXVI) and the latter in paintings (closer parallels than the one reproduced on Pl. LXXV decorate the walls of the Temple in Trikotithanam). These various motifs were also not coined *ad hoc* for the decoration of the rafter-shoes, and if they are found also in paintings of the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries they could as well have been seen in others of the twelfth and tenth centuries, were these paintings still in existence.

A medley of forms and shapes like that of the rafter shoes has a certain strangeness; it should, however, be imagined in its proper setting, against its nearer background, the solid wooden rafter which was a unifying base of the disparate elements, whereas its wider setting amongst the carvings and paintings of the temple made it sink into the rich texture produced by art, of form and colour, of the total edifice. Seen, however, in their isolated condition, the several motifs are each full of zest and freshness, and while they are assembled from various sources the craftsman proved his competence in the liveliness of his presentation. This may be favourably contrasted with the stubborn assiduity in decorating a Vishnu image (Pl. XL). The comparison between these two instances of metal-work is made on purpose because centuries lie between them. In a traditional art, practised in thousands of temples,—and in how many multiples of thousands of paintings and carvings in them,—a vast repertory of forms and symbols is being drawn upon all the time, while master-craftsmen, by the perfection of their

contribution, leave their impress. History and the changes of style wrought by time are at work in this perennial substratum. From the beginning of its known history the art of sculpture in Travancore is mature. Its levels however are many and they are intermingled in all its phases. The 'primitive' types stand apart—they are not discussed in the present context—and decadence has its beginning only in the nineteenth century.

The works in metal, however, are not only tokens of the various levels of traditional art; they show its Kerala quality which they share with the works of the stone- or wood-carver and painter. The *dwarapala* images in the Trichur museum, represent the highest level of the Kerala contribution in metal images. It is an equivalent of the form of the Kerala paintings (Pls. LXIII—IV). This unity of the local tradition is maintained also by the capacious images of later date, of Shasta, whose myth is shown in many paintings. In giving shape to this deity the craftsmen of Travancore have never faltered (Pls. XLIII—V).

The eighteenth century image (Pl. XLIII) in its artistic lineage may be seen descended in part from the Chieftain's figure carved in the cave of Kaviyur and the Vishnu of Niramankara. Its placid bulk is breath-inflated, it is composed of concentrated energy; heavier and less sublime than that of the Vishnu image, it has a majesty of its own which radiates from the body in curves; they appear raised on an arched halo above its volume. The ornaments rest lightly on the gleaming surface of the image, follow its modelling and are as ingenuously beaded as they are integrated in the whole image including its pedestal; they are not accessory adornments but consistently part of the vision.

The Shasta image of the nineteenth century (Pls. XLIV-V; beaten silver on wood) though hardened in its details, is of a similar nature. The volume of this image exceeds its tangible shape: it includes the space held by the Yogapatta (band) to body and limb; it also includes the space which drops from the ornament at the back of the head, to the pedestal, and also the wider space over which Shasta rules by a movement of his hand (Pl. XLV).

The genealogy of sculpture in Travancore could be shown in the Dravida and the Kerala lineage. The latter, which is the particular form of art in Malabar, does not stand isolated. Its nearest relatives are the sculptures of Mysore, known at the time of the Hoysala dynasty. They are carved in stone. Their actuality is in their intricate detail. It would be appropriate to carvings in wood. The Dwarapala figures in Trichur appear to be representative of metal images of high quality whose connection with the Hoysala style of Mysore is closer than their indebtedness to the bronzes of Tanjore, etc.

THE WOOD CARVINGS

Travancore is famous for its wealth of wood carvings, their quantity is prodigious, their variety refreshing. None exist which antedate the thirteenth century, and in the profusion of carvings extending over six or seven hundred years are the residues of the innumerable images and reliefs which preceded them.

The carvings may be viewed under three heads (1) as far as they are images, (2) as narrative scenes and (3) symbolical decoration. Under all the three heads however the carvings are symbolical, each figure, scene or motif has its reference to a reality which it adumbrates. These three groups are, moreover, not sharply demarcated, for the images take part in the narrative scenes, and images as well as scenes are not only surrounded but altogether pervaded by symbolic adornments.

The images are carved according to the rules which were binding for their execution whether it was in stone, wood or metal. The numberless images too, carved as part of a ceiling, on walls, or pillars, conformed with the rules. If correctly executed, the task of the craftsmen was fulfilled. They went, however, beyond the mere correct execution, not in depth and intensity, but by lavishing all the resources of their craft and memory, rich in traditional associations and adornments. Into these they infused their devotion, passionate and ebullient. Their work does not give form to intellectual intuition; it is devotional, accepts the rules to which the shaping of the images

has to conform, and is applied to it with fervent skill; all their emotional tension is in their skill; it goes into the adornments of the Gods and their actions, agitation and elation, terror and release from it; these are given shape not only in the demoniac figures which play their part in the myths, and have a fearful appearance, resembling animal or man, but also in those contortions of tree or creeper, scroll and scarf or of any shape in which pulsate the fear and awe, the apprehensions and inspirations which accompany man's approach to God.

Nevertheless the images of the Gods in the wood carvings are more often than not stereotyped (Pl. XLIX) and but few (Pl. LV) in their vast number have a quality equal to those in the more permanent substances, stone or metal. The application of the wood-carver is to the setting of the accepted images. His art is applied, in a double sense. It is applied to a given form, the form of the image which is not devised by him but by the priests. He applies himself to the adornment of these images by all his resources, lavishing on them those contents of the storehouse of his mind and training which are appropriate to them. This is a devotional application of his craft to the shape of the image. The other application is of these images thus richly adorned to their context within the whole temple. This varies according to the place they have to occupy; they are differently accommodated on a ceiling, filling its coffers, as panel of the wall, or as bracket figures.

The ceiling of the *namaskara mandapa* (prostration hall) in Katinamkulam (Pl. XLIX) shows in solemn, if somewhat mechanical, repetition the figures around Brahma, of the Lokapalas, the guardians of the eight directions, a theme which formed, as frequently as the Navagrahas, the adornment of the ceilings. The circles, countersunk each in its square, produced by the beams of the ceiling, are the rims of shallow cups in which the images are carved. Their weapons, *vahanas* (vehicles) and accoutrements fill the cup adequately, if not cogently, in each case. Each roundel in itself shows an organisation or pattern of minute units of form; these are streaked shapes as in the three panels at the bottom of Pl. XLIX,

more undulating units in the three panels in the middle, or a combination of both, in the top row. Such patterns lend to their units the shape of folds, of garlands, floral stalks, birds' plumage, or show them undistinguished, as pure forms of a movement responsive to the tenor of the whole panel (the scrolls on either side of the central image, especially on the left, in response to the bird-plumage). These details contribute their share to the solemn appeal of the ceiling. They are bounded by a circular frame itself completely dissolved into carvings, yet so broad that the effect of its circular shape outweighs its pattern with its quick change of light and darkness, carved surface and interval; the circular rim thus appears of a different substance, as it were, from that of the top surfaces of the beams, and is subordinated to them. Similarly also the other motives, for example the 'palmette' in its broad curved border,—a corner-filling device here—convert the texture of the wood into that of varied, yet disciplined, carved patterns. Thus rich in texture, made by art, the images of the divinities are set in an atmosphere of their own, in a world whose strict order they represent and occupy, each within its circle, and this again within its square. By the varied depth of the carved surfaces, the masses of light and shade are regulated, and in this broad simplification the details, the intricate texture, are wrapt up, subservient to the sobre symmetry of the ceiling, which in a temple represents the celestial world.—The joints of the beams are but sketchily carved with 'lotus-petals' and their central bosses pointedly fix the square compartments of the ceiling in rigorous order.

Where, however, the task of the craftsman was not as strictly set by the exigencies of architecture and iconography and he could fill panels and enrich mouldings by narrative scenes, he drew from the vast repertory of the Epics, mainly the Ramayana (Pl. L-LIII, LVII), and composed panels and friezes with an ease obtainable in a traditional art only, where the subject is known to all, the training continuous, and no effort lost on choosing a theme or the means by which it acquires form.

The Ramayana scenes, in their many and different representations from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century, show

the art of the people of Malabar as it moved their heart and imagination. These carvings are the peoples' Ramayana. It is told on their own level. The many different styles of this 'folk art' do not, as a rule, depend on the way in which the cult images have to be made so as to be fit for worship. As many as are the degrees of devotion and skill, so many are the versions of the Ramayana in the wood carvings of the temples. Their scale is modest, but each is lively and authentic. In no other branch of their visual art have the people of Malabar been given equal scope to speak in many tongues and from their hearts.

Sturdily and straightforward the vicissitudes of Sita are represented in Sathankulangara in the fourteenth century (Pl. L). Afflicted she sits in the cloak and canopy of her long hair and her enormous hands demonstrate her abandon and grief. Hanuman in the tree, and Hanuman approaching her; the tree which links the figures, fills the composition with algae-like leaves, such as grow in fairy-land: every child must delight in this setting. It is clear as a wood-cut. When, however, the exacting task of composing the figures as an enrichment of a round moulding (Pl. LI) is carried out, the burly fairy-tale mood does not forsake the figures and their context, the pathos of their action, while they proceed on their way to defeat an ogress whose gruesome form lies flat at the end of their procession. The 'trees' interspersed at regular intervals accompany the narration by the form given to their growth; it is calm or agitated, opulent or sparse. Although this art is truly popular it must not be imagined that it was practised outside the temples. It was a purely religious art that spoke to the people who came to the temple for the purpose of seeing it with devotion (darshana). In their own homes there was no scope for it.

The Ramayana scenes as carved in Sathankulangara show the single figures as compact volumes spaced soberly according to size and shape of the panel they had to fill or the moulding on which they were carved, adhering to its curved plane. The groups succeed one another, or the single panels are superimposed vertically and thus fill their apportioned wall-space.

ETTUMANUR

In Ettumanur (Pl. LIII), the Ramayana scenes, though superimposed, are not confined each in its panel but are divided the one from the other by a representational device only, a roof, for example, or by the foliage of a tree, showing thereby that the scene takes place in the palace, or in the jungle; or the several groups of figures are superimposed without any other demarcation than what they produce by their composition (the group at the bottom of the panel on the right). Thus the scenes follow one another in the vertical, on one panel, and form in each case one consistent relief composition. In the horizontal, the Sathankulangara carvings of the moulding had resorted to similar devices. None-the-less the competence of the Ettumanur craftsman is on a higher level; he infuses dramatic action into his figures, almost as if theatrical performances of the Ramayana had been his source of inspiration. The relief is very high, some of the figures are almost carved in the round; this can be said also about some of the panels in Sathankulangara, but, whatever the depth of the relief, the figures there are laid out parallel to the ground of the relief; they are displayed in planes and not in depth. The Ettumanur figures are placed at any angle, their movements cut into depth or project from it as they act their parts with a vehemence that tosses also the foliage of the trees and separates the figures by deep grooves. With all their splendid acting, the movement is in their miens and gestures, not in their modelling, dissolved as their bodies are by the rings and chains of their jewellery, febrile shapes, some weird, others agonised. These figures express as much anguish as also lurks in the repeated architectural motives by which their scenes are flanked. Sinister openings, flamboyant crests, combine and mark eyes: are they of the Monster's head, lurking from architectural devices replete with ancient meaning?

High-strung, crude in their refinement and nearing a dissolution of carved form, these Ettumanur carvings are a climax of popular art in which the single elements are as powerfully blended as are the ingredients in a witch's brew. Spells and

sorcery are modes of belief as popular in their practice as is the appeal of these carvings. Other Ramayana scenes in Ettumanur go even further in giving form to the uncanny; herds of demoniac beasts accompany those horizontal panels (Pl. LVI, 2). In a context like this, the symbolical adornments too, irrespective of their essential significance, are gnarled with demoniac traits.

The abandon to nervous and emotional tensions is kept under control in the more representational panels, such as the Coronation of Rama (Pl. LII) in which the main figures are shaped in the likeness of images. The composition of this scene seems to have been transferred, together with the images of Rama, Sita and others, from a painting into wood-carving. The composition, below the roof, is reminiscent of that of classical Indian painting as regards the space in which the figures dwell. They are seen as if forthcoming from the depth of the relief. This movement begins with the figure of a Rishi at the utmost right (the second head from above) and is extended thence to Satryughna, immediately behind Sita; to Sita and to Rama. These figures form an uninterrupted progression, like a pleated tress their concatenated group comes forward, reaches the centre of the panel having passed the corner where Hanuman is seated near Rama's pendent hand.

The twisted strand of crowned divinities, a firm garland of continuous shapes, is laid across the space of the panel and exceeds it with Rama's throne; it has for its ground a multitude of figures of whom but the foremost seem to have entered the field of vision and the rest, the throng (though not represented), is behind them. Their crowd has no direction, it is the animated tapestry of Rama's coronation. In the complexity of this assemblage accents leap up as flaming fly-whisk, rotund umbrella, standard or fan. They mark the central group in the vertical direction, and constitute the symmetry of the composition, while it is left to the slantingly held umbrella to balance the diagonal movement of the enthroned group. The strongest accent in the surface is that of the flaming fly-whisk. It exceeds the figure-panel, links it up with the roof which it oversects, and

covers with unconcern the large head of the figure behind it; this group of the lambent fly-whisk and the head behind it is the most authentic in this relief, it has come straight from the wood-carver's sense of form: fly-whisk in front of face, large hand of the figure in front of the fly-whisk, a profusion of carved surfaces and their gradation in which he delights, where full scope is given to him as in the carving of the symbolical enrichments (Pl. LIII). So there are many factors which go to the making of this composite relief. The images of the Gods are executed according to the canons and most probably a painted version. From there (i.e. from paintings) the direction of forthcoming of these figures is taken over into the relief. There is secondly the age-old way of Indian sculpture of filling a given panel by a dense crowd of figures. This tradition had reached a climax in Sanchi, in Central India, in the first century B.C., and is the general way in which large numbers of figures find their place in a relief, covering and oversecting one another as much as is necessary to accommodate their rows.

These two factors, (1) the pictorially established direction of forthcoming which has here the shape of a rhythmically pleated wreath laid across the panel, and consisting of the figures of Rama, Sita, etc., and (2) the densely packed tapestry of carved figures, are to the wood-carver ready-made formulae which he employs to the best of his own vision. This has its carriers in the three large heads—by far the largest in the panel—at the very back of the assemblage, in the top row. While density of carved figures, covering each other and over-secting, is an ever available resource of the Indian sculptor, the staggering of the figures, one above the other, is equally implied in this resource, its aim being to make visible as many figures as possible by showing as above what ought to be behind, and thus could not be seen.

In Pl. LII, however, the figures in the top row are particularly large and of lively countenance. It is there that the wood-carver takes his own position, identifying himself with the ground of his work, whence he views

the stage he has created and filled with images. Seen from there, from the top, at the back, the relief reveals its further organisation. Having proceeded outward and thus been dismissed into visibility, the figures are being bound to the vertical plane of the relief and are summed up, irrespective of their levels, by one diagonal movement, forcefully carried by Rama's pendent left arm to the bottom of the corner where Hanuman has his place, and ascending thence along Rama's arm and crown to the flaming fly-whisk and the canopy of the scene of coronation. With this main line diagonally organising the surface, its parallels also are given; the next being that which connects Sita's left arm, her crown and the umbrella and also the crown of Hanuman. The other parallels are drawn, the one on the right resting on the shoulder of Satryughna, and one in the opposite lower corner of the panel connects Rama's right hand—assuring fearlessness—with the crown of the last figure on the left.

The linear order to which the various components of the spatial context of this panel are thus subjected is the framework which carries not only the heterogeneous elements assembled and interconnected but also the enrichments which the craftsman bestows on it, coils and rows of beads, crests and tufts of loops and circles. They are scattered all over the relief, like seeds over a ploughed field. They cover the panel festively, and are also collected in the beaded edge of the canopy; then they are finally tossed from the entire relief as tasselled thistles convoluted above the roof, on the top of the 'tree of coronation' whence birds flutter and the sacred books are safely tied by strings that send their spiky ends curling towards the flaming fly-whisk. It is this part of the carving which has an early analogy in one of the reliefs of the Guhanathaswami temple.

The many memories thus collected and adorned are more alive in the texture, one would prefer to say, than in the composition of this relief. Of this there are many witnesses, for example the animal's mask lurking from the thistly jungle on top while holding in its mouth the apex of an arch in the very centre of the roof—a high halo connecting the heads of Rama and Sita—. The self-same place this kind of arch occupied in

stone reliefs of Mathura in the first and second centuries A.D. being representative there of contemporary symbolical architectural form.

These two instances (Pls. LIII and LII) from Ettumanur may suffice to illustrate an infinitesimal fraction of the contents of the storehouse of tradition from which the woodcarvers drew, and which they used by giving their own knowledge and application, and at times their inspiration (Pl. LIII), to the carving of sacred and familiar themes.

The high tension of the Ettumanur carvings does not coalesce into consistent form in each and every relief in this temple, nor is it to be expected where many hands were at work, all expert though not necessarily equally gifted. But not only in Ettumanur and in the sixteenth century was the output as varied as it was prolific. The same can be said of the work of any century, generation or batch of craftsmen who carved the Ramayana with a perennial sense of wonder and belief. Neither can its eighteenth century versions (Pl. LVII) be compared in their style and general tenor with those of the fourteenth century (Pl. LI) for the purpose of assigning a definite position in the history or evolution of the art, to the one or the other. The consistency is there, in the various Padmanabhapuram carvings (Pl. LVII), restrained and somewhat arid. The modelling is reduced for the purpose of the silhouetted effect; an assimilation has taken place of movements (the archers in the middle panel) such as swayed mediæval Indian sculpture from the tenth century, in Rajputana and Central India, and found their way to the far South *via* the heroic elegance of the carvings of Vijayanagar. But this assimilation, exemplified here in the eighteenth century, might as well have been accomplished in the sixteenth century or much earlier.

A living tradition, handed down in its wealth through centuries, has produced these carvings in Travancore, as it did in Central India, two thousand years before, in the reliefs of Sanchi and Barhut. These are close to one another in time and place, and yet what unaccountable varieties of vision within certain set rules, in common to all the strands of Indian art,

are gathered there; each relief has its degree of freshness or ardour, for this wealth is the store of which the hearts and minds of the people and the craftsmen are full. The collective monuments which the Buddhists had set up then, found no continuation. Had many more survived or patronage continued, the spectacle might have been similar to that offered by the sustained output of temple building, carving and painting in Kerala.

Sculptures in the round, as much as the narrative reliefs, were part of the architecture of the temples, the reliefs being carved on the architectural parts, the sculptures in the round forming themselves some of the architectural parts, serving, as they generally do, as brackets (Pl. LIV). They offer animated and perforated silhouettes similar to those used in shadow plays and cut out in leather. In addition to their rhythmical and silhouetted pattern, the volume of these bracket figures is turned around their axis, thus imparting the association of bodily movement to that which belongs to the architectural shape. This too is an all-Indian device, particularly of mediæval sculpture, whereas the proportions of the Kerala bracket-figures appear transformed by their accoutrements which are weighty and full of a movement of their own. Outside Malabar, the costume worn by the sculptures adheres to their bodies and limbs; the crown would be in continuation of the shape of the head, and the fluttering scarves would accompany the movement of the body. In Kerala however they add their own shapes and movements to those of the figures. This refers to types like that of the warrior (Pl. LIV), a figure distinguished in mien and gesture. Other bracket figures however, conforming with the images and their canons, are as rigid in their context as are the ceiling figures carved in relief in Katinamkulam.

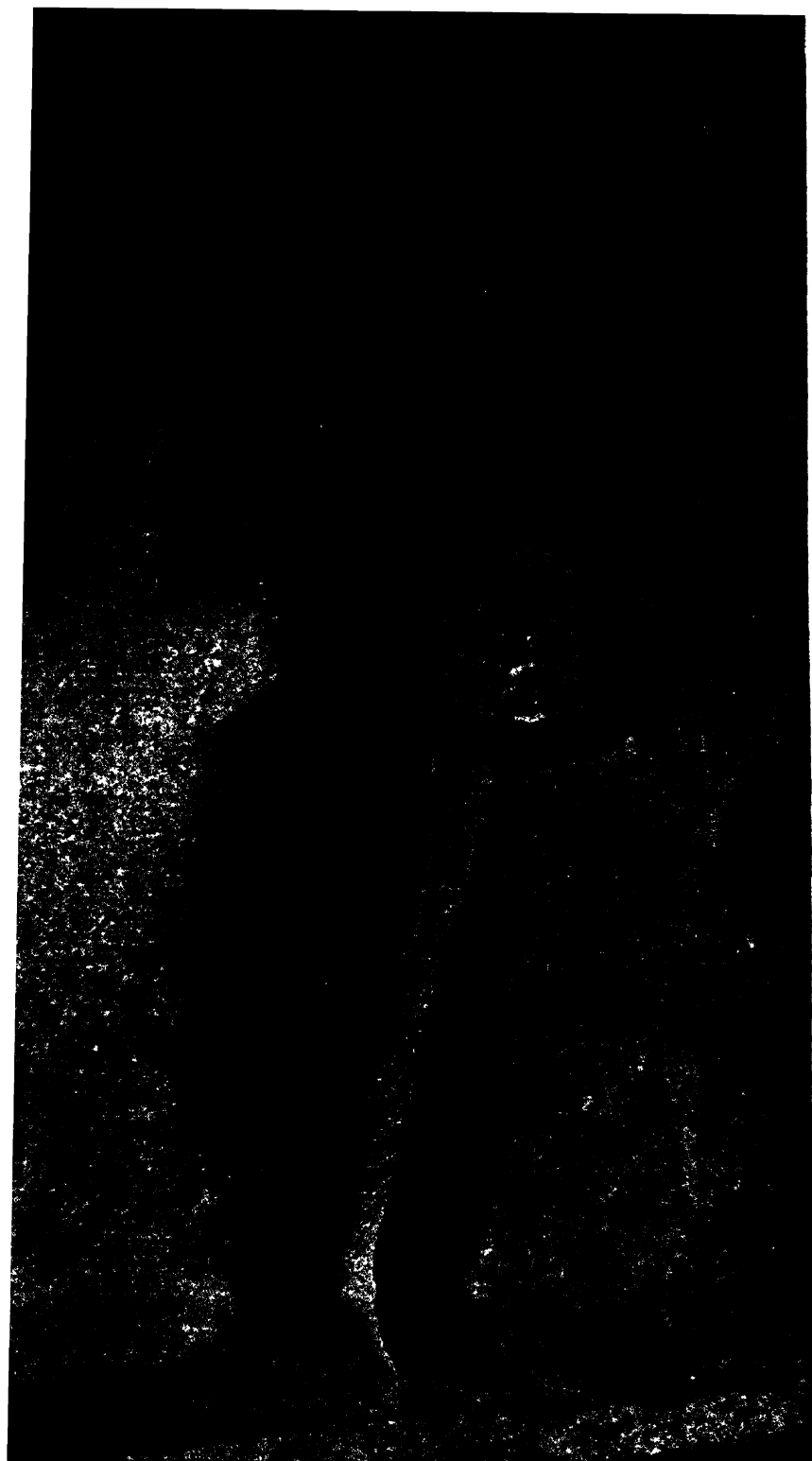
Iconography, carried out in the shape of an image; nothing more can be said of a good number of wood sculptures in the round. In their case the craftsmen, unable to realize the nature of the divinity, adhered to the rules in order to make without flaw the form which would be fit for worship, helpful to the concentrating thought of the devotee. Form and content come to life in but few of the icons; where, as on Pl. LV this seems

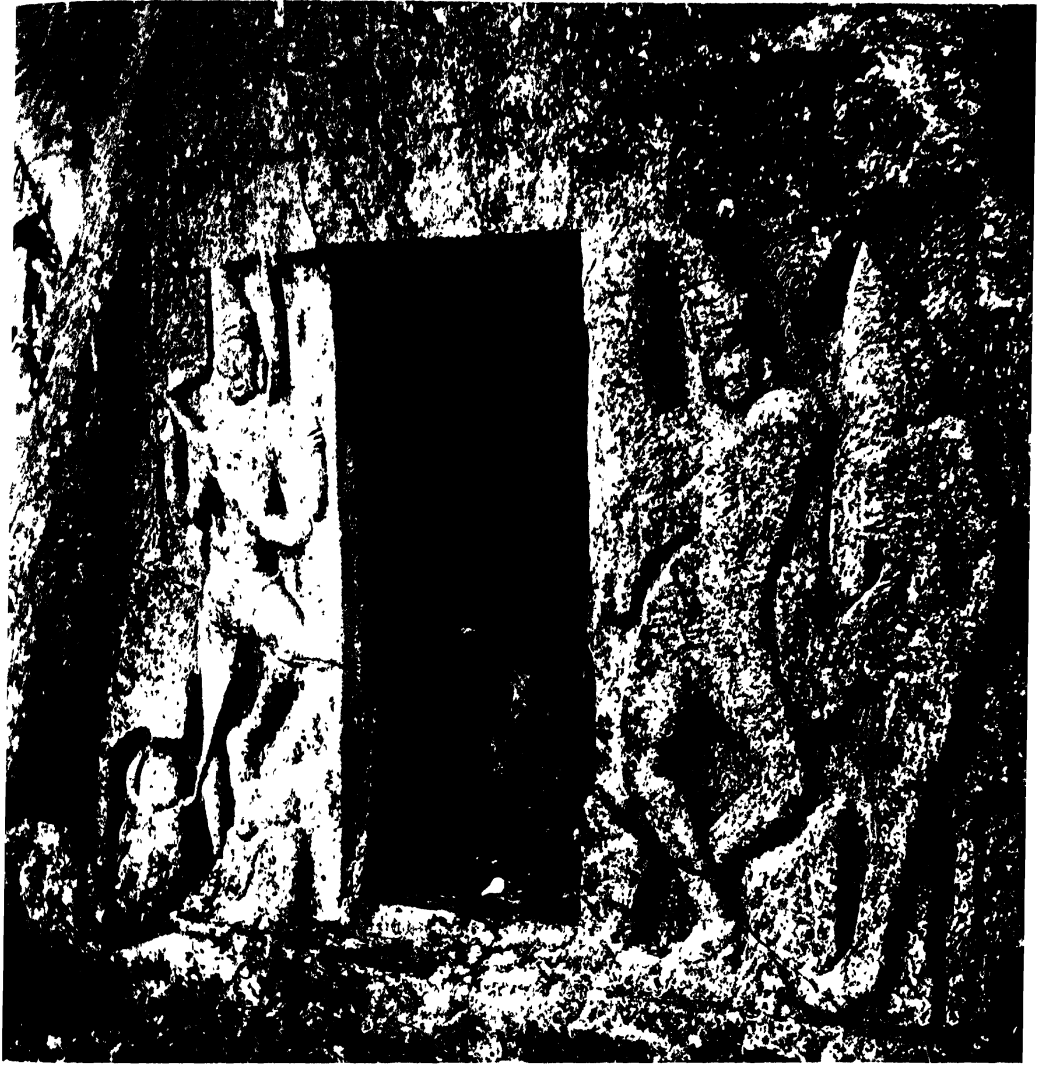
to be the case, it may happen that the image seen in its totality falls short of the fulfilment of its part view. This is due to the difference of level between the contents of which the image and its iconography are the concrete shape and those which the craftsman is capable of realizing. Far from crippling or hampering him, they furnish the mould or prototype which needs to be filled to its full measure if the image is to be an adequate work of art. But not all are supremely endowed, and where this is so, and the mould is made correctly, the devotee, on his part and according to his state of knowledge or illumination and degree of sensibility, replenishes it with its original content.

SYMBOLS AND SYMBOLIC FORM

The margin of discrepancy is smaller in those embodiments of the unseen Power which are clad in the shape of the Animal. The Animal is the lion, king of animals, the lordly Power, the Power of the Lord, the solar animal. His shape in the art of Malabar is not an interpretation of a lion as he is seen, but of his power as a symbol of the unknowable Power. It is therefore also not restricted to the lion's shape, but that of the elephant, the counter player of the lion may be fused with it (Pl. LVIII, upper row, mythic lions having the proboscis of elephants) or any other animal shape equally suggestive of Protean omnipotence. These shapes have their play at the bottom of the narrative panels (Pl. LIII), or they are shown forming their borders (Pl. LVI, 2) or they are set in rows at the base of all the wood-carvings, immediately above the stone socle of the temple (Pl. LVIII) where the Lion's face and those of other animals may also be seen carried by mighty busts. Simha-Shardula-Vyala and Makara are ancient symbols of Indian art; the 'combined animal' whatever its components, is at home as much on the seals of Mohenjodaro as it is seen paying homage to the presence of the Buddha in early Buddhist art. The supernatural animals are vested with all the energies of terror and play in which the Invisible Power is known to man. In the wood carvings of Travancore it is shown variously, sinister or humorous, as a current pattern of animal shapes, filling, together with modelled scrolls, borders or reglets.

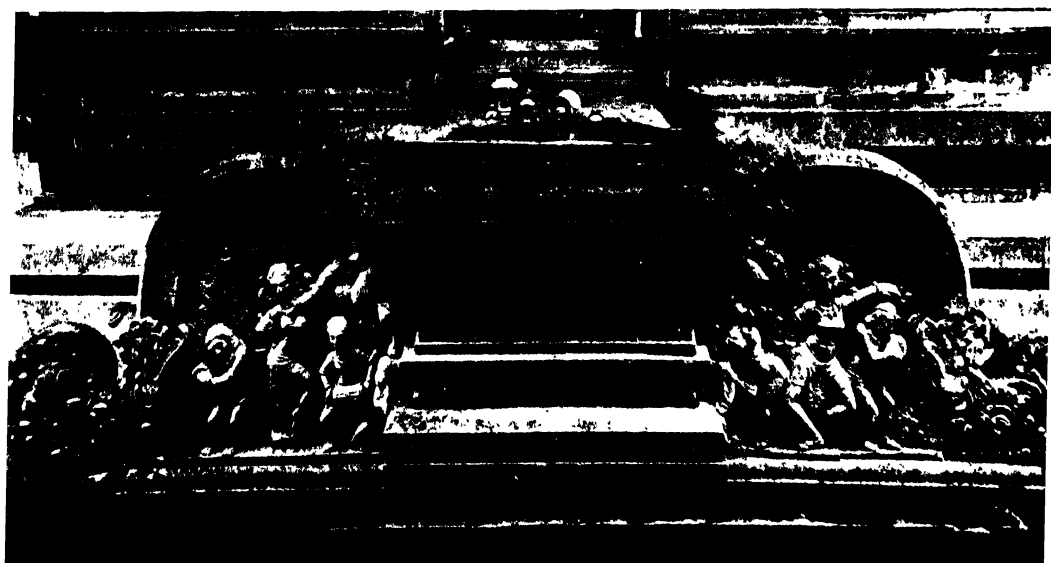
PLATES XXX TO XXXVIII
SCULPTURE







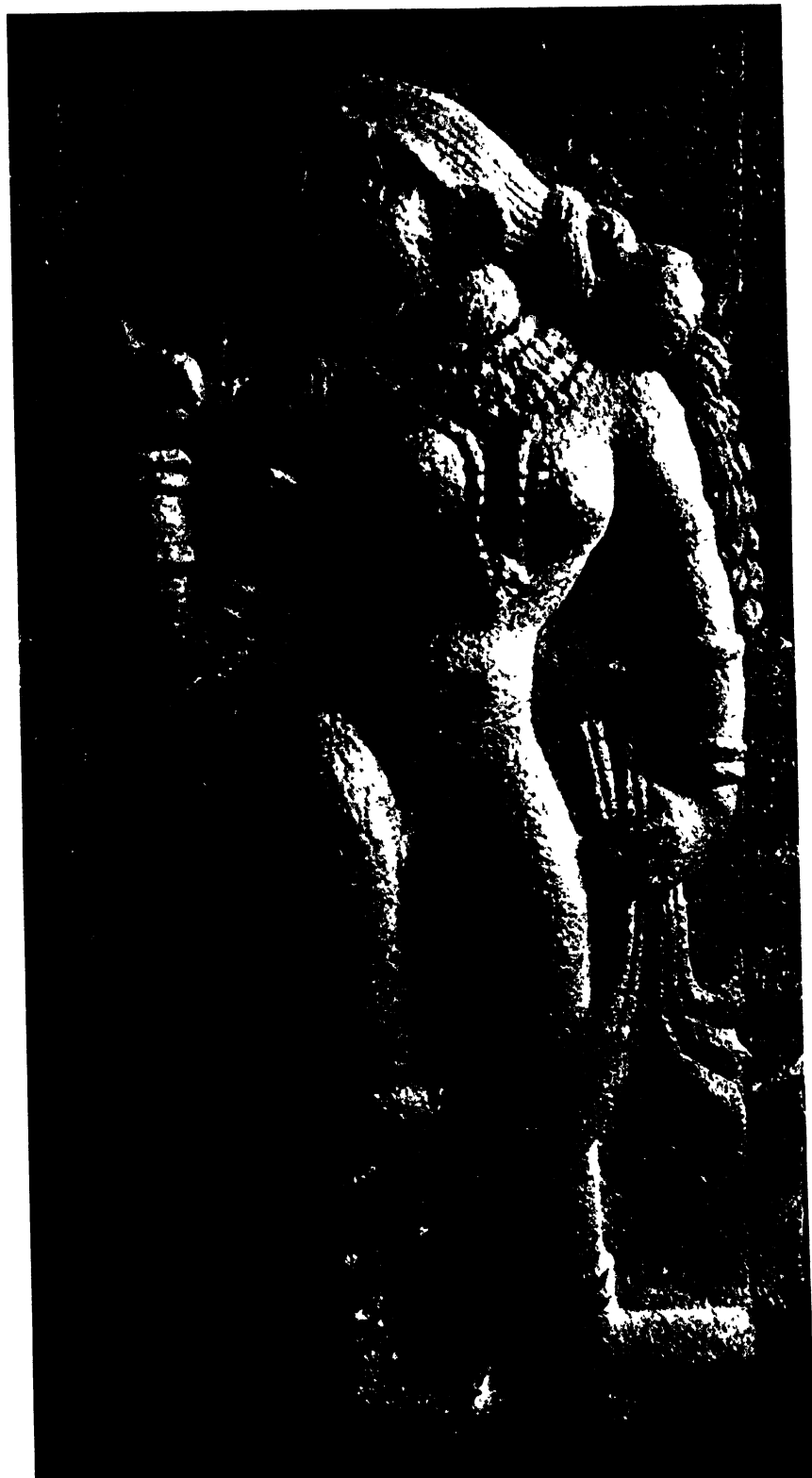












Scrolls extracted from the animal shape, scrolls tossed as waves by invisible storms in the likeness of plants and foliage (Pls. LII, LIII, L), assuming the shape of banana plants (Pl. LI) or of lotus cascades (Pl. LIX), spiky or luscious, are graphs to which the wood-carver imparts the life of his own realisations. These scrolls and curls and the agitation to which they give form are contributions of the craftsman; in them flows the rhythm of his life, whether these scrolls writhe in the tops of trees or are the pattern of a warrior's costume (Pl. LIV). The curves (Pls. XLIX, LVI) are clipped and deep, not flowing; they form vortices and eddies of many centres, they are being tossed by a great storm. In them the sensibility of the wood-carver has become manifest as linear rhythm, just as, in the shape of innumerable beads, dots and their dark intervals (Pls. LII, XLIX), it has become part of the texture itself of the carved wood, differing from its texture as substance.

A composition of both these pure means of original form is provided by the Lion's face (Pl. LVI, 1). It belongs to the Lion, the vehicle of Durga, the Great Sakti or Power. Modelled shape and linear rhythm are integrated in this ingratiating countenance. The Lion being the emblem on the banner of the Sun, his visage as carved in Chonakkara, in the eighteenth century, may serve as an emblem of the contribution of the wood-carvers to the art of Kerala.

Another base for the display of vital form are the symbolic shapes of architecture. Two motives have specially been singled out from the repertory of Indian architectural form, the *gavaksha* and another shape, which may be called *shirsha*.

Gavaksha is the name of the curvilinear window-opening, which, carved in the rock, admits light and air into the Buddhist temples. In structural Hindu temples its likeness is carved large and small, singly or connectedly, in rows and lattices over the surface of the temple. There it has no opening but is solid, a paradoxical device, a window shape through which no light can enter from without. The meaning of *gavaksha* is "ray-eye" or ray-curve. On the temple the "ray-eye" shines with the Light from within; it is not meant to admit light into the

“superluminous darkness” of the shrine, where God is housed, source of all light and illumination. In this its paradoxical application, the ‘ray-eye’, the *gavaksha*, is carved in any position on the walls of the temple; it is represented in some carvings in one of its original positions, that of a dormer window, of which the symbolical function is, on Pl. LII, to be the crown of the scene of coronation, the eye that looks on from above (cf. the mask of the animal, in this connection, on Pl. LII). In other carvings, *gavakshas* are placed in rows: this pattern had been known as *gavakshamala* (Raghuvamsha) for about a millennium before having been carved in one of its specific shapes in Kerala (Pls. LVI 2, LVIII, LIX).

From this closed window the faces of celestials look down, in Ajanta and elsewhere; or it is filled, in its large versions, with an image of the deity enshrined in the temple and with accompanying figures as on temples of Central India, from the tenth century, or, if its size is small, other devices may fill it, floral or nameless seals of the carver’s art. The shape of its arch too, its curve, is bent variously. Thus it figures in the corners of the ceiling coffers (Pl. XLIX), on fillets and mouldings (Pls. LVI, LVIII-IX; XXVIII) a self-contained scroll device, or extended by scroll wings (Pl. XXVIII). Or else it is attached to the other architectural symbol, which may be called *shirsha* and is carved, superimposed as vertical fillet, and frames the figured panels (Pls. LIX, LIII).

Shirsha means head, and is used to designate the bracket-shaped capital above the capital proper (*bharana*) of a pillar (“Samaranganasutradhara”, LVII, 128). In the rock-cut examples of the early centuries of the present era (no structural temples having survived) this sur-capital has the shape of superimposed slabs increasingly widened in area towards the top (for example in Bedsa, Karli, etc.). Above the uppermost slab, animal figures are carved in these early rock-cut examples. But not only on top of pillars but also on top of a sacred monument, the Buddhist *stupa*, are the slabs thus superimposed; they are supported by a cube called *harmika* (the small house), a square enclosure, in which inheres the uppermost part of the shaft of

the central pillar where it emerges from the apex of the *stupa's* hemisphere.

This very shape is carved in relief in Malabar; it has several more or less complex versions which allow a reconstruction of its underlying design. Carved singly and fulfilling the function of an upright which divides the scenes in the sequence, on a recessed portion of the wall (Pl. LVI 2), it resembles in shape the *harmika* of the Buddhist *stupa*, the small house, covered by widening slabs. In this particular relief, an ornate *harmika* is placed on a pedestal, overgrown by prickly flamboyance and the *shirsha* is covered by lotus petals. Elsewhere (Pls. LIII, LIX) it has lateral projections such as are familiar from mediæval pillars with their bracket capitals. The vertical framings on the wall of the temple in Thuravur (Pl. LIX) are even clearer in their detail than those in Ettumanur (Pl. LIII). They show (for example the second from the right, the lowermost device) emerging from flamboyant scrolls, the square shaft itself of the pillar crowned by superimposed slabs. These support (Pls. LIII, LIX) an architectural fantasy in which the central position is held by the *gavaksha*. In Thuravur, the *gavaksha* is carved closely reminiscent of its shape on the superstructure of mediæval temples. The *shirsha* is further augmented by architectural mouldings, smaller and part replicas of the *gavaksha*, and flamboyant scrolls. This superstructure occupies the place of the animal figures in the early rock-cut examples.

In lieu of the solid cubical *harmika* a square railing is seen on a number of *stupas*. It surrounds a small shrine into the shape of which the central shaft of the pillar is transformed.

Complete shrine-models of this type, equipped moreover with pillars and surmounted by a large *gavaksha* are carved between the two tiers of the roof of the temple in Kazhakuttam (1471 A.D.).

The 'High Temple' as seat of divinity; and the *gavaksha*, the place whence its Light shines forth, are thus combined, surge from, and are surrounded by flaming shapes. This burning, flamboyant fantasy centred in symbols of divinity belongs to the stock in trade of the Kerala wood carver.

CHAPTER V

**THE METAL IMAGES OF
TRAVANCORE**

By R. VASUDEVA PODUVAL

CHAPTER V

THE METAL IMAGES OF TRAVANCORE

No less important than the sculptures in stone are the metal images found in the temples of the State, particularly in South Travancore. Image-making appears to have been practised in Travancore from early times; and the art drew its inspiration from the religious faith of the people. The conception of Shiva, Vishnu, Parvati and Lakshmi in several forms, has been given shape in beautiful images in bronze, and sometimes copper, whose iconographical details are modelled on the rules laid down in the *Silpasastras* (art-canons). Some of the images are still used in worship in the temples; but many have become available as museum specimens through the development of defects that rendered them ineligible in *puja* (worship).

The earliest metal images discovered in the State are two standing images of Vishnu which are preserved in the Government Museum, Trivandrum (Pl. XXXIX-XL). From their technique and iconographical features, it is surmised that they belong to the eighth century A.D., if not earlier, and bear, like the stone sculptures in the cave temples at Kaviyur and Vizhinjam, a close resemblance to the Pallava work of that period (fourth to eighth century). The smaller image in particular is noteworthy as there is in it the grace and serene majesty characteristic of the images of this period. The figure is cast in copper and has the traditional adornments similar to those already mentioned. It has four hands, the upper right one holding the *chakra* (wheel of Vishnu), while the lower right is held in *varada mudra* pose (offering). The upper left holds a conch, and the lower left rests on the hip. One peculiarity which is noticed in this figure is that the *yajnopavita* (sacred thread) extends across the right forearm, and the emblems of conch and

wheel are held on a level parallel to the sagittal plane of the body. It has no complicated decorative details. The figure is well-proportioned in shape, and the simplification of contour gives it compactness. Three arms of the other image are broken off, the remaining one, the lower left, is held on the hip. The adornments are all admirably wrought. The *yajnopavita*, as in the figure of Vishnu already noticed, passes round the right arm. The nose is flat and the *kirita* (cap) is somewhat cylindrical. A kind of rock crystal is inlaid in the eyes; it gives them radiance.

A group of images depicting Shiva, Parvati and three Shaivite saints, in the Suchindram temple, are good specimens of ancient metal-work. The figures of the saints express perfect simplicity, pure devotion and self-surrender. Their deep religious faith is reflected in their faces.

Two images, one of Shiva and the other of Shiva and Parvati on the same pedestal, and three rafter shoes (Pl. XLI) with excellent figure sculpture, preserved in the Trivandrum Museum, afford examples of thirteenth and fourteenth century bronzes. The image of Shiva is of fine workmanship, and may be ascribed to the fourteenth century A.D. Its upper right hand holds a battle-axe, while the lower one is in the *varada mudra*. The upper left hand holds a deer, and the lower is in the *abhaya mudra* posture (protection). The rafter shoes belonged originally to the ancient temple at Ponmana in South Travancore. One of them shows the Dance of Nataraja, with Parvati on the left side and a devotee on the right. The figure of Nataraja has a battle-axe in the upper right hand, while the lower holds a ring. The upper left hand holds a deer, while the lower is in *abhaya mudra*. Parvati holds a lotus bud, and the devotee is clanging cymbals. On the other side of this rafter shoe is an image of Vishnu with a discus in the upper right hand, and a conch in the upper left. The lower right hand is held in *abhaya mudra* and the lower left in *varada mudra* postures. The figures of Sri Devi and Bhu Devi, consorts of Vishnu, are also present. The second rafter shoe has on its front the image of Narasimha killing Hiranyakasipu. On its back is the figure of Yoga Narasimha with a discus and conch in the upper right

and left hands respectively; the lower right hand is in *varada mudra*, the lower left is broken. The third rafter shoe has the figure of Brahma with three heads, seated in meditation, the right upper hand holding an *akshamala*, (garland), and the left a *kamandalu* (water pot), the lower right and left hands resting upon the crossed legs. All the three rafter shoes are richly engraved with lotus and floral designs, and each has a *Vatteluttu* (old Tamil) inscription of the fourteenth century A.D. as gathered from its palaeographical features, recording the names of donors. Dr. Kramrisch has described these valuable works of art in detail as regards their interpretation and their affinities outside Travancore.

Examples of fifteenth century metal images are fairly abundant, and are mostly found in the temples at Darsanamcope, Bhuthapandy, Parakkai, and, above all, Suchindram. The images of Cheraman Perumal and two Shaivite saints, Kazharsinga Nainar and Viranminda Nainar, are excellent specimens of the bronze sculpture of the period. The figures follow a highly stylized convention, somewhat lacking in vivacity. They show an adherence to traditional pose and features, but also elegant craftsmanship and elaboration of details. The external embellishments are all wrought with scrupulous care.

Two bronze Jaina figures, one of Parswanatha Tirthankara and the other of Padmavati Devi, in the Nagaraja temple at Nagercoil, may be considered specimens of sixteenth century metal images. Of these (Pl. XLII), one is a male figure standing on a *padmapitha* (lotus seat). Its right hand is held in *abhaya mudra*; and the left hand rests on the hip. It has on its head a *kirita makuta* (conical cap), over which is seen a five-hooded serpent's head. The ears are ornamented with *makara kundalas* (rings). There are also other ornaments, the *haras* (necklace), *udarabandha* (girdle) and *kankanas* (bracelets). The lower part of the body is draped with folds descending obliquely on the legs.

The female figure is in *tribhanga* (triple) pose holding in its right hand an utpala flower, the left hand hanging parallel to the body. It has over it a three-headed cobra's hood. Both

the images are cast with the utmost delicacy; their charm is enhanced by their finished drapery and other ornamentation; they are embodiments of an antique grace in form carried by a clearly developed style full of quiet dignity.

An image of a standing Vishnu, reported to have been discovered in Kazhakkuttam, near Trivandrum, and preserved in the Government Museum, Trivandrum, is a good specimen of bronze work of the seventeenth century. It has a rich elaboration of detail in conventional style; pose and features are traditional. It is a *Sthanakamurti*, whose back right hand holds a *Sudarsana* while the front one is in *abhaya pose*. The front left arm is in *katyavalimbata hasta* (hand on hip), while the back left hand holds a conch. The big *ratnakundalas* (ear ornaments) and other ornamentations, such as the necklace, the girdle, the sacred thread, bracelets and anklets are finely wrought. The figure is represented in an attitude of quiet dignity, loaded with ornamental details characteristic of the art of this period.

The art of image-making gradually fell into disuse in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. There is, however, one instance of metal images set up in the early eighteenth century, during Maharaja Martanda Varma's reign, when, after the reconstruction of the Sri Padmanabhaswami temple, the images of Sri Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Hanuman, Sri Devi and Bhu Devi, were installed in the temple before the Kumbhanyasa ceremony between 1729 and 1733. In modern times, the two places noted for the casting of bronzes are Vazhapalli and Suchindram; but the work is not at the level of its predecessors.

CHAPTER VI

**THE CRAFT OF THE
METAL-WORKER**

By J. H. COUSINS

CHAPTER VI

THE CRAFT OF THE METAL-WORKER

Art-craft in metal has naturally been less extensively practised in Travancore than that in wood, partly because of the absence of raw materials in the country and the remoteness in times past of available supplies. All the same, the State has to its cultural credit an achievement in the metal-craft of image-making for temples which, if not so prolific as that of the neighbouring south-east coast, with its ancient and generously patronized temples, such as Madura, Srirangam, Tanjore, Trichinopoly and Rameswaram, has a distinctive and impressive quality of its own. I shall add some points of appreciation to the detailed account given by Mr. Poduval and to the comparative study of Dr. Kramrisch.

The chief collection of bronzes, already referred to, is in Suchindram temple. These are taken to belong to the twelfth century, and to have derived much of their inspiration and technique from the neighbouring Tamil country with which South Travancore was in close cultural affinity in the great era of image-making. These images at Suchindram belong to Shaivite Hinduism, and include excellently posed and wrought figures of Shiva and Parvati and a number of Shaivite saints.

A single bronze figure of the Goddess Parvati, recently dug up in the precincts of Padmanabhapuram Palace, and now in the Ranga Vilasom Palace in Trivandrum, gives a good idea of the psychological combination of power and placidity attributed by the Hindu mind to its personalizations of cosmic Powers. It also demonstrates the assurance of the craftsmen of the era beyond two centuries ago in both the fundamental shaping of the image, its architecture, so to say, and the working up of symbolical and decorative details.

A recent find by the Archæological Department is a bronze Shasta (Pl. XLIH) of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Shasta is the hunter deity, and expresses facially an outlook and eagerness not seen in the other deities. He is depicted in some mural paintings on horseback casting a spear. The newly discovered bronze is notable for the admirable modelling of the body, which suggests strength without heaviness. It also displays the decorative sense of the craftsmen of its era in the jewelled bands arranged about the body with strict allegiance to tradition, yet with convincing naturalness.

Shasta occupies a unique position in the Hindu pantheon in being the son of two Gods, Shiva and Vishnu. His birth on a plane that requires the co-operation of the masculine and feminine qualities and capacities was accomplished by Vishnu's assuming the guise of the Goddess Mohini. Shasta therefore combines in himself the two main aspects of Hindu culture, the Shaivite and Vaishnavite, and symbolizes their inner unity as well as the inner unity of his parents. His chief shrine is at Sabarimala, on a hill in Central Travancore, 140 miles from Trivandrum, 35 of which are over jungle paths. The annual pilgrimage to this shrine early in January draws thousands of devotees on foot from all parts of Travancore.

The images mentioned above were moulded in wax, cast in metal, and chased by hand. But image-making in metal was not confined to this method. A piece of craftsmanship in silver is a source of delighted admiration because of its vivacity, and rich ornamentation. This image is also of Shasta (Pl. XLIV-V). It bears the signs of devoted skill. Not an inch of its surface is without some glorification of available space by carefully executed ornament. As a cast image it would be a remarkable piece of work. But it is not cast: it is beaten out in strips and sheets laid over and hammered into a model in wood (as seen in the broken left thumb), and secured by silver nails. Such a piece of craftsmanship presumes antecedents and contemporaries, and it is hoped that some of these may be found before long.

The necessity for both static and portable lamps, ceremonial and domestic, gave the metallic craft-genius of Travancore an opportunity of expression of which it richly availed itself. The

use of traditional brass lamps in temple ceremonial, in the indigenous dance-drama (Kathakali) and in homes in which the art-instinct remains alive, has happily continued the making of various kinds of lamps, despite the temptations of modern electric and other forms of lighting, though the impulse to ingenuity of design within an indigenous genre is not as marked as it was, and some slackening of finish is observable.

Perhaps the most æsthetical of the lamps of Travancore, as it is also the most sought after by collectors, is the so-called Greek lamp (Pl. XLVII, 2). The example in the illustration is twelve inches from tip to tip; but both larger and smaller examples are in collections and in use; new ones admirably reproducing the old are purchasable. The design is a very much generalized bird-form; the hollowed "head" providing the receptacle for the oil and wick; the tail being the grip for carrying the lamp about. The body of the lamp is a reservoir from which the oil in the burner is replenished by a spoon attached to the lamp by a chain. The most august occasion of the use of the Greek lamp is in after-dark temple ceremonies, when the path of the Maharaja, on his way to and from temple-puja, is lit by one of them carried by a temple attendant.

A very distinctive hanging brass lamp (Pl. XLVII, 1) was recently recovered at Padmanabhapuram Palace, and may be taken as over two centuries old. It preserved in its design the knightly atmosphere of a time when the Rulers of the State were engaged in frequent conflict with small border principalities that resented the growing power and extent of Travancore proper. The lamp is perfectly balanced, and by a device at the top of the chain can be adjusted to remain facing in any required direction.

Two other types of hanging lamp may be referred to; one has a plain receptacle into which the oil is fed by hand; the other has a reservoir under the bird from which oil automatically feeds the outer receptacle in which the wick rests. The elephants pouring cosmic energy over the Goddess Lakshmi (the guardian of home life) form a familiar subject in the arts of India (Pl. XLVI). Equally familiar in Indian art is the

legendary bird generally referred to as the *hamsa*, or swan, (Pl. XLVIII, 1) though bearing no special resemblance to the bird so named in other parts of the world. Symbolically it is related to the swift-flying intuition, which is itself related to light in both its physical and metaphysical aspects.

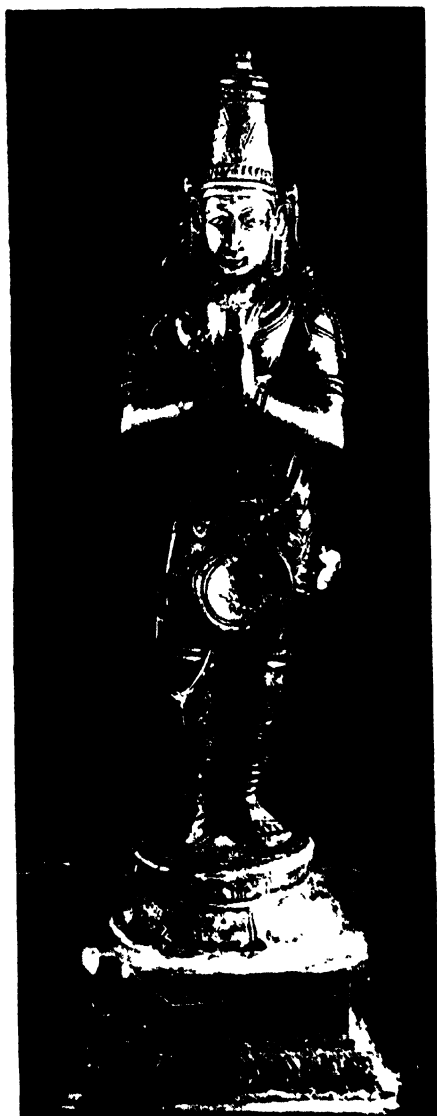
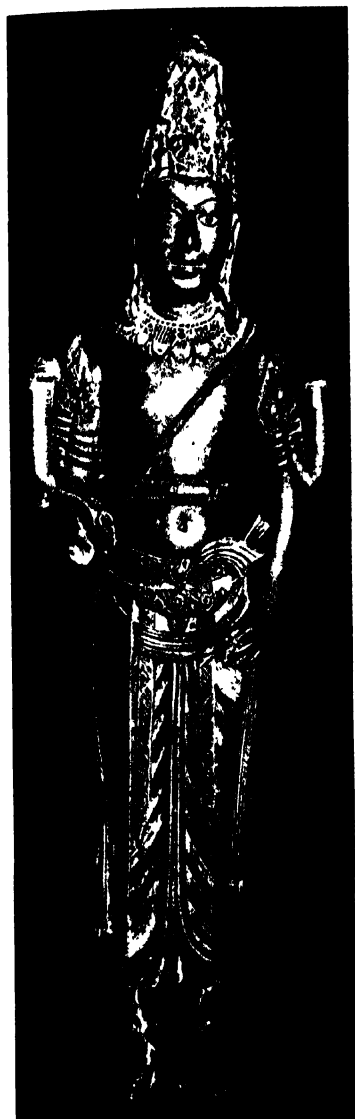
One of the most familiar types of floor lamp is that shown in Pl. XLVIII 2. This type is in various sizes, from a few inches high to over four feet. The original of the illustration is the latter height, and is one of a number used in special ceremonies in the Sri Padmanabhaswami temple in Trivandrum, and exhibited, when not in use, in the adjoining Ranga Vilasom Palace. Lamps of similar type, but with unadorned stem and plain circular oil-basin, are used as the traditional "foot-light" in performances of the Kathakali.

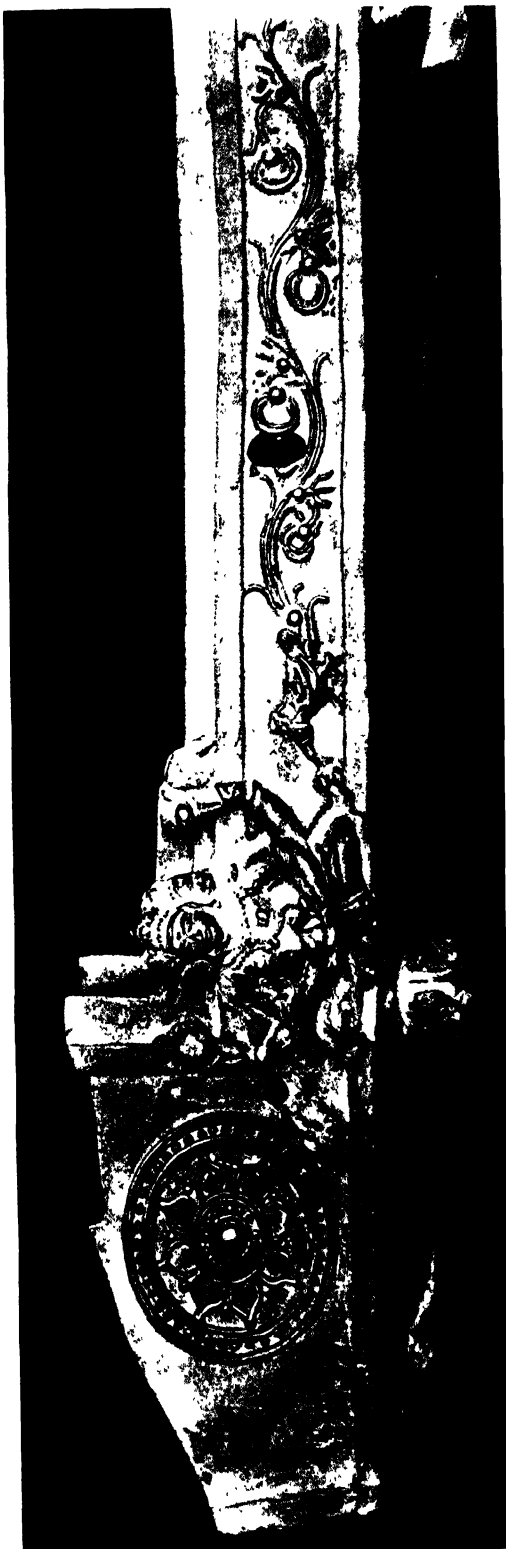
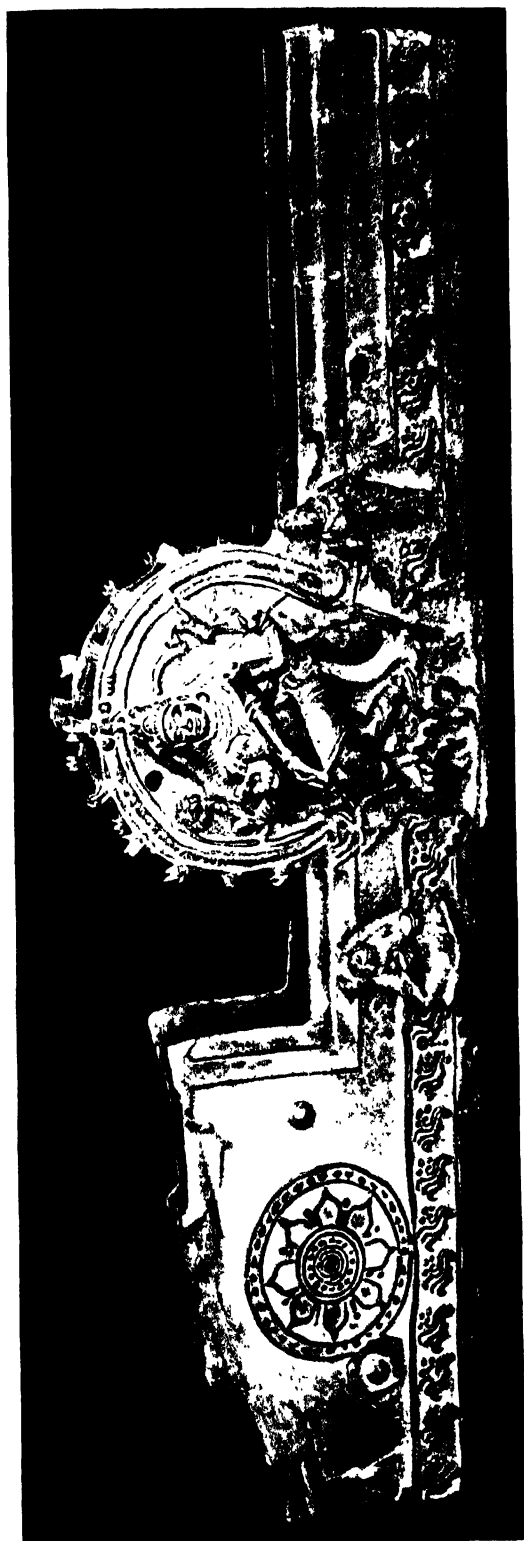
A disadvantage of such lamps in continuous use for a number of hours is the necessity of replenishing the oil, an operation which breaks attention to whatever is proceeding. A reduction of replenishment was made possible by the development of the automatically feeding reservoir, as indicated above. This in the large floor-lamp is done by using the space inside the bird, which thus is both strikingly decorative and useful. The bird reservoir is removed, reversed and filled. When replaced on the lamp the oil enters the burning-basin through an aperture, and the flow is regulated automatically by atmospheric pressure on the surface of the filled oil basin from which the wicks project over the lotus petals around the basin. The reservoir has also been elaborated into a pair of birds forming a single enlarged space, thus further diminishing the need of attention.

To these large floor-lamps may be added the brass triple lamp still ceremonially used in Travancore (Pl. LXVIII). The illustration is from a mural in Padmanabhapuram Palace, and conveys, by comparison with the human figures, both the size, impressive appearance and position of this sovereign among lamps.

There are many other types of metal lamps in Travancore, large and small, simple and ornate, but the above will indicate





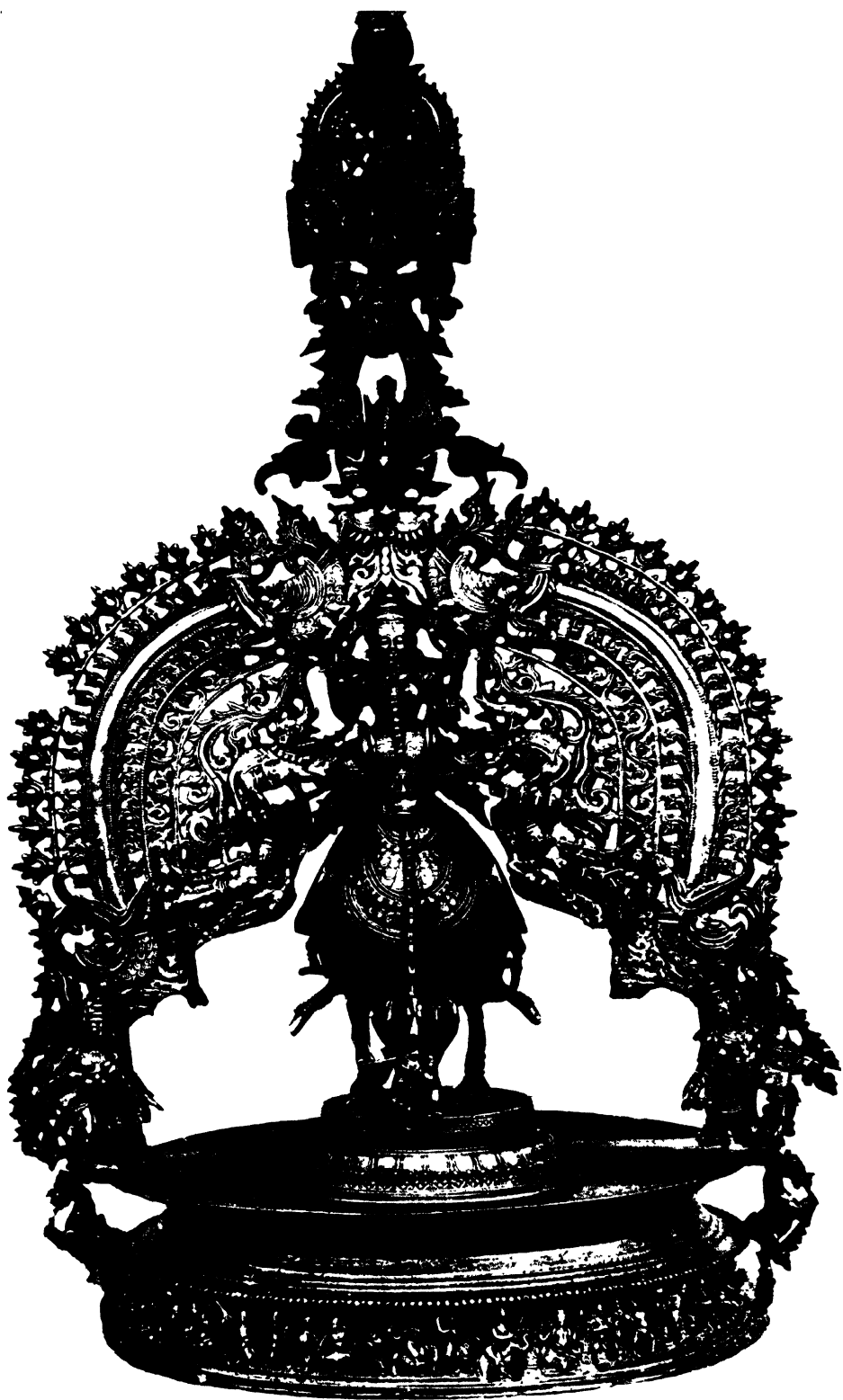


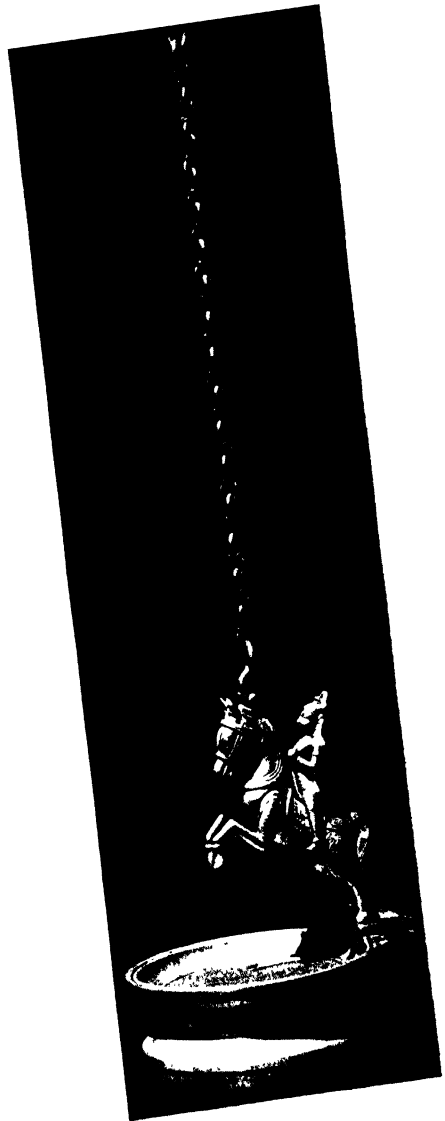


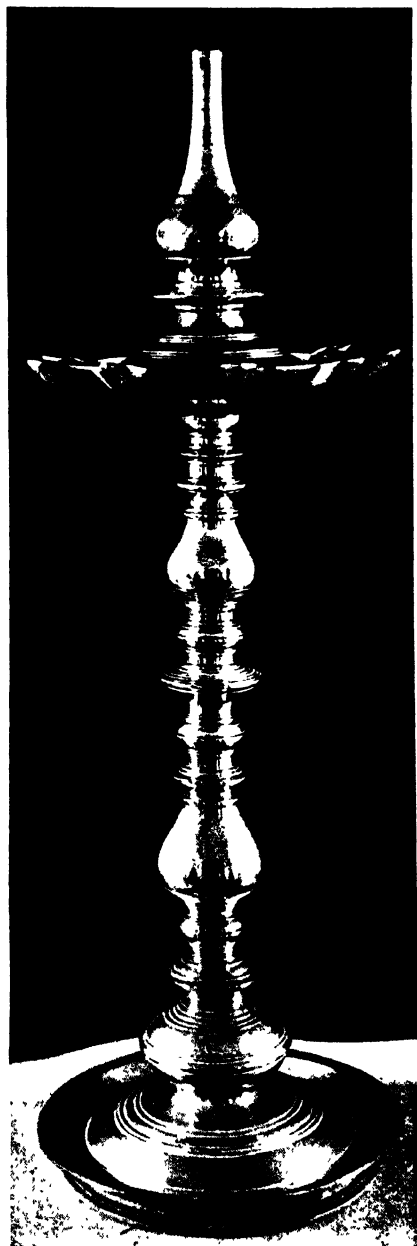
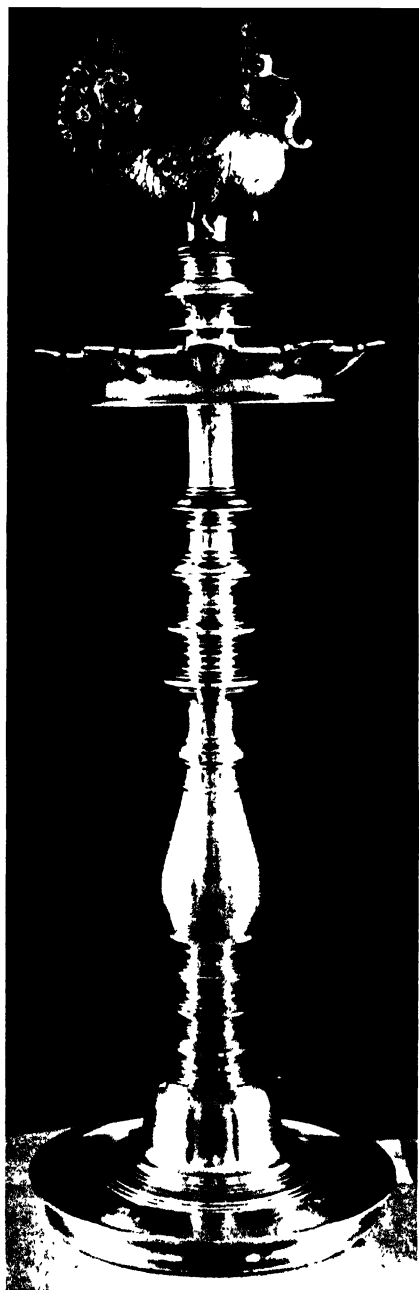












some of the more important. To these may be added the figure of the small lamp-bearer, a miniature of large-size similar figures in stone in the temple, carrying a simple oil receptacle in which a wick is laid.

An interesting piece of indigenous secular craftsmanship in metal is the safe transferred from the palace of Sri Swathi Thirunal Maharaja (1829-1848), the famous musical Ruler, to the Ranga Vilasom Palace. The safe, which was presented to His Highness by craftsmen of Trivandrum, is 27 inches long, 24½ inches broad, and 22 inches high. The body of the safe was cast in bronze. The pierced indigenous designs were laid on copper sheets. The safe is fitted with drawers. The feet on which the safe stands are five inches high. Metal work of this kind is still carried on by a few families at Vazhapalli in Central Travancore.

The recent revival of interest in indigenous art in Travancore brought back the almost lost art of metal-mirror-making. For generations the metal mirrors of Aranmula, the seat of a famous temple, had been popular for religious and domestic use; but cheap glass substitutes ousted them. The proportion of tin and copper in the alloy, and the technique of working it into a reflecting surface, dwindled down to the possession of a couple of families. But a renewed demand for them has brought them again to public ken. An eighteenth century mural in the Sri Padmanabhaswami temple of Trivandrum shows a semi-celestial lady performing her toilet with the aid of an Aranmula mirror.

Among the arts in metal that are available for the passing visitor is that of Kuftgari whose relative is Damascene and the Bidiri work of Hyderabad State. Kuftgari consists of the inlaying of a light metal on a dark one. An iron surface is roughened in order to provide a base into the microscopic teeth and crevices of which the craftsmen deftly hammers silver thread in the chosen design. The surface is then polished and the kuftgari plate, round, oval, square or otherwise, is used, sometimes completely as a decorated plate, sometimes as a photograph frame or as the sides and top of a box, or in other ways. There

are a few individual workers in kuftgari in the State, descendants of those who, it is said, introduced the craft a century or more ago; but it is chiefly followed in the Government School of Arts, Trivandrum.



CHAPTER VII

**THE JEWELLERY OF
TRAVANCORE**

By R. VASUDEVA PODUVAL

CHAPTER VII

THE JEWELLERY OF TRAVANCORE

The art of the jeweller, like that of the sculptor, has from early times appealed strongly to the genius of the ancient craftsmen of Kerala: and some varied and excellent jewellery is preserved in the important temples of the State, such as Suchindram, Trivandrum, Vaikom and Ettumanur. They are made of gold on which precious stones, such as diamonds, rubies and emeralds, are laid. They throw a flood of light not only on the unbroken continuity of tradition in the art, but also on the skill exhibited in their making. The Travancore craftsmen of old attained high proficiency in the jeweller's art; and were able to create a variety of items of rich and artistic pattern and workmanship, cleverly adapted for personal and deific adornment. Meticulous care was bestowed on the minute details of work, and highly technical skill was shown in cutting and polishing refractory stones. Jewellery of an elaborate kind was freely used in the biggest temples of the State from early times.

But the ornaments of the people afford to the student of arts and crafts a most interesting and useful field of study, a study that has not only its æsthetical pleasure, but also helps the elucidation of ancient culture. The late Prof. Ridgeway's theory is more true of Kerala than of any other part of India, that ornaments in Malabar owe their origin mainly to magic and less to the love of adornment and decoration. Endowed with physical beauty, and surrounded by a rich and bountiful nature, the ancient people of Kerala paid little attention to outward embellishments either in dress or jewellery. With advancing civilisation changing fashions have been introduced in the country; but the earliest ornaments of Kerala have a ritualistic bearing. There were different types of them and different modes of wearing them, round the neck, on the ear and wrist, and in the case of children round the waist and ankles.

It was not the custom in Malabar to wear ornaments on the crest of the head, the nose and the upper portion of the ears.

A study of Travancore jewellery reveals certain beliefs that have been held from ancient times. For instance, it is said that every one must wear a bit of gold on account of its physiological values. Those who could not afford to go in for gold wore silver. Among other metals, copper is not generally used as such except as rings; and it is supposed to purify the wearer. But in combination with other metals it is used for bangles, particularly by the Malayala Brahmins. Iron too is used in the shape of rings fastened round the ankles of a new born baby, or by women during their monthly periods; but in the case of men the wearing of an iron ring is prescribed when they have to conduct funeral ceremonies, in the belief that it will protect the wearer from the influences of evil spirits. Great value is attached to pearls as ornaments. Yet, however lavishly stones were used in jewellery, they were tabooed in ornaments below the waist. Seeds, nuts and stalks of certain trees, particularly the seed of elanji, and also nails, claws, teeth and hair of animals, especially the claws of tigers, the teeth and hair of elephants, were also used as amulets and ornaments, as they were supposed to act as charms. This fact is borne out by the existence even now of the Palakkai *mothiram*, i.e., ring made of the seed of the Pala tree, and the Pulinakha *mothiram*, i.e., the ring made with the claws of a tiger. The former is worn on the belief that it will secure the benign influence of Bhagavati (the patron Goddess and guardian angel of the Malayalis) whose favourite is Pala; while the latter is supposed to be a cure for dreams and nightmares.

The designs in gold follow familiar local motifs. The gems are, flat diamonds, rubies and emeralds. The following pieces of Travancore jewellery are typical: *nettippattom*, forehead ornament; *chadappila*, ornament for hair-plait down the back; *kondappoo*, circular ornament for the back of the head; and various types of gold necklaces. In another ornament called "Tali" worn by all Malayali ladies, the conventionalised representation of Bhagavati was originally the symbol. Later, it was

modelled also like the hood of a serpent or shaped on the model of a full blown lotus. But the ornament which is most connected with magic and ritual is the *yantramkulal*, garland of yantrams (symbols), in which a copper leaf is impressed, with mystic symbols to protect the wearer from the influences of evil spirits. An examination of these early ornaments shows traces of animal worship, tree worship and image worship.

CHAPTER VIII .

TRAVANCORE WOOD CARVING

By R. VASUDEVA PODUVAL

CHAPTER VIII

TRAVANCORE WOOD-CARVING

The art of wood carving has been practised in Travancore from a remote period; and a number of temples in various parts of the State are rich in examples of the craft, illustrative of the old workmanship and preserving the continuity of tradition. There is an abundant supply of timber of various kinds available in the State's forests, and wood therefore naturally formed the principal material for the construction of houses, temples and palaces in early times. The ceilings, gables, doors, lintels, etc., of even ordinary houses were decorated with figures and designs showing the artists' skill in embellishment, and wood-carving has given the State a special reputation. In the decorative and relief work on temple cars, *mandapas* (halls) and the central shrine in particular, the Travancore craftsmen found full scope for the exercise of their remarkable skill.

Travancore wood-carving is generally found as a decoration of the exteriors of buildings. Teak is most generally employed in their construction, and lends itself to every movement of the carver's tool. Beside the ornamentations on fluted columns, wooden lintels, brackets and capitals, the Travancore craftsmen produce statuary, reliefs and also delicate floral ornamentation. They created, though in a conventional manner, various figures of Gods and Goddesses, as well as figures of human beings, animals, birds, trees and flowers; the latter are executed with a vigorous realism in a massive and noble style. In the best wood-work an admirable manual skill is lavished on every detail, producing rich and intricate effects.

The temples at Pazhur, Tirumaradi, Turavur, Kitangur, Ettumanur, Vazhappalli, Kaviyur, Chattankulangara, Kuratti, Katinamkulam, and the Ramaswami koil at Padmanabhapuram, contain some of the notable examples of old workmanship in wood, illustrating various Puranic scenes and figures from the

Bhagavata, Ramayana, Halasya Mahatmya, and Maha Bharata. The multitudinous scenes and figures delineated in these are boldly designed and are expressive of high emotions, of throbbing life and vigour, and also of mental concentration. The best of them display an expression of meditative subtlety.

Most of these sculptures are undated, and have almost the same clearly developed style with clear-cut forms, gesture, pose, drapery and costume.

Of those whose dates can be more or less gathered from inscriptional records, the earliest so far noted are the friezes and figures carved on the wooden ceiling of the *namaskara mandapa* in front of the central shrine of the Mahadeva temple at Katinamkulam, a mile west of the Murukkumpuzha Station on the Trivandrum-Quilon railway. An inscription in Vatteluttu script engraved on the left base of the shrine records that the temple was consecrated in the Kollam year 389 (1214 A.C.). The relief work on wood there may therefore be taken to belong to the early part of the thirteenth century A.C. The workmanship is excellent, and the ceiling is divided into nine square compartments, into which are fitted nine neatly carved images of divinities, with Brahma in the centre seated on a swan. The beams supporting the ceiling of the *mandapa* contain five friezes bedecked with beadwork, conventional floral designs, geometrical motives, ornamental foliage-scrolls and various forms of lotus-flowers. The eastern and western entrances into the inner *prakara* (wall) have also fine wood-carvings, representing groups of figures consisting of Shiva and Parvati, flanked on one side by Ganesha and on the other by Subrahmanya; and also those of a Gajalakshmi and of Ganesha riding on his vehicle Mushika (rat), flanked by *dwarapalas*.

The temple dedicated to Narasimha at Chattankulangara, near Chengannur, has an abundance of wood-carvings which may be attributed to the fourteenth century. The Vatteluttu inscription engraved on the entrance to the temple, and presumed on palæographical grounds to belong to the fourteenth century records the execution of repairs to the temple and its consecration. The carvings therefore belong presumably to this

period. There are over 21 important panels of deific figures and Puranic scenes, all expressing tender sentiment.

The images in wood in the niches and on the sikhara (cupola) of the Shiva Temple at Kazhakkuttam, 10 miles north of Trivandrum, and the friezes in the Bhagavati temple at Tonnal, close by, are illustrative of the wood-carving of the fifteenth century. An inscription in Vatteluttu characters in the Kazhakuttam temple belonging to 1471 A.C. relates to the consecration ceremony of the temple, and it is not unlikely that the wood-sculptures there belong to the same date, or had been made after the models that existed there at that time. The ceiling in this temple contains the figures of Dikpalas; the vehicles of the Gods are shown separately on the sides, not as being ridden on by them as seen in the Katinamkulam temple mentioned above. The most important of the scenes represented is that of Arjuna's penance, and his obtaining the sacred weapon from Shiva. These have a commanding grandeur.

In the Tonnal temple, miniature figures of human heads, a belt of elephants, lions, *bhutaganas* (gnomes), Shiva and Parvati, seated on the back of an ox (vehicle of Shiva), and Mahavishnu with Sri Devi and Bhu Devi, are sculptured with technical excellence. An inscription in the temple records that the renewal of the shrine was commenced in 1479, when the image in the temple was consecrated. The wood-work therefore belongs to this period, i.e., the middle of the fifteenth century.

The Shiva temple at Ettumanur contains some notable examples of wood sculpture, (Pl. LII, LIII) admirable pieces of decoration and masterpieces of representative art, in which the figures have a dignified bearing and subtle expression of repose. An inscription on the base of its central shrine states that repairs to the temple were begun in the year 1542, and the consecration ceremony was performed in 1545. The wood-work therefore may be taken to belong to the sixteenth century. The whole of the Ramayana story is carved with striking beauty round the central shrine. Other scenes are from the Santana-gopala, Krishnaleela and the Bhagavata. The carvings in the

cornice, brackets, and architraves, are also of a high order of excellence. What distinguishes the wood-carving at Ettumanur is its singularly clear-cut and beautiful style. The artist has displayed here a fine sense of form, skill in executing the traditional ideas; and, within them, a delightful free play of his fancy.

Specimens of wood-work which show a vividness of expression and an innovation of style combined with power in the Shiva temple at Vazhappalli are illustrative of seventeenth century wood-carving in Travancore. The Vatteluttu inscription on the north base of the central shrine dated in Kollam 840 (1665 A.C.), states that the repairs to the temple were completed and that the consecration was celebrated in that year. The sculptures therefore of this temple can be taken to belong to this period. Round the central shrine of the temple are found a remarkable group of panels containing over 35 scenes and figures from the epics and the Hindu pantheon, in decorative wood-carvings in a free and daring style. The ceiling and beams of the *namaskara mandapa* are similarly decorated in a naive and charming manner, and show individual freedom and power of characterisation.

To this period belong also wood-carvings at Chonakkara and Vettikulangara, displaying the same high order of excellence and distinct style of workmanship. Some of the most important scenes carved round the central shrine of the Shiva temple at Chonakkara are Arjuna's fight with Shiva in the guise of a hunter and the penance of Shiva. In the temple at Vettikulangara, the whole of the Bhagavata is illustrated with remarkable vigour. The figures here have a charm and rhythm rarely seen in other temples of the State.

Forty-five panels of beautiful figures carved in wood and fixed round the four walls of the Ramaswami temple at Padmanabhapuram (Pl. LVII), depicting the story of the Ramayana and forming decorative ornamentations of the eaves, are the finest available examples of eighteenth century wood-sculpture. From the State archives it is gathered that the

construction of the temple and its consecration were in the year 1744 A.C., in the reign of Maharaja Martanda Varma, the maker of modern Travancore. These specimens are the latest and finest examples of a long-lasting tradition of carving skill. Many of the panels suggest a remarkable fertility of imagination and an acute feeling for form.

The art of carving in wood began to decline from the beginning of the nineteenth century. It became sentimental and artificial; the carved figures now look less vivid and show little delicacy of detail. An example of wood-sculpture of this decadent period, illustrative of Puranic episodes, found round the Shiva temple at Kuratti is however peculiar, consisting of a seated image of a four-handed male deity with a *damaru* (drum) in its right hand and *chakra* (disc) and *sankha* (conch) in the hind pair of arms, while the left hand is in the *katyavalimbitha* pose (hand on hip).

The art of the wood-carver, exposed to many fluctuations, seems to have been arrested in its development, and in course of time came to lose its original vigour and versatility. The rich life of the past was lost to the craftsmen; and the loss of individual freedom, not directed any longer by tradition, marked the end of the efflorescence of artistic expression in the State. But the coming of the era of Sri Chitra Thirunal, the present Maharaja, and a revival of interest in indigenous arts and crafts, have exerted a healthy stimulus among lineal descendants of the old craftsmen, who are showing ability to emulate the achievements of their predecessors.

In the chapters on architecture above reference has been made to the special feature of the Malabar gable. This feature has its place also in wood-carving, its screen being, in the better class of buildings, wrought in charming designs carrying forward into our time the ancient motifs presented by the carvers; the down-flowing ornamentation of the eaves, the vertical supports in the middle distance, and the panelled background.

The reticence in domestic decoration that Dr. Kramrisch has referred to comes out in the wood-carved axle-trees of the bullock-carts of Travancore. These are unseen by the driver or passenger, and only seen by the alert eye overtaking the cart. The spacing of the carvings is necessarily two-sided; but variety of design in filling the spaces is notable.



CHAPTER IX

**THE ART AND SYMBOLISM OF
TRAVANCORE WOOD-CARVING**

By J. H. COUSINS

CHAPTER IX

THE ART AND SYMBOLISM OF TRAVANCORE WOOD-CARVING

In a country noted as Travancore has been for the variety, quantity and quality of its trees (the product of growth-inducing climate co-operating with responsive soil and graded elevations) it was natural that timber, as has been already pointed out, should be utilised by the people to a predominating extent. From the earliest known times to the present day the tribes-people of the forests have sheltered themselves from the attentions of wild animals and monsoon deluges in huts of local timbers; and have helped out the processes of life, vocational and domestic, by all kinds of wooden implements.

From the forest hinterland, which covers 2,500 square miles (one-third of the area of the State), and yields a very large variety of trees, the influence of timber gravitated to the more populous coastal region, and permeated all phases of the life of a numerically expanding, energetic, and culturally creative people, producing all manner of objects for use and decoration and for the exaltation of edifices and figures under the inspiration of religion.

Setting aside the architectural use of timber, which is dealt with elsewhere in this book, we shall survey a selection of wood-made objects serving various purposes, in which skill is heightened by one or more of those elements of form, design, texture, rhythm, which add art to craft.

The most impressive expression of artcrafts in Travancore is found in the Hindu temples, in which the artificers devoted all their skill and feeling to the translation of the concepts of religion into worshipable figures and significant events. An exhaustive study of such works in wood as survive in good condition in the State would require a large volume to itself.

Here only a few illustrations can be given to indicate the main characteristics of this art-craft.

Technically the ichnographical the wood-carving of Travancore is remarkable for its composition. From the central figure in a work to its remotest accessory there is an observable gradation and a clear boundary. And since all details of both personages and symbolical adornments in a composition are essential to the full expression of the theological and philosophical concept of the work, there is no blurring of relatively insignificant items; the same skill, for example, is applied to the delineation of the tail-feathers of the peacock on which Subrahmanya, the son of Shiva, rides, as to the posture of his progenitor in his aspect as Nataraja.

In this sense Travancore carving has the solidity and clarity of actual objects that in western art is termed "realistic". Its deific personages and their accompaniments are completely objective. It has no alluring distances, no indefiniteness such as elsewhere is called "atmosphere." Yet, in the original sense of the term, it is "mystical" in its tangible expression of intangible ideas. Its real subject is not portrayed like things seen: it is suggested like things known.

To the non-Hindu mind that is æsthetically sensitive, such works make an appeal to the feelings through their extraordinary qualities of creative accomplishment in substance and form. Their emotional appeal to the general Hindu mind is not æsthetical in the academical sense, but vital: behind the deific figures and their symbolical implements and adornments moves the universal Life, one in essence; multitudinous in an expressional variety which, for all the distinctiveness of its details, owes its existence to its relationships to the others and to the central life. The artist creates reminders of these varieties. The reminders, because the reality is not exhausted in its outer representation, are removable by imperfection: an image that is worshipped in a shrine today may be discarded tomorrow if a flaw is found in it; and, per contra, because the external reminder may be substituted, the ravages of time,

climate and vegetation may frequently proceed without remedy in sacred buildings and accessory works of art.

The psychological distinction between transient outer expression and permanent inner significance is illustrated in wood-carvings of Shiva in his main aspects. Nataraja may be generalised as personifying the cosmic energy that keeps the universe in existence through rhythmic motion. Nilakantha, another aspect of Shiva, represents the curative power that extracts and neutralizes the poisons generated in the processes of life. Chandrasekhara is Shiva as the embodiment of discipline that leads to mastery of the outer world and perfect understanding of the inner. The scientific validity or otherwise of these personalized ideas is not here in question. The apposite point is that each aspect has been iconographically developed according to its own detailed necessities, and is worshipped as itself. But their inner relationship is indicated in symbolical cross-overs. One of these is the mace in one of the left hands of Nataraja bearing a miniature bull. In another aspect of Shiva this bull (*nandi*) is his vehicle of transit (*vahana*), and in this case is larger than its rider. Hence it comes that Nataraja in one panel is not only expressing his own special function as the cosmic dancer, but symbolizing his other function as the rider of *Nandi*, as the spirit supported and transported by matter.

The subject of Nataraja is a popular one in south Indian imagery. It appears in Travancore in stone, wood, metal, ivory and mural painting, and in interpretative dance and drama. On the east coast the image is endowed with a remarkably vivid realization of rhythmical motion, the elegant figure of the deity resting apparently lightly and momentarily on one foot. On the west coast, on which Travancore is situated, the image is sturdy in build, and with both feet planted on a symbolical "demon" suggests, rather than expresses, the dance (Pl. LXIII). In another image of Nataraja, in the Ranga Vilasom Palace in Trivandrum, is a very striking example of a decorative setting of the Lord of the Dance in wood-carving of almost textile fineness. The image is more static than the one alluded to already; and the details of the shrine, while corresponding

with such details in other carvings and in sculptures in stone, have a special delicacy and design that signalize an art of decoration carried to a high pitch of perfection, in contrast with the heaviness of the image. Yet the shrine was apparently made for the image; and the æsthetical difference between them presents an interesting problem, which, however, is beyond the scope of this chapter.

Probably the finest single work in wood in Travancore is the mid-eighteenth century frieze, already referred to, around the outside of the shrine of the Ramaswami temple at Padmanabhapuram. Happily the great work of wood-art has withstood weathering and dust to a considerable extent. The frieze is in forty-five panels, each slightly under seven feet in length and one and a half feet in height, a total length of about three hundred feet of consistent masterly craftsmanship. The sections shown in Pl. LVII are an epitome of the visual subject-matter of the frieze; deific and heroic personages, natural and mythological fauna and flora, with structural and decorative features. Unlike most of the carved panels which are in relief on a background, the Ramaswami temple frieze has no background save where such is a part of the scene delineated; that is to say, a sky or distance background is pierced out, giving the frieze the appearance of an enormous length of fret-work. From the illustration referred to something of the effect of weathering on al fresco wood-work in the tropics will be seen in the shrinking and wrinklins of the surface. Happily the recent awakening of interest in the arts and crafts of the State, and the rescuing from generations of oblivion of Padmanabhapuram Palace, with its treasures of architecture, sculpture, carving and mural painting, have evoked measures for the preservation of such invaluable cultural achievements, and for making those that are reserved within temple precincts accessible to non-Hindus in copies in public collections.

An interesting appendix to the Ramayana frieze above is the single figure of Rama, the perfect king, that occupied a place in the shrine-room of the Palace of Maharaja Swati Thirunal (1827-1847), the famous music composer, in Trivandrum, and is now a striking item in the Ranga Vilasom

Palace. The figure of Rama, slightly under human size, is, with the exception of loosely hanging ornaments and weapons, carved out of a single piece of wood. The figure is executed with plain realism. It has no cosmically symbolical additions, since Rama, though worshipped in many shrines, is of the heroic order rather than the deific, and is given temple honours not so much as an original divinity as an avatar of Vishnu. Like the knights of "The Faerie Queen" and other allegories, Rama is an embodiment of an aspect of attainable human perfection, that of perfect rulership. Plastic representations of him, like that before us, make a subtle blend of idealistic quality and realistic presentation. This more sophisticated nineteenth century carving, in contrast with the eighteenth century work already referred to, shows a movement away from creative vigour, which is always inherently striking, even occasionally ruthless, to derivative, though still admirable craft which, having lost original inspiration, excellently compensates the loss by decorative et ceteras.

We have to content ourselves with the foregoing examples of group and single-figure wood-carving in Travancore chosen from many inspired by the two main aspects of Hindu culture, the Shaivite and the Vaishnavite. We turn now to wood carving as applied to the decoration of buildings.

The most distinctive feature of secular Travancore architecture is the end-tilted "Malabar gable." To its structural use, which is outside the scope of this chapter, the decorative sense of the craftsmen added carved ornamentation that is striking to the eye in its boldness, and a pleasure to the mind and imagination in its balance of design, as indicated in Chapter VIII. The same artistic qualities as went into the roof-gables went into the gabled tops of salient doors. The door in the side wall of Padmanabhapuram Palace (Pl. XXVII), gives a clear idea of such craftsmanship in the hey-day of Travancore art, during, and probably shortly before, the reign of Maharaja Marthanda Varma (1729-1758). Unintelligent attempts to meet decay in the two-centuries-old wood-work, and the crude substitution of heavy modern tiling for former small tiles,

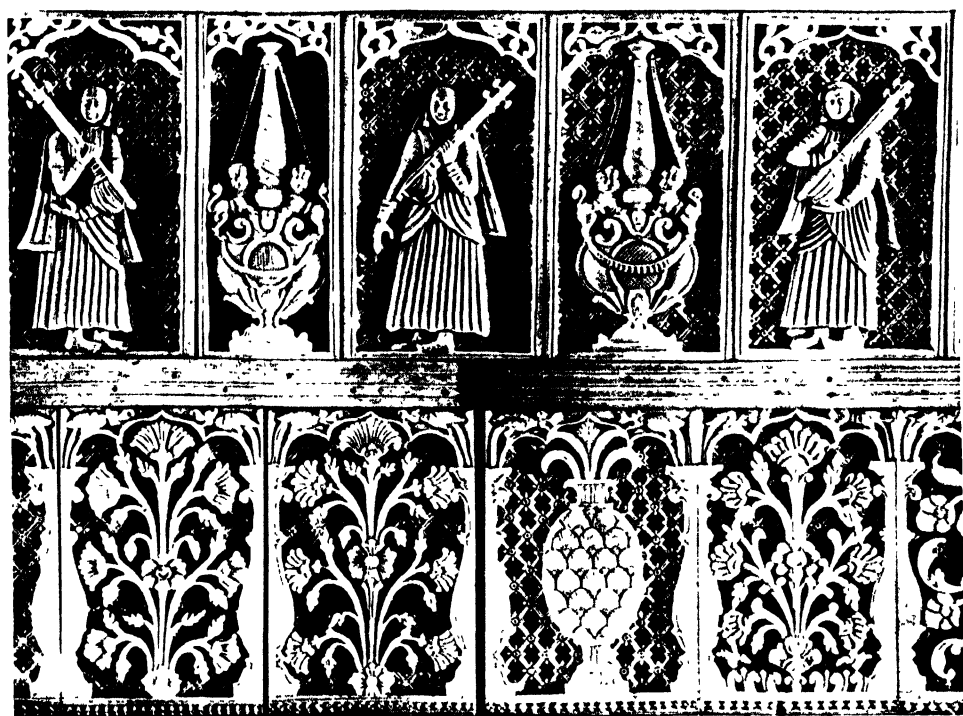
introduced incongruous elements in this exquisite work of art. But its essential features remain.

In Pl. XXV is shown a masterpiece of craftsmanship in wood also in Padmanabhapuram Palace; a ceiling-supporting pillar in one piece between base and capital, carved with the artistic affluence and almost self-conscious perfection of design and execution that mark the summit of an era with a long ascending path of tradition; a kind of roof-tree with bole bare half way up, and, with a preliminary hint of coming growth, spreading out in branches that give support, and in leaves and flowers that add delight. Plate XXVI shows the splendour of the upper part of the pillar, and the additional detail of almost craft extravagance in a movable ring cut inside the petals of the right-hand lotus. The age of this pillar is not certain; but its vital position in what is regarded as the oldest part of the Palace may date it back perhaps two centuries beyond the era of Maharaja Marthanda Varma, say to four hundred years ago.

On the grounds of Padmanabhapuram Palace there stands a house built of wood, excepting the tiled roof, unpretentious externally, but yielding on investigation a wealth of early eighteenth century wood-carving in pillars, ceilings, jambs, lintels, steps, and other details. The house now identified as the Nerapura (wood-house) was for a long time totally neglected, and left to the voracious attentions of borer beetles, and the progressive degeneration of heat, damp and dust. Fortunately the building has come within the scope of the revival of interest in indigenous arts and crafts; and measures for its renovation and future care have restored to the world an exquisite monument of human genius and artistic industry, (Pl. XXVIII-2).

In the same group of wood buildings a notable feature is the carved ceilings, one of the least elaborate of which is shown in Pl. XXII, 1. That the skill of the carvers did not diminish but rather increased in the century following the creation of the Nerapura is indicated in the ceiling, pillar, and wall carvings of the great Palace of Maharaja Swati Thirunal (1827-1847) in Trivandrum fort. Pl. XXIX depicts a multi-petalled extension of the popular lotus design.

The illustrations of Travancore wood-carving given above have been chosen as types from a vast mass of such work in temples and palaces, where religious devotion and august patronage stimulated the artists to the creation of masterpieces embodying a supreme fusion of idea and workmanship. But similar utilization of nature's most varied and extensive gift of responsive material for the art-craftsman is found in old "Nair houses" which still retain their traditional style and decoration save where renewals under modern influences have produced regretful incongruities. Public buildings for over half a century have been mainly outside the Travancore tradition, and have given no opportunity for craft-skill in wood. A striking building, however, on the indigenous line is the Government Museum in Trivandrum, put up in 1880, with a view to an oriental synthesis within the Travancore gabled style and carving. Its inner roof is a wonderful example of wood work, but not capable of intelligible illustration. Externally the Museum preserves the Padmanabhapuram supports to bay windows with their challenging mythological animals which, even so near as sixty years ago, show some of the ingenuity, virility and skill of the wood carvers of Travancore. Recently built Public Offices facing the Museum are a pleasant and promising collaboration of past motifs and future constructions in the topping of severely practical lower storeys by Kerala roofs and gables adorned with typical wood-carved designs.



CHAPTER X

TRAVANCORE IVORY-CARVING

By J. H. COUSINS

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TRAVANCORE IVORY-CARVING

Ivory-carving in Travancore, as far as present knowledge serves, does not show any examples older than the eighteenth century, though Biblical and classical references indicate that Travancore ivory-work was known a thousand years before Christ. But what remains from the eighteenth century, or perhaps earlier, happens to be an object of superb art both in size and workmanship. The object referred to is an ivory throne that, on a recent recognition of its artistic importance, was removed from a small hall formerly used for audiences, where it was seldom seen, and suitably placed in the Ranga Vilasom Palace, Trivandrum. The discovery of a portrait of Maharaja Sri Karthika Thirunal seated on what is evidently the same throne gives presumptive evidence that it was in use during his reign (1758-1798) if not earlier. In any event, the throne did not come into existence by inspiration, but as a culmination of long exercise and development of the inner capacity to visualise form and proportion, and the outer capacity to use tools with the patience, care and concentration that the art of ivory-carving demands.

The ivory throne mentioned shows the high attainment of the artificers of two centuries ago in two of the modes of ivory-works, etching and relievo. The first is seen on the inside of the back and arms of the throne. Thin slabs of polished ivory were covered with a coating of wax. On this the design was cut by a pointed instrument. The design was bitten into the ivory by the acid essence of lime-fruit. Black pigment was rubbed in; and when this hardened, the wax was removed. Owing to the difficulty, amounting almost to impossibility, of procuring slabs of ivory of uniform width, the design does not conform to the slabs but to the total width of the back, the central line of the design falling from the gold knob that marks the highest point of the back. This want of co-ordination of design and

slab would, however, be less noticeable when the throne was new than it is now, as the slabs would originally be so closely placed that the lines would be almost unseen, whereas two hundred years of shrinkage of the slabs has led to some opening of the spaces between them.

In the carving on the outside of the throne, the ornament is in horizontal rows, the upper and lower in low relief, and the three middle rows in high relief. The upper design represents the arms of the State at the time of the making of the throne (they have since been simplified into two elephants and conch) flanked by two figures which seem to be of classical extraction. The bottom row of floral design retains the close placing of the slabs: the lines of separation are visible on close scrutiny, but do not interfere with the total effect.

The three middle rows are a series of small separate slabs, the designs standing out in high relief on a trellis-like background in low relief. The figures of the top row of these three are alternately a rose-water sprinkler repeating the heraldic animals above, and a succession of women musicians, rather of one woman musician in four phases, balanced as to the centre in bodily position, but varied in the hand and arm postures. The musician plays on the *tambura*, a stringed instrument for maintaining the *sruti* (keynote). The two figures at each end of the row may or may not be joining in the singing; but they are playing an essential part in an Indian musical performance, whether the artist be woman or man; the inner one of each pair carries a bouquet of flowers; the outer figure of the left-hand pair has an arm stretched behind the shoulder of the other figure with a garland hanging from the hand; both garland and bouquet being for the performer: the corresponding figure at the right-hand end of the row carries a rose-water sprinkler. The designs of the middle row are conventionalized fruits and foliage. Those of the third row are alternations of a mythological animal and bird, with a double ending of fruits.

A similar ivory throne, but more elaborately adorned and jewelled, was presented to Queen Victoria in 1851 by the then Maharaja of Travancore, Sri Uttaram Thirunal (1847-1860).

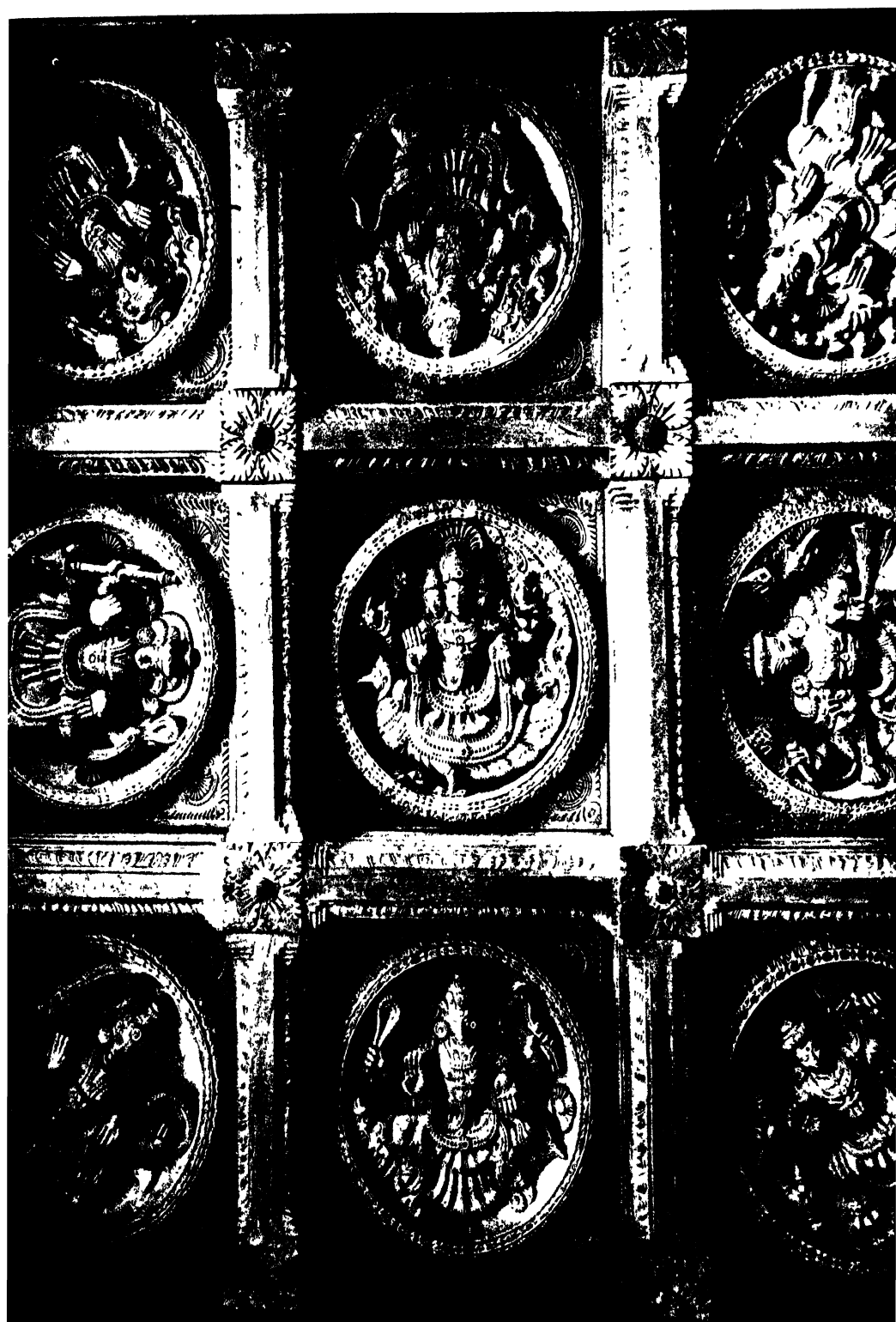
It is understood that the throne was used by Her Majesty as her chair of state at Windsor Castle until the end of her life, and it was afterwards deposited as an object of notable art in the Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington, with the exception of some of the adornments, which were retained at Windsor Castle.

But the ivory-carver's craft in Travancore has not been confined to such large and expensive articles as thrones or to elaborate co-operation with the precious metals in palanquins. Thanks to the encouragement of the craftsmen by the Rulers of the State, and to growing patronage of acknowledged skill in an exacting craft, the reputation of the ivory-work of Travancore has travelled far and wide. A Government Department for the encouragement of the craft was established in 1873. Fifteen years later it was taken over by the newly founded Government School of Arts, and remains an artistically and economically valuable side of its varied work.

The demand for ivory articles both by visitors and for sale abroad has led to the establishment of a number of manufactories on a commercial basis. These maintain the traditional care and delicacy of workmanship, but some of them tend in their subjects to move away from authentic Travancore idealism and reality to somewhat hackneyed versions of foreign figures.

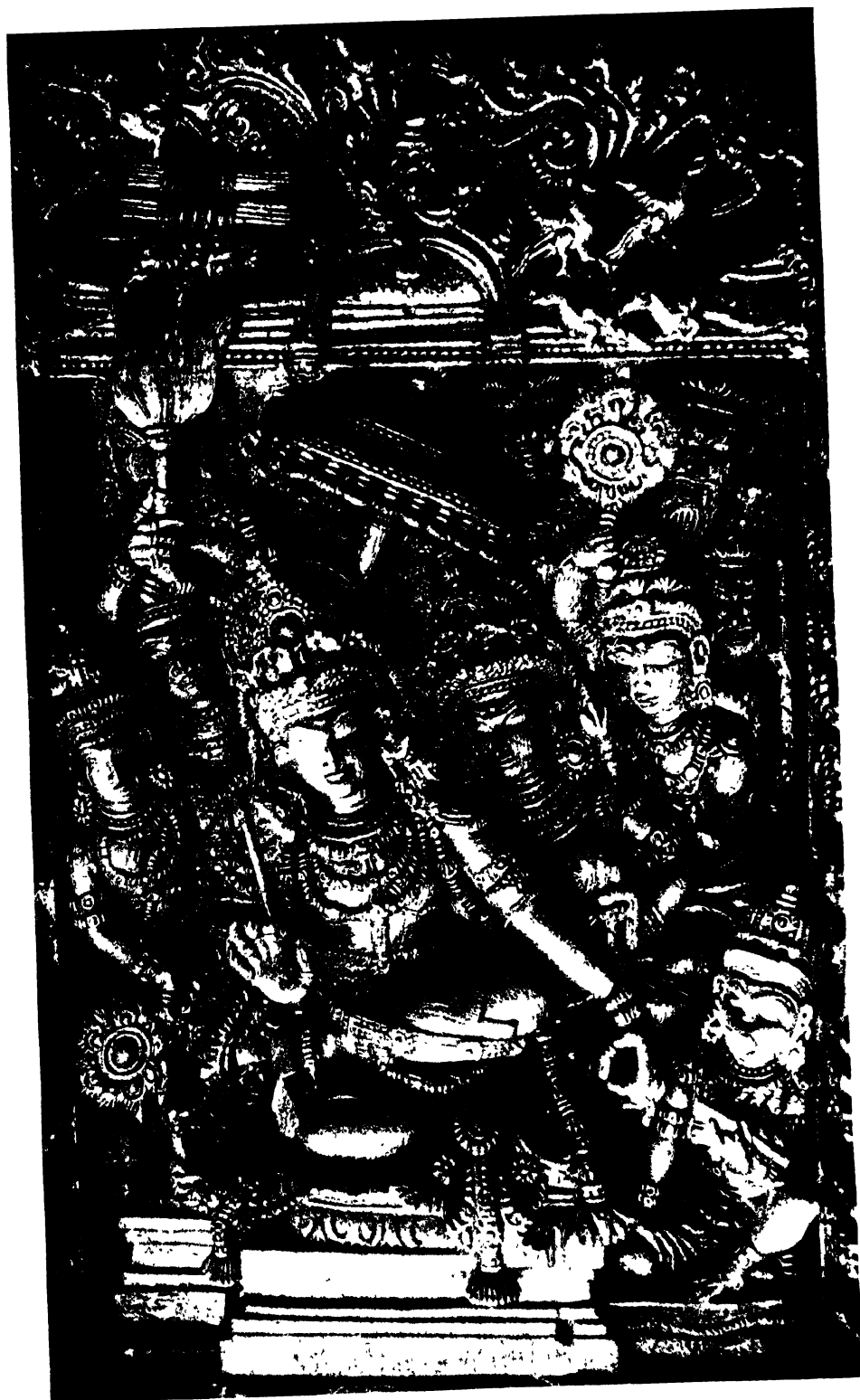
PLATES XLIX TO LXI

WOOD-CARVING









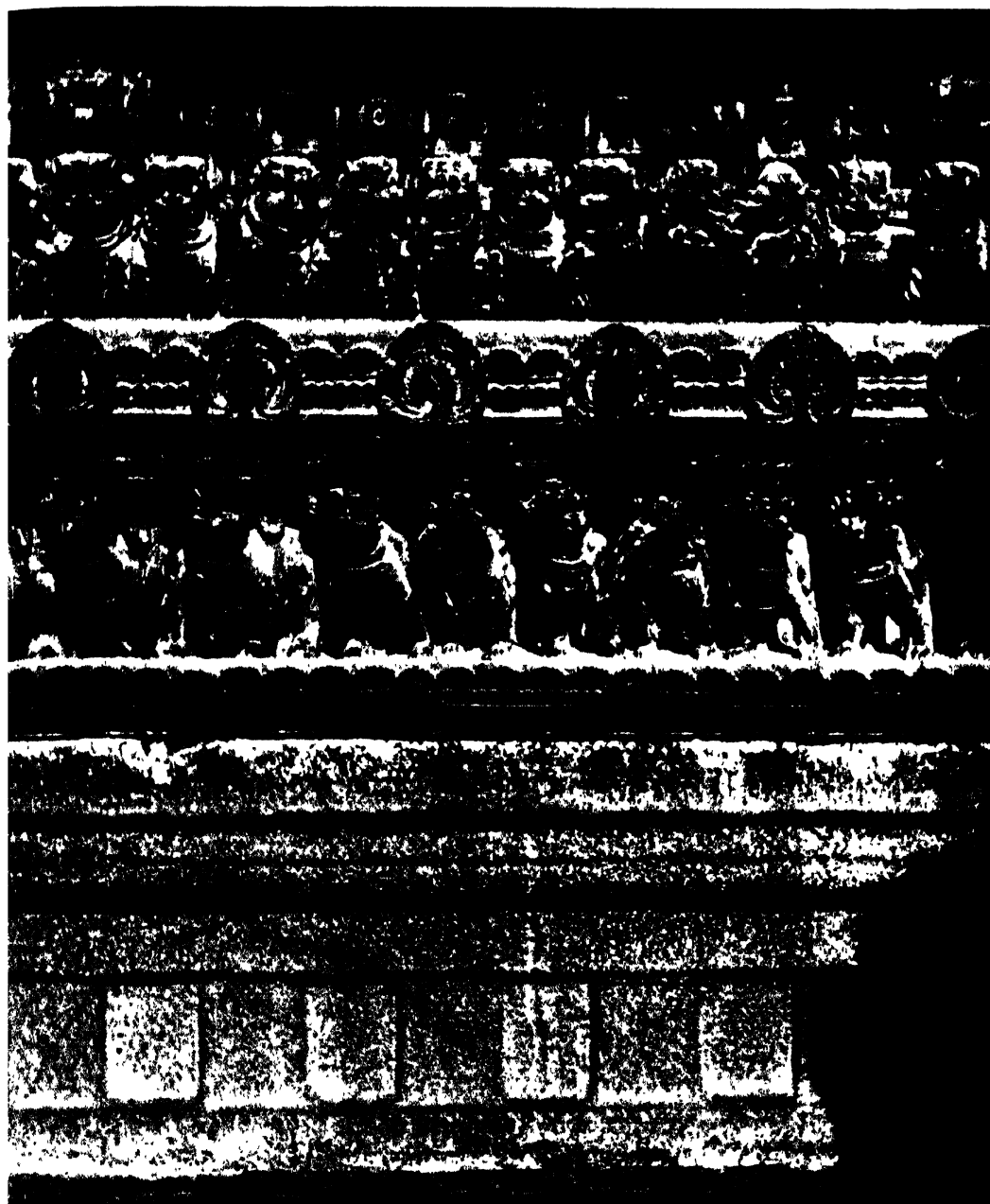


















CHAPTER XI

PAINTING IN TRAVANCORE

By R. VASUDEVA PODUVAL

CHAPTER XI

PAINTING IN TRAVANCORE

The earliest specimens of painting in Travancore belong to the ninth century A.C., if not earlier. These were found recently in the rock-cut cave temple at Tirunandikkara in South Travancore. The hall inside the cave seems to have been once richly decorated with paintings; but these unfortunately perished through neglect in the course of time. Amongst the few relics of them now visible are outlines of figures which have an admirable finish of technique and a delightful expression of grace and benignant peace. Copies of fragments of five out of seven panels are shown in the Sri Chitralayam at Trivandrum.

Some relics of mural paintings, presumed to be of the fourteenth century, have been noticed on the walls of the Tiruvampadi shrine in the Sri Padmanabhaswami temple, Trivandrum. These belong to the reign of the Travancore King, Aditya Varma Sarvanganatha, who was a great patron of art and letters. A Sanskrit inscription engraved in the shrine records that King Sarvanganatha constructed the shrine of Krishna and adjacent buildings in the Saka year 1296, corresponding to A.C. 1374-1375. The figures noticed in the murals comprise mostly women in different kinds of drapery and wearing many varieties of jewellery. Their coiffures are particularly attractive. One panel, depicting a music party of women playing on various indigenous instruments is remarkable in its composition and charm of colour.

A painting which belongs to a period not later than the sixteenth century A.C. is found on the *gopura* (tower) of the Shiva temple at Ettumanur, in North Travancore, which, Dr. Coomaraswamy says, in "An Introduction to Indian Art" is "the only old example of Dravidian painting." (Pl. LXIII). It is 12 feet in length and 8 feet in height. There is no possibility of fixing the exact date of this precious work; but an inscription

within the temple, engraved on the base of the circular *garbha-graha* (sanctum sanctorum) shows that the repairs to the temple were begun during the Kollam year 717 (A.C. 1542) and the purification ceremony was performed in the Kollam year 720 (A.C. 1545). The painting on the *gopura* may therefore be ascribed to a period not later than the sixteenth century. The theme of the picture is that of Shiva, as Nataraja, trampling under foot the spirit of evil represented by a demon. The story is that Shiva, as Nataraja, once upon a time went into the jungles to convert certain Rishis (sages) who opposed him with the help of a demon named Apasmara or Musalagan, whom they produced from fire by their magic. Shiva overcame the demon; and is seen in the picture trampling upon him in a dance of triumph. The dance that is depicted in the mural is supposed to illustrate the mental and physical energy of the Creator. The pose and balance of the figure of Shiva are a marvel of pictorial art. The flying braids of hair and the ends of the cloth which is twisted about the waist and body suggest violent ecstatic movement. On the braids of the hair are a crescent, a small figure of the Goddess Ganga, and a serpent. Snakes are seen coiling all round the picture. A snake is also worn on the neck of the left side, while one that has fallen is held by both hands of the vanquished dwarf. Shiva is clad in tiger skin above the knees and wearing ornaments such as girdle, anklets, wristlets, armlets, necklaces and the sacred thread on the left shoulder. He has a *yali* (mythical animal) on the right ear and a snake on the left. The figure of Shiva is smeared with white ash. The figure radiates bliss, glory and peace. It inspires joy in his worship and strikes terror in the mind of the wicked. His lips show intense sweetness; his eyes representing the sun, moon and fire, are radiant with emotions suggesting celestial bliss. The weapons in his hands are 16 in number. The right hands hold a trident, diamond, fire, *ankusa* (noose), snake, rattle-drum, battle-axe, and a garland of beads, while those of the left hand hold a skull, *veena* (musical instrument), bell, rope, ends of a flower-garland, flag-staff with banner, bones and deer respectively. The dance is witnessed by celestial

beings and sages who praise Shiva's glory. They are all blessed by the glance which radiates from his eyes commingling the threefold *rasas* (moods) of *sringara* (love), *karuna* (pathos) and *roudra* (fury). The figure is surrounded by the nimbus of the glory of the universe, which "like a dome of many-coloured glass stains the white radiance of eternity." On the whole, the sixteen-armed picture of Shiva in his mystic dance, symbolising the rhythmic motion of the universe, is a masterpiece of pictorial art.

A few damaged specimens of a group of paintings, presumed to belong to the same period, are found on the outer walls of the *garbhagraha* of the Shiva temple at Vaikom. From the temple chronicles relating to the year 1539 it is seen that there was a fire between the years 1329 and 1539, and that the temple was afterwards rebuilt and consecrated. The paintings may therefore be taken to belong roughly to a period between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. (Pl. LXIV). There are 20 panels of about 40 deific figures which appear to have retained their ancient charm, though in some cases they have been interfered with by retouching. This style combines clear-cut line with a singular purity and delicacy of colours. Though many of the panels have been subject to damage, those that have survived have a commanding grandeur and power.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries appear to have been a period of unprecedented activity in pictorial art in Travancore. The most important of the paintings belonging to this period are on the topmost floor of the four-storied building in the Palace at Padmanabhapuram, a former capital of Travancore. (Pl. LXVII). There are nearly 50 scenes of mythological interest painted on the four walls of the room. They are designed with masterly skill and have remained wonderfully fresh. They are a valuable artistic heritage full of charm and stimulating interest. The faces of many of the figures depicted are elongated. Most of them, though conventional in type, show a fascinating design and draftsmanship, enhanced by the glamorous magic of colours. Every scene has a completeness of spirit and symmetry. The paintings include the major figures of the Hindu pantheon and some incidents from the Puranas.

Mural paintings of a slightly later date than those at Padmanabhapuram exist in the Adikesava Perumal temple at Tiruvattar, one of the places in Travancore sacred to the Sri Vaishnavas. From two of the inscriptions in the temple dated Kollam 778 to 782 (1603 to 1607 A.C.), it is seen that the Travancore King Vira Ravi Varma effected repairs and added fresh structures to the temple and erected the *ottakkal mandapa* (single-stone hall). The paintings therefore may be presumed to belong to the early seventeenth century, and are a connecting link with the specimens of pictorial art discovered at Padmanabhapuram and other places. Many of the murals have undergone considerable damage; but their charm has not been completely wiped out.

The culmination of achievement in the pictorial art of the State is seen on the walls of the shrines of the Sri Padmanabhaswami temple at Trivandrum. From the lithic record engraved on the *ottakkal mandapa* we learn that the Ruler Sri Bala Martanda Varma, caused the temple of Sri Padmanabha to be rebuilt from the *vimana* (tower above sanctum) to the *dipasala* (place of lights) by a Brahmin architect, Balakantara; and set up the *ottakkal* as well as the images of the Gods Padmanabha, Lakshmi, Bhumi, the Parivara Devatas and the serpent couch, and performed the *kumbhabhisheka* ceremony. These works were commenced in the year 1729 and finished in 1733. The paintings may therefore be ascribed to the early part of the eighteenth century. They are executed in purely native style, and are perhaps the latest record of indigenous painting of the best sort on a somewhat large scale. They are so placed that it is impossible to photograph them. Many of them have become damaged by exposure and neglect; they represent the old tradition of pictorial art.

Bearing a close resemblance to the mural art depicted on the walls of the Sri Padmanabhaswami temple at Trivandrum are a few paintings on the walls of the central shrine in the Tirumuzhikulam temple dedicated to Lakshmana at Mulakulam, in the vicinity of Vaikom and Ettumanur. (Pl. LXXIV). Though many of them are damaged, their colours have a crystalline purity.

Four mural paintings belonging almost to the same period are found on the walls of the *sricoil* of the Vishnu temple at Arunmula. Each of them measures 63 inches in length, and 50 inches in height, painted in pairs on either side of the facade of the central shrine.

Another wall painting of special interest, belonging to this period and depicting a Palace scene was noticed in the *Karivelappura malikai* attached to the Fort Palace, Trivandrum. Though it is considerably damaged, the court scene in it, measuring 2' 3" x 1' 4½", is a masterpiece of realism and pictorial arrangement. Each figure is different in its expression from the rest; and every one of them is marked by elegance, serenity and poise. The representation of an old Princess of the royal family, holding a rosary and watching the ceremony that is going on, is in particular very life-like.

A mural scene depicting the Puranic story of Gajendramoksha (Pl. LXVI), occupying a wall space of 154 sq. ft. (14' horizontal and 11' vertical) was brought to light in the Krishnapuram Palace recently. In execution, posture and composition it is a priceless piece of artistic work and is the largest in the State so far discovered. Judging from its technique and from the date available about the construction of the Palace, the painting is presumed to belong to a period between A.C. 1725 and 1740.

Specimens of mural paintings of a later, and decadent, period, roughly of the late eighteenth century, are found on the walls of the temples at Panayannarkavu, near Mannar. There are two temples, one dedicated to Shiva, and the other to Bhagavati. Both are decorated with well preserved mural paintings.

Side by side with the great achievements in the pictorial art of the country there was fostered and kept up a primitive art of the people. A fusion of decorative and representative impulses inherent in the religious cults and beliefs of the people is one of the principle features distinguishing this art. Decorative geometrical designs of a conventional character in the form of *padma* (lotus) *swastika* or *chakra* (wheel) are the necessary

concomitants of temple ritual in the State. In addition to this, the cult of Durga, Kali and Shasta, who are propitiated by the people, have brought about a form of pictorial art in which the figures of these deities are drawn, and hymns in praise of them are sung, for 40 days in the year in some of the old temples and palaces of the State in the months of December and January.

The figures of Shasta, Kali and Durga are generally drawn. The materials employed in their painting are:—charcoal powder for black; rice powder for white; the powder of turmeric for yellow; the powder of green leaves for green; and a mixture of turmeric and chunnam for red. The figures drawn with these colours are lively and vigorous; they have a rude barbaric splendour.

The history of painting in Travancore from about the last quarter of the eighteenth century marks a distinct change through the influence of foreign schools on local talent. The portraits of Kartika Tirunal Rama Varma Maharaja, Bala Rama Varma Maharaja and of four princesses of the royal family, now in the Ranga Vilasom Palace at Trivandrum, are specimens of water-colour paintings on the model of the Mughal miniatures, presumably by indigenous artists. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, Travancore seems to have taken a lead in the art of painting, and produced several painters of merit. The first impetus in this westernised art was given by the prince of musicians, Swati Tirunal Rama Varma Maharaja, (1820-1847) who attracted to his court all the outstanding talents of his time, among whom was the painter Alagiri Naidu, a native of Madura, considered to be the best painter of the day in South India. A portrait of Dewan Subba Rao by him is in the Ranga Vilasom Palace at Trivandrum and is a fine piece of work. Alagiri Naidu trained a young man named Raja Raja Varma, a scion of the Kilimanur line, in the art of painting in which he soon excelled his tutor. Two water-colour paintings—one of the stone *mandapas* on the road-side near the old landing place, at Trivandrum, the other showing hungry beasts in a forest, and also two ivory miniatures attributed to him, are exhibited in the Sri Chitralayam (State Picture Gallery)

at Trivandrum. Raja Raja Varma was patronised by the Maharaja of the time and given facilities for training a number of pupils and to dedicate himself to the art of painting. Among those taught by him were his nephews Raja Ravi Varma and C. Raja Raja Varma, brothers who became later painters of eminence in India. For some years their works awakened a genuine interest all over India.

Painting in oil-colours was little known in Travancore before the time of Raja Ravi Varma. Theodore Jensen, an English portrait painter, happened to visit Travancore at the time. The two brothers soon became acquainted through him with the technique of European oil-painting and began to imitate it in their own work. Raja Ravi Varma and Raja Raja Varma worked in collaboration for a number of years. While the former excelled in portrait painting and depicting episodes of Puranic interest, the latter's genius lay in painting human figures, still-life, and landscapes. A room of the Sri Chitralayam is given to works of this artist.

The paintings of Raja Ravi Varma are mostly of scenes and figures of mythological interest. They are remarkable for their richness of tone.

The first picture by Ravi Varma was of a Nair lady at her toilet. It was exhibited in the Fine Arts Exhibition at Madras in 1874, and won the Governor's Gold Medal. His first classical subject, Sakuntala's love-letter to King Dushyanta, also won the Governor's Gold Medal in the Madras Exhibition, and was purchased by the Duke of Buckingham, the then Governor of Madras. A painting which he executed at the command of Visakhram Tirunal Rama Varma Maharaja, "Sita's Ordeal of banishment by Sri Rama", was in some respects the apothesis of his reputation as a painter of Indian Puranic and mythological subjects. This attracted the notice of the Gækwar of Baroda, on whose invitation Ravi Varma painted a number of portraits and sketches. Raja Ravi Varma also did some paintings for the Maharaja of Mysore, dealing mostly with Puranic subjects. The Sri Chitralayam at Trivandrum has a collection of the originals of some of the masterpieces of Ravi Varma's portraits

and studies of Puranic figures and also some paintings associated with the palaces of Baroda, Udaipur and Mysore. In all his Puranic paintings, the figures of Raja Ravi Varma are life-size. His figures of women are all of one type; their distinction is found only in the difference and arrangement of their drapery. Nevertheless he is a good painter of portraits of a ripe corporeal beauty. As a colourist, he had few peers in his time. He gave to all his paintings a rich composition and cultured colouring, besides investing them with a vivid vitality. But though his figures seem to have a perfection on the representational side, none of them can be said to possess delicate or elusive spiritual subtleties.

Ravi Varma's best work was in oil portraiture; of which he was one of the most accomplished masters of the art in India. All his portrait studies are remarkable for a thoroughly dignified conception, and have the attraction of clear, soft and finely toned colours. He brought to light in his portrait all the essential qualities of the objects portrayed. In short, it may be said that he laid the foundations of the art of oil-painting in the country. A striking feature of Ravi Varma's work moreover is his knowledge of anatomy.

Since the time of Raja Ravi Varma, there has hardly been any painter of conspicuous eminence in Travancore. But his sister, Mangalabhai Tampuratti, has done some excellent work. Two of her paintings in oil, one, a portrait of Ravi Varma, and the other, "Charity," are preserved in the Sri Chitralayam. She is par excellence a painter of women and children.

Two other artists, Patinjare Matathil Padmanabhan Tampi and Rama Varma of Mavelikara Palace have both, following the example of Ravi Varma, zealously pursued the Ravi Varma style of oil painting without however succeeding in further developing it.

Till the accession of His Highness Sri Chitra Thirunal Bala Rama Varma Maharaja, there continued a marked decadence in the art of painting in the country. His Highness's reign has witnessed the dawn of a new era, and synchronises with a renaissance of art in India. The establishment

of the Sri Chitralayam, the State Picture Gallery, by His Highness in 1935 has indicated the beginnings of a new interest in fine arts. The beginnings of this change are noticeable in an alcove of a dozen paintings from nature and imagination by a Kerala artist, K. Madhava Menon. He works with the fineness of the Mughal painters of the past, but on a larger scale. Every detail of a theme is painted with scrupulous care, though never with a loss of reality and rhythm. His work and that of some of his pupils in the University School of Arts inspire hope for the future.

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CHAPTER XII

THE FORM OF THE PAINTINGS

By STELLA KRAMRISCH

CHAPTER XII

THE FORM OF THE PAINTINGS

The carved images and symbols are coloured and thus part of the painted wall (Pls. LIX-LXI). Sculpture and painting here are as closely connected as are painting and drawing. Now it is the carvings which predominate and colour is auxiliary to their effect; then again the wall with its paintings is given its accents by carved and painted console-images. The temple in Pazhur, in the eighteenth century, shows the same connectedness of painted wall surface and painted sculptures as could be seen in the cave temple of Badami, in the Deccan, in the sixth century. But their relation here is different and also their quality.

THE CLASSICAL HERITAGE

The Devata (Pl. LXII) on the wall of the *mandapa* of the Shiva cave-temple in Tirunandikkara, in South Travancore, is one of the few discernible figures, painted about the year 800 and having formed part of a large panel of which only the uppermost portion is in existence, showing amongst flowers, clouds and rocks traces of hands in fleeting movements and of heads bent with tenderness. In another panel are two seated figures of which the one, that of a woman, has an impressive countenance; fragments of pillars and smiles, faces of elephant and leonine mien, all having the spontaneity of an established tradition which, having explored all its possibilities, shows its mastery even when it does not draw on all of its resources.

The ground of the paintings is white, the colour of the wall; red and touches of green and yellow are still discernible, the outlines are of unequal function, now supple and modelling and then again merely circumscribing the modelled surface so that it appears like a plaque set against its background. Such unevenness in the use of the elements of form is also to be seen

in other paintings of approximately the same phase, such as those in the Kailasanatha Temple in Elura. There, however, a new orientation was about to be given to wall-painting which up to then, homogeneous in its form, had produced over one millennium the 'classical' paintings in Bagh, Ajanta, Badami, etc., in the Deccan.

While no direction different from that of the paintings in preceding centuries in the Deccan, and also in South India of about the same time is taken in the paintings of Tirunandikkara, they combine inherited plasticity with a breadth of shape, still sentient in its contour. Thus classical Indian painting is strong in its own tradition in the southernmost part of India, in South Travancore, carrying on the heritage of its southern predecessors, of about a century or more previously, in Sittanavasal.

KERALA FORM

Nothing is known as yet or has been made accessible of painting in Travancore between Tirunandikkara and the sixteenth century approximately. With the stupendous wall painting of Nataraja (Pl. LXIII) in the *gopuram* of the temple of Ettumanur, the chapter of Kerala painting in Travancore, opens, to our present knowledge, about the same time as it does in Cochin with the wall paintings of the Mattancheri Palace. The paintings glow in sombre colours, Indian red and terreverte, white, black and yellow; blue is very sparingly used; the technique is tempera, the binding medium being made from the seed of *abrus precatorius*. The ground of the paintings is a specially prepared plaster to which may be added thin washes of lime. The white in the paintings is that of the ground, white details in the coloured parts are produced by scraping the surface. These white surfaces and also the deep black ones—the cascades of beards of the Rishis—help in fixing to the surface the round effect of the bodies and limbs of the figures. These are modelled in colour, yellow being stippled with red while green is shaded with black. A black outline furthermore binds in the surface the rotundity of the limbs.

The limbs and bodies are uniformly modelled, smooth shapes, inflated to the same degree of roundness in all the

figures, the shadows being massed towards the outlines. These are firm, without any modelling capacity of their own so that hardness is imparted to the volumes bounded by them. One and the same modelling by shading independent of any source of light, is meted out equally to all the figures; they differ only in their proportions, and these are given by the status of their carriers, the kind of divinity they give shape to; subservient to their iconographic physiognomy, the Gods and Goddesses have their appropriate proportion, volume, colour and attributes; there is essentially but one type for the Gods, another for the Goddesses while the demons are cast in a greater variety of moulds. There is sameness also of position, a broad three-quarter view of the face which, but for the eyes, has its permanent mood immovably impressed on it. The gestures of the hands and arms are as varied as are the glances of the eyes, each having the function of an intelligible sign in its proper place.

While the body of each figure is a compact unit, the appearance of the figure is augmented in width beyond the amplitude of its body, by arms, generally bent at the elbows and held away from the body; be they lowered or raised or in any other attitude, in any of the images, they form part of their coloured volume. This is further extended when the arms are many and are part of Shiva's dance, as a butterfly's wings are part of its flying shape. Like a gigantic butterfly caught in a stained glass window and transformed into its luminosity is the shape of the dancing Shiva. It is an emblem, encircled by the rim of its halo, and singled out from the celestial assembly. Each of the figures of the celestial host however, though not as forcibly, is also a unit by itself bounded by its outline. It encompasses the broadly spread drapery and high crown; the latter moreover is inscribed in an oblong halo. The platter of its coloured surface presents the intricate shape and decoration of the crown and the smooth expanse of the face.

The figures are shuffled in vaguely parallel horizontal rows, one above another, covering as much of one another as yet allows each figure to be identified. This refers to their connectedness

vertically, whereas in the horizontal the painted panel is studded with them, one figure bordering on the other without inter-space. There is no background whatsoever to the density of their display. There is ground only where no Gods are; at the bottom of Shiva's circle it forms its pedestal; above it, a row of diminutive devotees is singled out from the celestial assembly; it is not part of it and stands on its own ground.

Each figure is set in a circumambient line. Where this does not coincide with the outline of the body it is made particularly distinct by having a beaded border—the 'beads' being specks of light, the ends of the rays emanating from these painted presences. Brahma (on the left) has a veil of locks, etc., spread around him; it is beset with the luminous beaded border.

The sixteenth to seventeenth centuries show the sumptuous, heavy fabric of Kerala painting. It has reached a stage where nothing can be added to it and it is still strong. Soon afterwards its grandiose luxuriance becomes threadbare in texture and is adapted immediately to a quality less compact and closely knit, and more freely consistent.

Nearest to Ettumanur are the less ambitious though not less gravid paintings of the temple in Vaikom (Pl. LXIV; see also Pls. XIV, XXXVIII). The single compositions here are adjusted to the available wall-space on the round *Srikoil*.

The breadth (one would almost be tempted to say the girth) of the image of Parvati holding her son Ganapati on her lap, exceeds any dimension in which limbs shaped like those of man are wont to move. The bounteous girth, however, is not that of the appearance of figures as they are seen in this world; it belongs to the Gods as beheld by their painter in Kerala. The world in which he thus beholds his Gods has no scenery or stage, no setting comparable to any actuality. It is the rich fabric woven by their presence; their shapes form the units of its pattern.

Classical Indian painting had shown God in his manifestations in the world, enchanted by their presence. They moved

on the ever-green slopes of Mount Meru or in the clouds nearby. They had their chariots and palaces, groves and mountain caves as places of manifestation. There, ever young and beautifully active, they had their play in which all things took part, trees and rocks, the pillars of the palace, the gleaming jewels and dancing scarves. This adorable world, the pleasure of the Gods in which they move at will, is not painted on the walls of the temples and palaces of Kerala. Its phantasmagoria is not displayed, no houses are built in these paintings for the Gods to dwell in, no groves to have their sport in; they have no ground to tread on; no space in which they could be shown gracing it with their movement and presence, for there is nothing besides their presence. Nothing exists outside it. They occupy all the space, and their ambient lines clasp it as much as they communicate their fullness to the many shapes which they engender; all are part of their presence and have no separate existence. Borne by the vastness of the appearance of the Gods, they are its adornments, jewelled clasps and rings which hold the bounteous shape within bonds as tight as are its outlines. These then are the confines of their all-filling, all-replenished presence; the encircling ornaments and raiments in which the pressure of the body of divine presence is felt and contained, and the capacious outline within which this presence confronts the devotee for whose sake it is displayed. Even though thus encompassed, there is no end to the presence of a God but where it coincides with that of another divinity. The limits of the body are augmented until they touch upon the confines of another presence equally potent in form-engendering shape.

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Once the potent shape is limned, its ornaments adjusted and the halo encircling the crown, its presence engenders further shapes like those of the ornaments and the crown. Petals and pearls, strings of them and bunches gyrate around the nucleus—the presence of the divinity—until they form its wider confines, and assemble along it; white flower garlands and pearl chains being part of this limit of radiance. Thus bounded, the presence of a God seems, as it were, to have drawn into its orb all visible

form. The single devices themselves are precise, have each their name and connotation; their main reference, however, is to the figure which they surround and whence they derive their place and shape in the picture.

On the lap of Parvati are laid out waves of patterned cloth; they flow along the opulence of her limbs; these are so firmly full that they do not yield to any pressure, be it that of jewelled belts or the weight of Ganapati's elephantine legs which, together with their bangles, are added to the ornaments of her lap. Similarly the flaming pearls laid out on her chest are not weighted by the wheels of the ear-rings; these are the place of transmutation where ornaments sprout in bunches of lotus petals, like pointed plantains, and the same wealth of floreated fruit and seed is in the crown, flaming off beyond its confines, from the central stem of the tree under whose branches, of her own radiance, this Madonna is enthroned. Bananas and seed-pods as also the movements of the tails of animals of great majesty, the lion or the bull, contribute to the shape of its branches. Their movements are produced in the form of branches of the tree by the reverberation as it were of the abundance which is in the form of the Goddess. Into her presence are integrated, and from it are given their shape, all her adornments and attendants. They emerge, crowned and haloed like herself, from the rim where she abides.

These crowns to her left and right are pictorial concepts of which each unit has its significance, the lotus, the *gavaksha*, the trident; they are divine edifices superstructural to images that are not shown (but for the raising of a brow, under the crown on the right, which, properly seen, already is in the entourage of the divinity next to Parvati).

The ornaments, the surroundings, the symbols, are all the outcome of the central group, their shape is like that of their source; the petals and pearls, stems and scrolls, share in its modelled ripeness.

Nothing exists outside the divine presence, its outermost perimeter concludes its shape; it is co-terminous with the next

divine presence and its comprehensiveness. This lies in its own girth. It is taut, full of contents to which shape is given in ornaments carrying its form to the outermost reverberating confines. They are as definite and broad as is the outline of the image.

Spaceless, but voluminous, the closeness of shapes is massed and it is mastered by a linear context whose ebb and flow is staid around the central theme, the compact figure of divinity. God in the world was the theme of classical Indian painting. The world of the Gods is the content of the painted walls of Kerala.

It is shown with a proficiency which an often repeated vision ensures. The paintings of the sixteenth century give no indication when it was first beheld; that it was not thus seen outside Malabar the schools of adjacent countries bear testimony whose work is partly contemporary, and also anterior to them. Wall paintings, however, of Mysore under the Hoysalas should, judging from the sculptures, have been of a related kind.

The Kerala paintings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are rooted in their own past which is part of South Indian painting known from the days of Sittanavasal, in Pudukkottai, and represented in Travancore by the fragments and traces of painting in Tirunandikkara (Pl. LXII). Classical Indian painting, as practised in the South, has found its most perfect shape in the painting of the lotus pond on the ceiling of the rock-cut hall of the Jain temple in Sittanavasal. The entire surface is covered with lotuses, each flower is presented on the background of its leaf, a platter and halo of its florescence; these leaf discs float on the waves of the lotus stalks by which the intervening surface is streaked. The lotus leaves are neatly outlined, and their function in the painting is similar to that of the halos around the crowns of the Gods in the Kerala paintings.

In the same painting in Sittanavasal, as also in Tirunandikkara, one—and a favourite—way of showing the face is a broad three-quarter profile almost as distinctly outlined as are the

lotus-leaf discs on the Sittanavasal ceiling. The broad three quarter view sharply outlined is, however, the rule in Kerala paintings of the 16th and 17th centuries; like an iron band its outline grips the face of Parvati (Pl. LXIV).

The ample, if schematic, modelling of the figures, together with the heaviness of the surrounding lines, would be incongruous were it not pervading the whole composition and all the paintings. Two components of classical painting, each following its inherent possibilities logically to the very end, appear thereby compacted; the one fits, the other fills, they have become the substance of painted form. Inflated surface and ambient line are the most alive where they are combined in small units: finger-tips, toes and the flaming beads of jewelry.

The walls of most of the temples in Travancore are painted. The contingent of painters and sculptors throughout the centuries must have been prodigious. The bonds, however, which united the arts of Malabar were strong. If the Mattancheri palace paintings are compared with those in Ettumanur and Vaikom, the differences are few, the agreement general. The Travancore paintings are less detailed, less warm in their modelling, and more definite and sumptuous in their lines. This generalisation, however, does not indicate particular local schools of Travancore on the one hand and Cochin on the other; it applies especially to the Vaikom paintings. Local schools, particular local idioms following the sensibility of a particular well endowed painter, there must have been many. This can be inferred from the wide range of Kerala paintings in the eighteenth century. Besides, however, the bulk of paintings executed within the leading schools, are others whose allegiance is elsewhere; their heroic demeanour, were one to follow ancient Indian classification, would designate them as Kshatriya in form in contradistinction to the Brahmanical form of paintings which constitute the bulk of the paintings hitherto known in Kerala.

MEDIAEVAL AND OTHER COMPONENTS

The Kerala form of painting appears to have come into its own at a time—about the year 1000—when also other

provinces of India had begun to express themselves in their own pictorial idiom, Western India in its 'Gujerati' illustrations, and the "Eastern School" in miniatures of a less striking and more cultured convention. The Eastern School prolonged a reduced repertory of classical painting until the days of Chaitanya when a renewed religious awakening intensified its definition. Classical heritage, in certain of its features, remained for centuries a basic factor in the paintings of Malabar as it also did in Bengal. Western India on the other hand and finally also South India, from the days of the Vijayanagar Kingdom, in their paintings were quickened towards a more incisive and simplified context in which a dominant line and flat colour surfaces had done away with the larger conceptions and greater resources of classical Indian painting.

This "mediæval" context sporadically entered and contributed to a restricted extent to the art of painting as practised in Malabar from the seventeenth century.

Outside the general type of Kerala painting, in their posture, costume and physiognomy, are the figures painted in a panel of a wall of the rock-cut temple at Chitalar (Pl. LXV): stark profiles of face, the body in a combined front and side view, clad in tight bodice and clinging *sari* whose stripes and folds are the main adornments of the figures, the jewellery being relatively sparse and collected around neck, wrists, etc. These are as unusual in the paintings of Malabar as is the stance of the figures, swaying backwards from knees to hip, and thence forward. This stance, although less indicative of immediate movement, is particularly that of figures in the paintings of Vijayanagar; so is the strict profile of the face; but the eyes here do not sail unforeshortened across the face in profile, as can be seen even in later paintings (Pl. LXVIII-IX) where the art of Vijayanagar, or the mediæval type of painting in India, was embodied in the context of eighteenth century painting in the Kerala tradition. The eyes of the Chitalar figures are foreshortened, a powerful modelling swells the bodies of the figures, its breadth betrays the work of a Kerala painter who, in the seventeenth century, adopted the South Indian costume,

such as was worn under the Nayakas, whose statues are carved in the pillars of the temple of Madura and Srivilliputtur. Neither their satiety nor their sleekness however, left their mark on the work of the Kerala painter. He gave form to the heroic pose—latent in the Vijayanagar figures—and endowed it with the ponderosity of the Kerala idiom, its sumptuous flow of line having become quickened by a stimulus whose own source, in Vijayanagar, had already become dry.

The leading schools of Kerala painting may be followed into the eighteenth century, when its most impressive large-scale compositions were painted in the palaces of Krishnapuram and Padmanabhapuram.

The “Gajendra Moksha” panel in the Krishnapuram Palace (Pl. LXVI) has elemental power, as far as the wings of Garuda reach which carry Vishnu. The rest of the story is laid out in rectangular compartments, full of figures cursively outlined. The diction is facile and lacks in the strength and consistency which would have been required for a welding of the several components which here appear added, one next to the other, especially in the middle row. A lotus-pond grown from seeds of Kerala and Europe, and an elephant devoid of its native substance, are on the one side, and on the other are two large female figures of the general post-Vijayanagar or Nayaka South Indian Type; their stance and bearing are of different extractions from those of the divinities which they approach. Their figures are drawn without conviction and so are those in the top row.

The wings of Garuda dominate the painting. They might have been shown in their proper formal surroundings in another painting of which nothing has been preserved except the impression it seems to have made on the decorators of the Krishnapuram Palace.

Where the output was on so large a scale as it must have been in the eighteenth century, and Western paintings could readily be seen by the craftsmen, it is no wonder that some of their motives and conventions found a way into the art of

Kerala. The wonder is that they had not touched the integrity of the local tradition prior to the eighteenth century. Now, however, as the Krishnapuram painting shows, other schools, in this instance of the Tamil country, were also readily welcomed. Such introductions are seen more or less in the raw where the power of the painter is at a low ebb, and incapable of arriving at a wider synthesis.

But the eighteenth century was not an age of disintegration. The solidity of the established standards might have been loosened. It had attained to a maximum of compactness in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which could not be prolonged at the same level over a long stretch of time. A lessening of the coherence of this form,—an altogether finished product,—and the simultaneous inrush of substitute possibilities, could be coped with only by greater painters than those who were employed in Krishnapuram Palace. While outside influences made themselves felt, the relaxation in the consistency of the leading school gave scope to a range of possibilities within the practising artists, who otherwise would have done their work under its paramount guidance. Many idioms now raise their voices; they convey the same thoughts; the intonation and the cadence of their voices differ. The eighteenth century was a formative period within the tradition of Kerala art.

A synthesis of the living art of Travancore within the tradition of Kerala are the wall-paintings in the upper room of the Padmanabhapuram palace. The entire walls of this large room are covered with paintings, each in its panel (Pl. LXVII); some of the larger compositions appear to be the work of one master. The Ganesha and Shasta panels (Pls. LXVII-LXX) are among them.

The triple row of figures (Pl. LXVIII), dividing the painted field as also in the Krishnapuram Palace painting, represents a singling out and schematising of the closely knit tapestry of figures, as in Ettumanur. The image of Ganesha, the central divinity, cuts across two panels.

The image of Ganesha (Pl. LXVIII) deviates but little from what must have been its more ancient mould. The modelling

has increased in roundness, larger masses of shade are spread from its outlines inward, but it remains a modelling as if of sculpture, productive of a rounded shape irrespective of any source of light; this is how the Gods of India have been bodied forth in the classical paintings. The head of Ganesha is forcibly turned to the side. This increases the animation of the figure, its foreshortening is, however, none too successful. All the other constituents of his shape conform fully with established standards. It is, however, not the image of Ganesha but the figures of his devotees and their groups in which the eighteenth century is seen at work.

Just as the close contiguity of the superimposed masses of figures had become rationalised, cut up and arranged in lines, so also are the single figures now set at a distance from each other, so that the ground is seen of the painting against which they are limned. But not only their clear and noble outlines—these have regained a modelling capacity absent from the 16th and 17th century paintings though present in classical Indian painting (Pl. LXIX)—demarcate them against the monochrome ground. The outlines of their smooth limbs are accompanied by a beaded border such as had comprised the wider entourage of the images in the earlier groups of paintings (Pls. LXIII-IV). Here it is no longer an outer rim to their pearl-beset, opulent radiance; it is a device which clarifies and enlivens the picture while at the same time it fixes the position of the figures as part of its surface to which they appear attached as if by series of pin-heads. This now is the function of the once glowing beads of radiance. Once the property of the Gods in their wide and closely filled sphere, they now accompany the outline of the single figures of the devotees as well as of their offerings and of any figure or object represented. The triple lamp, in the bottom row, is the most resplendent of the newly formed patterns. Itself of ancient shape, as rounded, as vital with the energy that formed it as any of the lamps (Pl. XLVIII) of Travancore—(the ornate hanging lamps (Pl. XLVI) are of a different type and have more in common with the wood carver's art),—its beaded outline traces patterns on the ground and they are given their

fulfilment in the light lozenge specks that have sprung up on the ground, its nameless flames. So distant a fantasy is not found in the earlier paintings where every motive had a name of its own and was a symbol in its own right.

Now the figures, far from bending their heads shown in broad three-quarter profiles and full ovals, carry them in sharp profile, summarized by the bordering pin-heads, against the monochrome ground. Though the physiognomies differ according to the status and caste of the figures, they are yet of one typological family. Its pictorial ancestry may be traced to Vijayanagar. This refers to the faces. The bodies display much of their frontal width while they too, on the whole, have accepted the stance of the figures in the Vijayanagar and subsequent schools of South Indian painting. The freedom of movement, however, is here greater than elsewhere, the knees are more flexible while the volume of trunk and limbs is not only undiminished but even increased albeit in naturalistic detail (Pl. LXIX; body and foot of figure holding conch-shell, bottom, extreme left). This is how the Western factor has been assimilated.—The line, together with a regained modelling capacity, has become more pliant, and rejoices in its own inventiveness in curved triangles applied on arms and chest in which it sums up their modelling. The conversion of the various pictorial means into ingenuous surface pattern can be seen in the 'drop' shapes that grace especially the necks of the figures, in places where the sinews are. Drop shapes and triangular lines are patterns derived from an altogether assimilated, descriptive naturalism of Western provenience. They are balanced by the white flecks in the dark hair, whose sequence and shape follow the course of the pin-head border (cf. Pl. LXIV). Other flecks on a larger scale are the lozenges already pointed out and which have settled, light, on a dark ground, and dark on the white turbans of the musicians, in the bottom row.

The newly devised elegant figures confront the opulence of the more ancient shapes, of the clustered fruits on their stem, full of sap (Pl. LXIX); they carry them to Ganesha to be

integrated in his wider crown, tree and entourage (cf. Pl. LXVIII).

The more ancient rhythms by which he is surrounded have dwindled in size and cogency, in comparison with their former plenitude (Pl. LXIV). Engulfed as they are by new, floating rhythms, they are no longer of the all filling world of the Gods, but refer to the actions of men as they approach their Gods.

The picture of Shasta (Pl. LXX) is of a different order although the same components are blended therein. The ancient vision prevails, the whole composition is of one continuous texture though it has become thinned. Horse and rider, and the dark figure in the middle of the bottom row, are out of the ancient heritage; the rest are new-comers, some by their attitude only (female figure, bottom), most of them, however, in type as well as costume, and in their profile view. The vehemence of attack, as in the tiger-stabbing hero at the bottom, has been inherited from the frenzy of demoniac figures in the more ancient paintings. Vijayanagar types have become supple as the branches of the tree where they seek shelter from the tiger's attack. The Vijayanagar component is second in strength; Western naturalism is in the plumage of the beaded bird, on the left, in the modelling of the leg of Shasta, specially the knee, etc.

The compositional theme is well-known from earlier wood-carvings (Tirunaradi, etc.) and, no doubt, from paintings, too. The density of its context, in the Padmanabhapuram example, results from an integration of all the shapes; it is akin to that of paintings of the sixteenth century. The beaded border (the horse's bells and jewellery that play about the figure of Shasta resemble it) and the larger beads of fruits growing on many a tree and shrub in this painting, make the ground on which they are set incandescent with their orbs. The spotted tiger's skin adds further scintillations, so that the whole unearthly hunting scene is astir with sparks.

Below, a delicately Westernized arabesque of animals behind bars of ribbon, is a welcome jumping board for Shasta's horse.

But however unrelated the components might be as regards their origins, they are completely at one in making this picture consistent.

To the eighteenth and early nineteenth century are to be attributed also some of the most vital pictures within the Kerala tradition in Travancore, where largeness of vision had never been compelled to be diminished to the size of miniature painting for the delectation of royal connoisseurs. The example given by the Mughal and other Indian courts was not followed by the rulers of Travancore, nor did the results of Mughal patronage, the many small pictures which were painted all over India, unsettle the steady vision of the painters in Travancore. Their art remained sacerdotal and heroic, aware all the same and receptive of the new forms of life and art that landed on its shores or touched the towns and villages.

The paintings of the temple of Tricakrapuram, (Pls. LXXI, II, III) show, in the late eighteenth century, traditional art at its highest level strong in its allegiance to form as perfected in the 16th and 17th centuries (Pl. LXXII), equally potent in its integration of new and foreign modes (Pl. LXXIII) and supreme in the welding of all knowledge inherited or assimilated, to the purpose of telling, in the pure language of art, the immortal stories of the living Gods (Pl. LXXI).

The picture of Shri Krishna and his parents (Pl. LXXI) has the power and mystery of an ancient ritual. Archaic Greek compositions are similarly constituted in the balance of their seemingly static actors. But here the organisation is more complex, the actors being shuffled in two planes on a monochrome ground, those of the second plane providing the steadiness of the chorus. The stark profiles of the two women facing each other, impersonal, majestic, joyous, set the rhythm of the picture going. They and the large figure on the left are tied behind the bar formed by the horizontals of their breastbands.

The ground on which they move is closed by the beaded border. The composition on two levels is united by its theme, and by the rhythm of the wave of garlands that links the

women's ample figures in both the planes. The clear spacing and sharp profiles; the divine power of the child's body, these are transformations of the Vijayanagar or mediæval Indian component on the one hand and of Western naturalism on the other. They are embraced by the breadth of Kerala painting.

More than one painter must have been at work in Tricakrapuram; they were alive to the many possibilities of form within their competence; they painted as well in the more ancient mode as they did in having assimilated the various new modes. Lakshmi and Parvati (Pl. LXXII) are painted in the mode of the 16th and 17th centuries, but, though the Goddesses are seated in close embrace, their bodies are separated by a new spaciousness, a wise disposition of the plain dark, and the light patterned, ground. There is a certain amount of sketchiness in the execution; the hands are clumsy; in most of the 18th century paintings the fingers have lost some of the acute sensitiveness and delicacy which was theirs in the earlier paintings, a failing of intensity in the details, while the whole has the breadth of the Kerala tradition.

This breadth remains where the assimilated components are many (Pl. LXXIII) and where the residues of Western painting—such as had been embodied in the early Mughal illustrations (Hamza Romance) and thence by the painters of the Kangra school—seem to preponderate. The sentiment expressed by the figures of Shiva and Parvati and by the Bull, is also communicated to the foliage of the trees, while the group of the two divinities is monumental and no intimacy detracts from its mystery. A screen of mountains, bead-edged, comprises the wider identity of Bull, Shiva and Parvati and shields it against the varied foliage of the trees not grown in heaven. The bead-bordered screen, a last residue of the wider radiance which comprised divine presence (Pls. LXIII-IV), has here exchanged its beads for scallops, rocks and pebbles.

Descending from the high level of art in Tricakrapuram to the average of competent painting within the tradition of Kerala,

the Worship of Ganesha—most popular of all the Gods,—from Mulakulam (Pl. LXXIV), admits in its paintings popular scenes. The mother who brings her child for early devotions has a nobler antecedent in Ajanta; the distribution of alms, and the offerings, brought to the Gods, were carved and not only painted in the Gupta age, and the keen characterisation of the people in these and similar scenes had found expression in the Vishnu-dharmottara (III. Ch. XLII). It is, moreover, possible that Dutch genre paintings of the 17th century had found their way into Kerala as did in the 18th century Kangra and late Mughal paintings.

At this phase paintings on temple and palace walls are not exclusively the form of the world of the Gods in their majesty. The variety of this world, its movements and physiognomies, enter into their presence. Thereby each type, each group, is given its cast and stature. The assurance moreover of their movements (figure with arm raised, on the right) is given to these figures as a boon by the Gods; the boon is in the transformation by pictorial means of the telling gestures of the rabble into the dignity and freedom of the devotees' approach (the two heads, topmost in the second row, near to Ganesha; and the two main figures in the bottom row, on the right). It is no accident that their figures are summed up by the cusped border as is also the image of Ganesha within its halo, on a plain ground.

With dignity though with less fluency, the great concept of Vishnu on the serpent Ananta, the Endless, is painted in Trikotithanam. The execution is mediocre, while the composition has the vastness of Ananta on whose body Vishnu lies. The rectangular panel, the world ocean, crinkled with waves and lotuses, is a neutral foil on which floats the bed of serpent-coils, exceeded by the direction of Vishnu's reclining shape, in one surpassing movement (Pl. LXXV).

This great conception, modestly rendered, exceeds not only the frame of the picture but also the power of the artist who executed it. Traditional art having given the theme, its execution is in the hands of the performer; be he ever so humble,

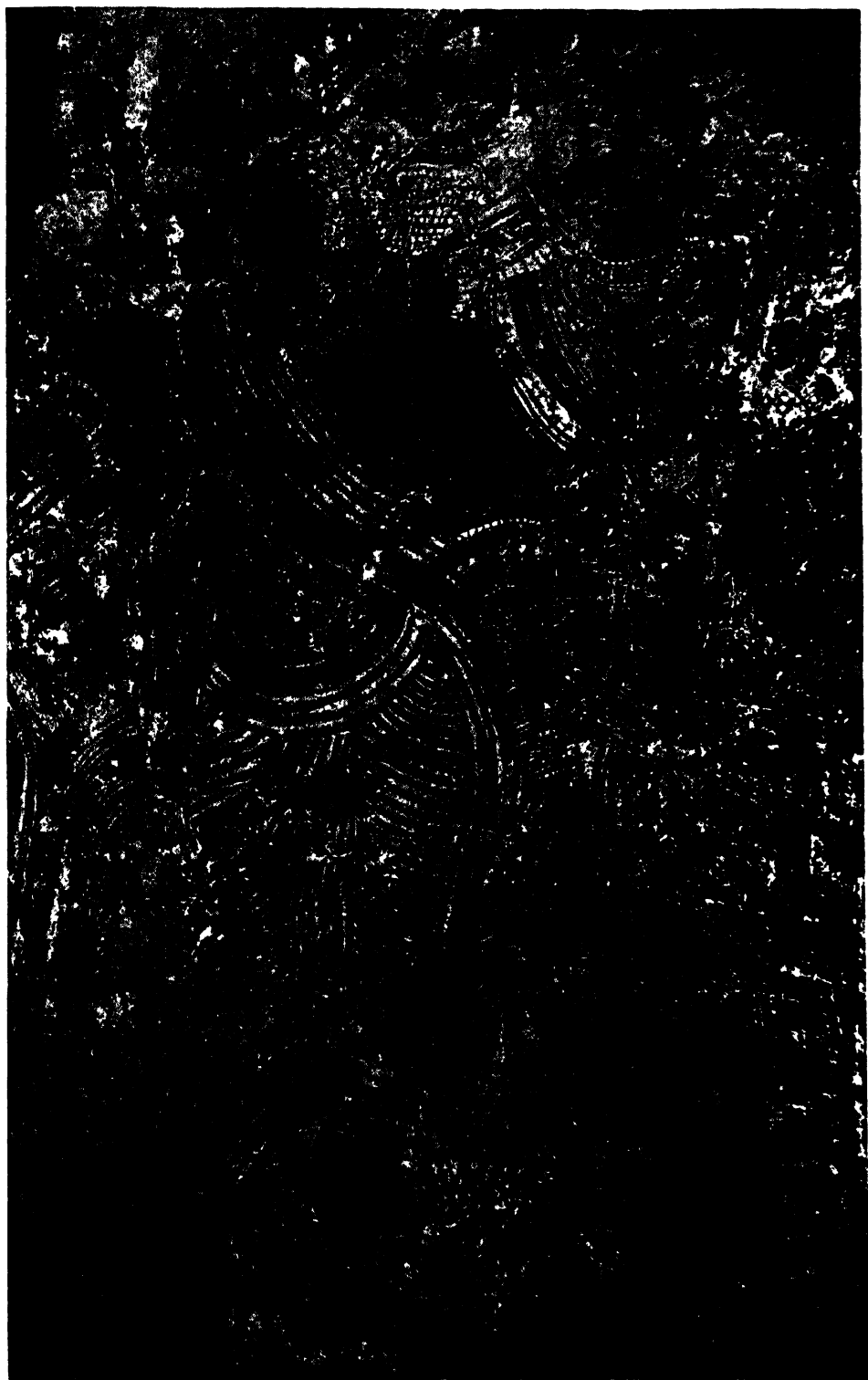
if his training is within the tradition, his modest contribution may, as in the present example, convey some of the greatness of the prototype in whose mould it is cast.

The frame-work of traditional painting in Travancore was strong as long as it was supported by a living realisation of the principles that had set it up. As in wood carving so also in painting, each craftsman leaves on it the total of his ability, matured under particular contingencies of inheritance, surroundings, and racial memory. These may be polished and urban (Pl. LXXIV) or rustic (Pl. LXXVI) and in the later instance more dependable in their approach. The painter of Draupadi's Swayamvara, on the temple of Parayanarkavu (Pl. LXXVI; cf. Pl. XVIII) draws in it, with ardent abandon, his faith in the strength of the Pandavas. Their figures are shown by him on different surfaces of the wall, a strong though not a closely knit composition. Its ingenuousness and breadth assure him his small place in the great tradition of Kerala painting.

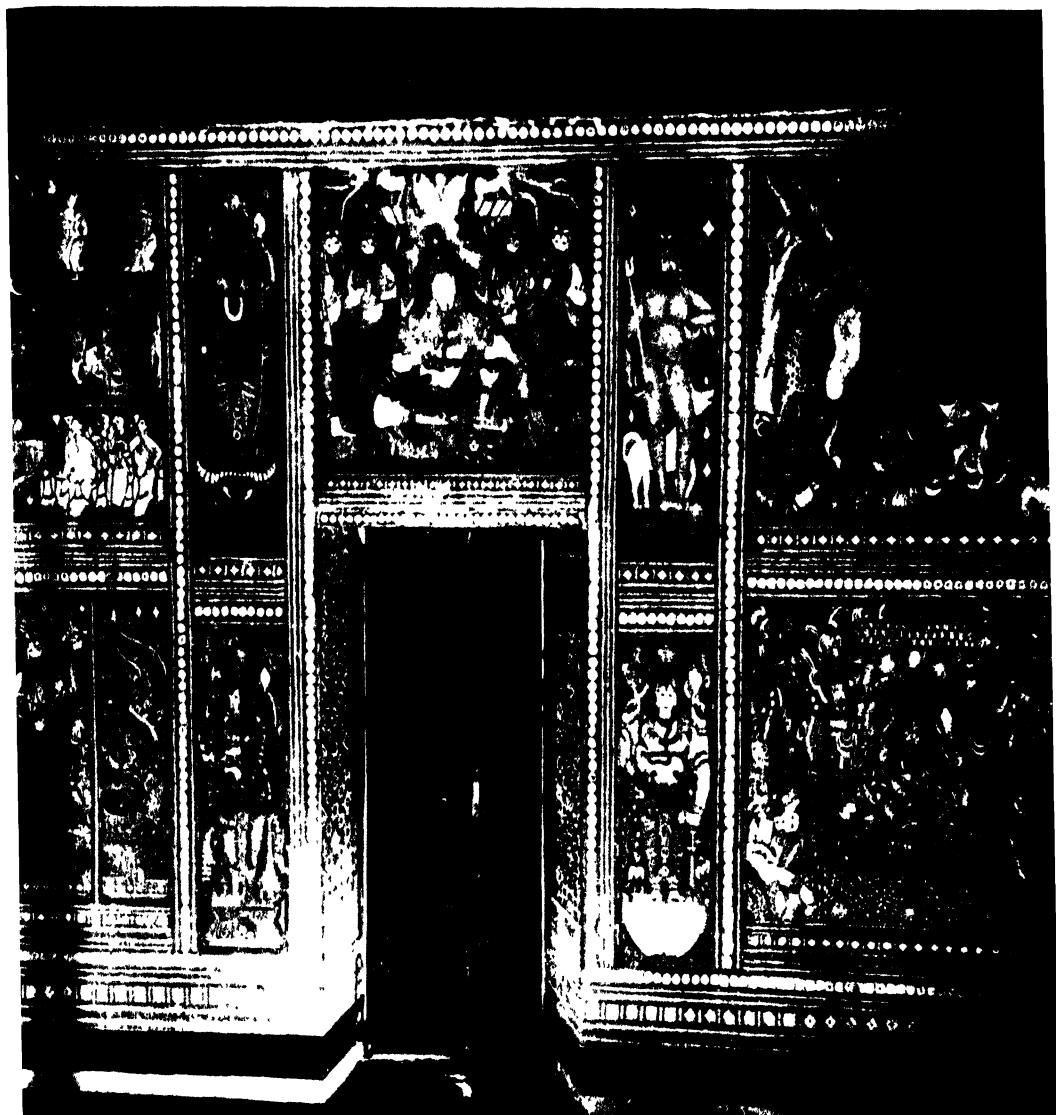


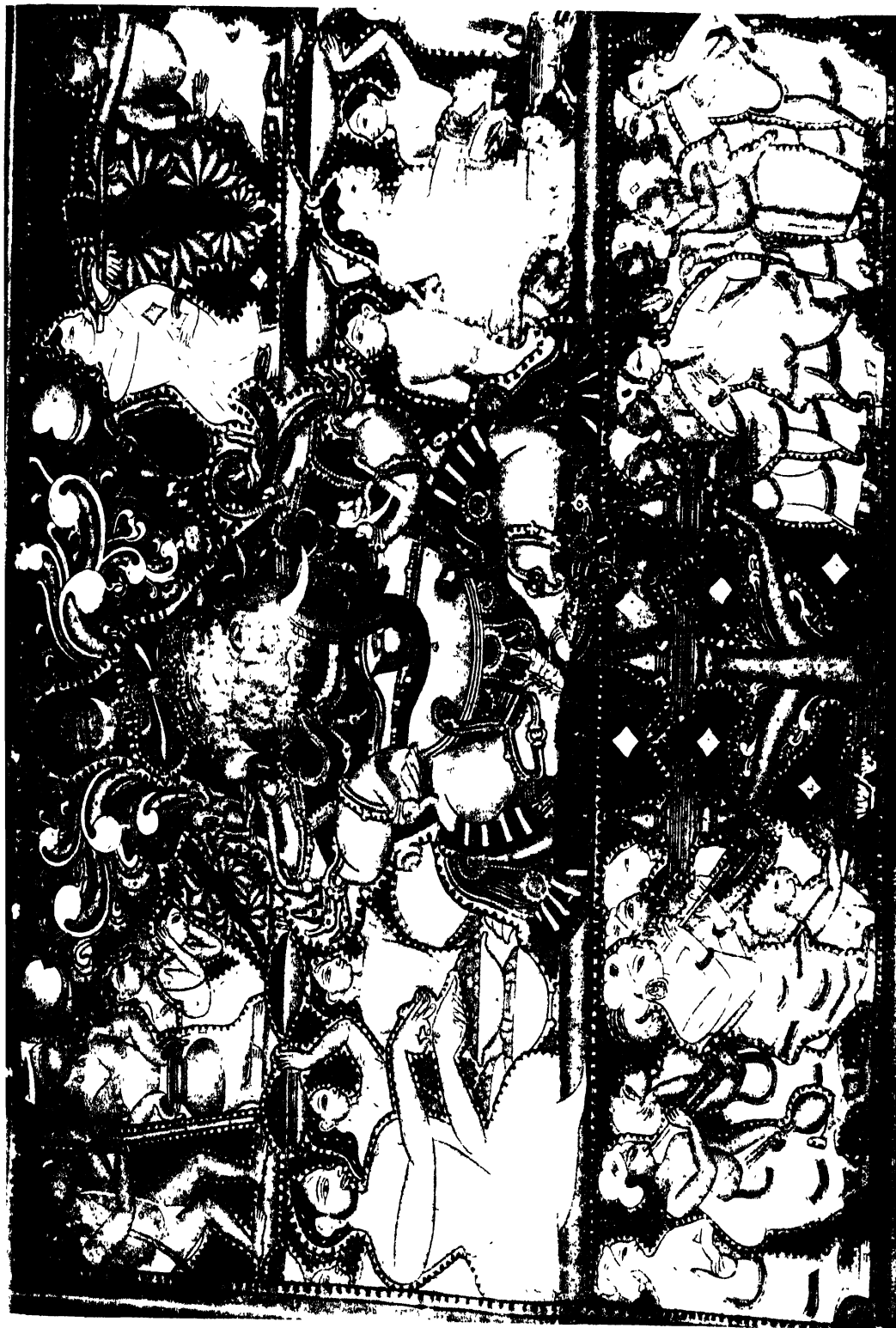












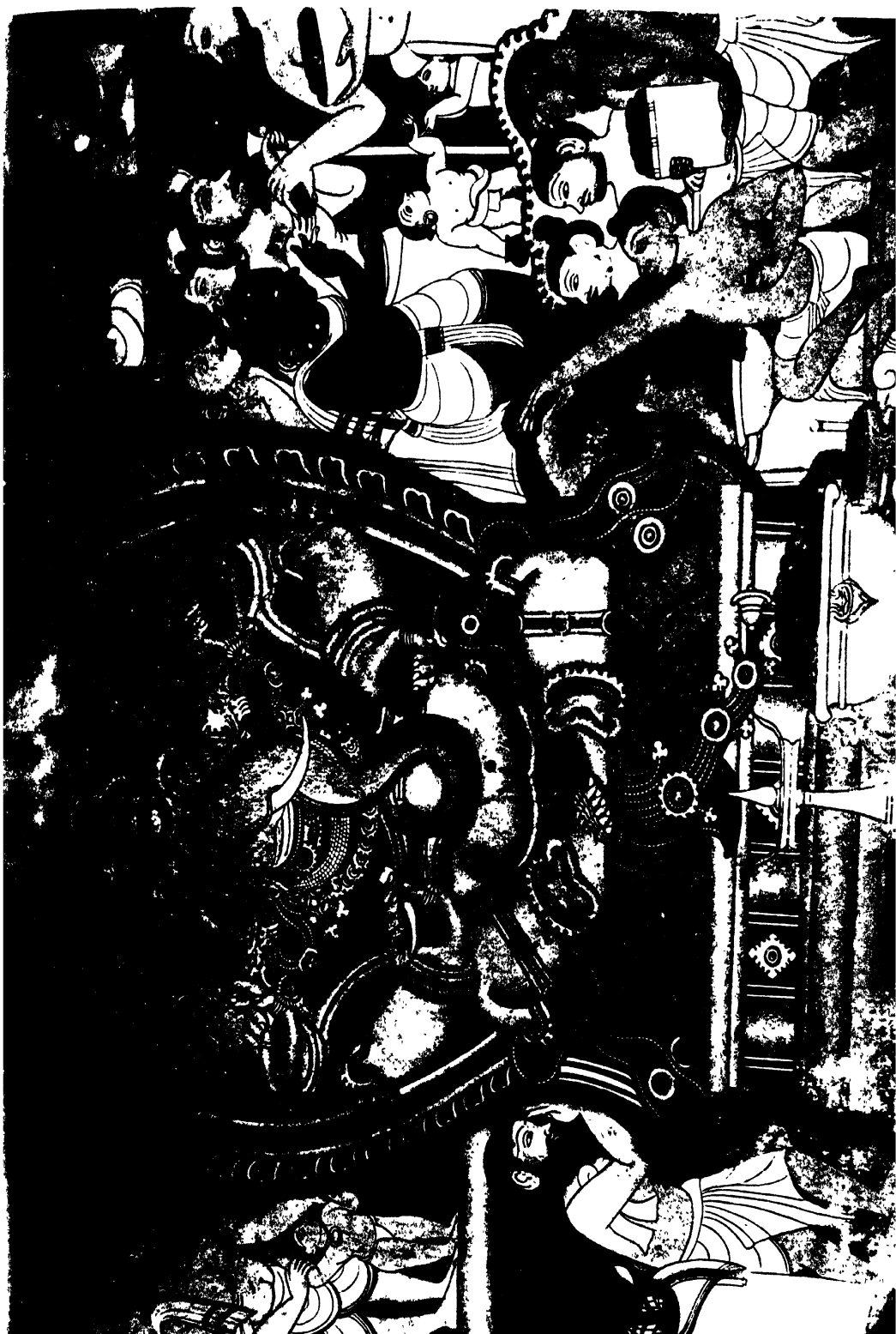


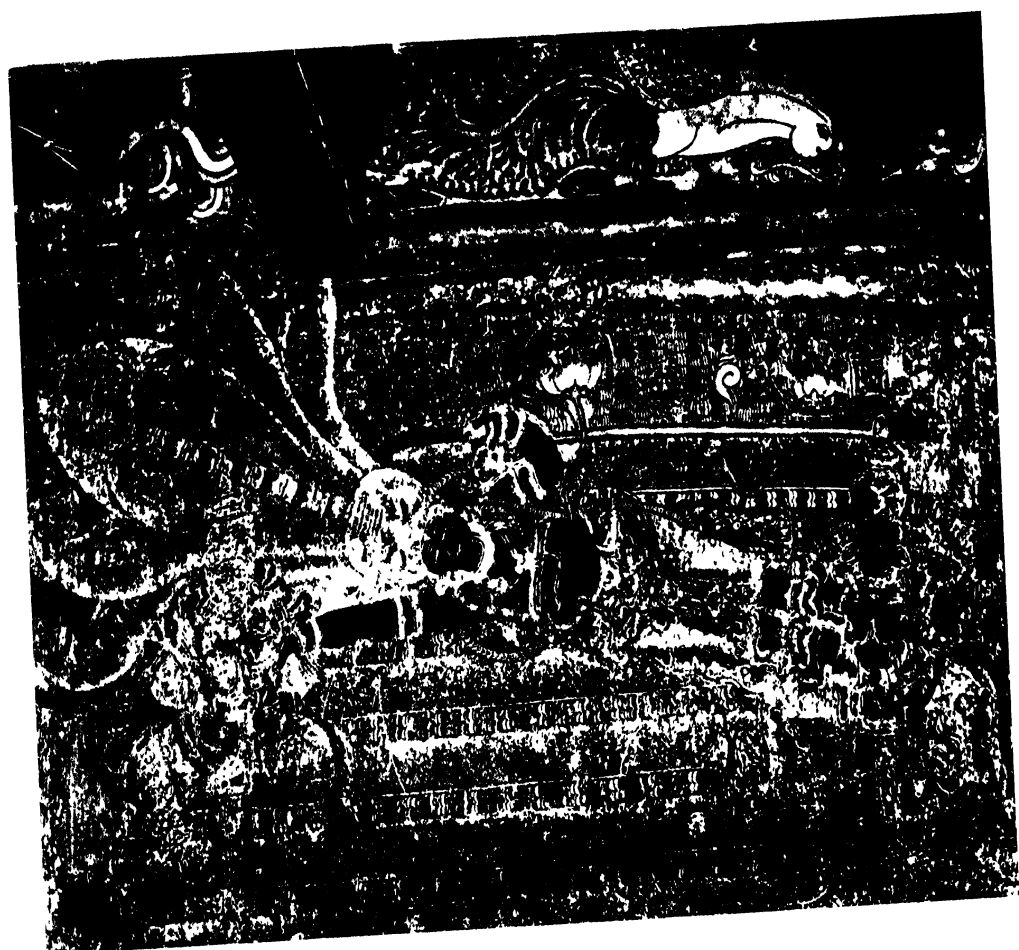














CHAPTER XIII

DANCE-DRAMA AND

SHADOW-PLAY

By J. H. COUSINS

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DANCE-DRAMA AND SHADOW-PLAY

The cultural influences from the peninsula which found their way across the modifying, but not isolating, frontier of the forested mountain-chain which forms the eastern boundary of modern Travancore, stimulated a people long noted for quick reaction to external impulses. Such reaction in the plastic and graphic arts has been dealt with in preceding chapters. Here we shall study the reaction in Dance and Drama.

It is now generally recognized that rhythm is one of the fundamental conditions of life, and extends its control through the entire world of nature and humanity. So far as the earth is concerned (to quote from "Rhythm" by Elsie Fogerty), its rotation "in a regular, rhythmic periodicity is the fundamental fact of natural law to those who live upon it. . . . Man has passed through the stages of complete satisfaction in animal sensation, in taste and in smell, to the visual mastery of the universe of light, of form, of colour. Finally, in poetry and music, to the imaginative re-creation of the world in terms of rhythmic sound." But the rhythm thus noted in the planet and in sound operates also in the periodicity of eating and drinking, of sleeping and waking, and is, strange as it may seem, one of the essentials of the static arts of architecture, sculpture and painting, which exist in being, so to speak, a momentary pause in a movement which the eye conveys to the mind as having the character of rhythm, and as being therefore artistic.

In the list of ways, quoted above, in which man has achieved mastery, and essayed the "imaginative re-creation of the world," there is no mention of the dance. This is probably due to the fact that, in the western world, dance is commonly regarded as a social amusement not remotely associated with some degree of "satisfaction in animal sensation," and has only recently been conceded a place on the threshold of the arts

through the creation of the ballet and the mimetic dances of certain famous artists. Biblical references to the dance of Miriam, of David, of Salome, have been generally regarded as spontaneous expressions of joyful, devotional, or malevolent exuberance, but having no place in the western observances of Christianity or in Christian art. But, having regard to the locations of the dances referred to, it is not unlikely that they shared in the oriental attitude to dance as an art based on the rhythm and design of nature, and capable of evoking extensions of both the higher and lower capacities of humanity, and of invoking responses from beyond the normal human consciousness. The verity or otherwise of the oriental idea of the art of dancing is not here in question: the art as seen by the oriental mind is accepted as an æsthetical fact.

From Hindu India went out the subject-matter and technique that localized themselves in the Archipelago as the Javanese and Balinese dance, that tells the stories of the Hindu epics, Mahabharata and Ramayana, in rhythmical movement, postures, gestures, and manual symbols. On the continent it became the Cambodian dance. From Buddhist India went the materials that became the Noh-dance of Japan. Within the motherland of Asian culture, India, time brought local variations, the most apposite of which to our study is the Kathakali of the south-west coast, which became in its special staging a peculiarly distinctive art, while retaining the classical subject-matter.

Three aspects of the dance in Travancore come before us: (1) the indigenous folk-dances in which the unsophisticated imagination and rhythmical impulse of the folk found, and still find, expression that is largely spontaneous but controlled by traditional ideas and methods; (2) the Bharata-natya that developed in the peninsula, particularly in the south, and passed over into Kerala both as a separate form of dance and as an art-influence; (3) the culmination of the joint folk and classical dance in the relatively modern Kathakali that has recently entered on an era of renaissance simultaneously with the revival of indigenous dance in other parts of India. Let us summarise them serially.

(1) Local festivals at temples such as Ambalapuzha in central Travancore and among certain of the ancient tribes, and general festivals such as that of Onam, at which traditional dances are performed, are regarded by scholars as continuations of seasonal celebrations. They began among the tribes in primitive dances and songs with instrumental accompaniment, praising the deities of hill and forest. Such folk-dances are regarded as the original material of the later Kathakali. Among the more remote tribes they were mainly representative of their ordinary activities in agriculture and hunting. Tribes more amenable and accessible to the influences of culture enacted stories of Krishna and Rama.

Then came an era of military prowess in the Kerala region, training being given in *kalaries* (gymnasias) which became centres of physical culture. Out of these arose a form of dance-drama (as the Noh came from the Samurai of Japan) as a military recreation—the Yatrakali, also known as Sanghakali and Shastrakali. In the Yatrakali, which is still performed on festival occasions in the Hindu calendar, the serious and comic are mixed, the presumption of scholars being that the serious parts, dealing with religion, came from the *kalaries*, and the lighter parts from the folk-dances, even as comic interludes punctuate solemn Puranic stories on the ordinary stage.

Two elements in the Yatrakali are thought to have led on towards the future; one in the dialogue which may have been the origin of the later drama in which song and speech alternate; the other in representations of feats with swords and shields which may be the source of later sword-dances in Kerala and of the large group-dance of the descendants of the militia (Nairs), the Velakali, which is performed periodically in the wide avenue leading up to the Maharaja's temple of Sri Padmanabhaswami. In the Velakali the sword-play of the Yatrakali is continued; so also is the strict training of the *kalaries*, not only for individual display, but for the large-scale enactment of the battle of Kurukshetra, which forms the background of the universally known Bhagavad Gita. The rival armies are represented, but with a curious difference. The dancers are not divided into opposing groups: they take one

side only, that side being, with heroic generosity, the side of the defeated Kurus. The Pandavas, who are given the victory, as in the Mahabharata, do not raise a finger in the hour into which the dance compresses the ancient epic conflict, for their parts are given to giant figures carved in wood, and dressed and decorated after the manner of the epic heroes, in red skirts and beads, and endowed with prominent eyes, abundant hair and long finger-nails. Silently they stand, save one, the oldest, who sits, while the simulated conflict surges about them, advances, recedes, advances again, and finally fades away as the defeated Kurus retire, leaving the field to the victorious and silent Pandavas, and the not so silent crowds of spectators of the festival-dance.

(2) The subject-matter and technique of the Velakali point back to a period in the history of the Kerala region when the conjoint military discipline and folk relaxation came under the growing influences of the culture that had established itself in North India, and proceeded southwards, carrying with it the philosophical ideas and religious conceptions and observances of the ancestral Aryan seers; carrying also what is more apposite to our subject, the imaginative embodiments of deific powers and processes in the Puranas, whose stories became the inexhaustible source of the arts of Hindu India, and have remained so to this day.

The acclimatizing of the Puranic stories in South India necessitated translation from the Sanskrit language in which they were composed. This brought to the south-west coast a linguistic rival to the Tamil language which had predominated in the earlier stages of the development of the local Malayalam. But the most important influence in the art of the dance was the system of dancing (*natya*), attributed to the ancient sage, Bharata, whose name is one of the synonyms of India, and set out in a treatise (*shastra*) now referred to as the Bharata-natya-shastra, the canon of the Indian classical dance.

On the historical dating of the various stages of the dance in Travancore writers are generally tentative or silent. We learn of a primitive era dominated by Dravidian influences; of a middle era of Sanskrit influences; and of a modern

era in which the ideas and languages of the first two eras combine with a local variation of technique and presentation in the Kathakali: of the latter only have we any certainty as to dates. The tentativeness or silence referred to is due to the paucity of original literary materials and lack of curiosity, until recently, as to the historical and æsthetical significance of such reference to the arts as is available. But a valuable aid to art-history has arisen from the bringing to light by the Department of Archæology of Travancore of temple sculptures which had long passed into the category of sanctity where such mundane matters as history and æsthetics were regarded as irrelevant, but in the past few years have had to yield to the questionings of the spirit of knowledge.

Two examples already cited will indicate the evidence of sculpture as to the artistic classification of Travancore dance at fairly certain dates. In the temple at Trikkadittanam, in central Travancore, there are two stone panels depicting, in one panel, the *kudaikuttu* (*kudai-umbrella, kuttu-dance*), and in the other panel the *kudakuttu* (*kudam-pot*), (Pl. XXXVI) both referring to incidents in the traditional lives of deities. The temple in which these valuable pieces of historical evidence are found is assigned to the eleventh century after Christ; and, apart from the sculptural features of the panels, it is clear that the Travancore dance had reached a high degree of physical expertness a thousand or more years ago (for the panels depicted an established tradition) and admitted to its repertoire subjects other than the didactic stories of the Puranas.

Again, in the temple at Trivikramangalam, (Pl. XXXIV, 2) near Trivandrum, which is presumed to date from the twelfth century, there are stone reliefs of a woman dancer in two postures, with musicians, one of the postures showing extraordinary pliability of body in a half turn of the upper part of the body on the lower half, a pose which may represent a momentary phase in a complete turn. One of the poses (that on the right-hand panel), is identified as from the Bharata Natya, which is thus shown to have been an integral part of temple activity eight hundred years ago with a long previous

history behind the expertness displayed in the sculptures. Mural painting also bears witness to the antiquity of the classical dance: a fragment still visible in the cave temple of Thirunandikkara, of the ninth century after Christ, shows a hand in a recognisable *mudra* (sign) still used.

In both these examples of old Travancore dance the accompaniment is purely rhythmical, the pulsation being supplied by the *mridangam* (horizontal two-ended drum) and cymbals. They thus belong to the *nritya* of the Bharata Natya which is without melody and story, and consists of a fantasia (though under control) of rhythmical movement. Fully developed dance-drama, in which a story is told not only in codified movements and gestures (*abhinaya*), but in hand-signs (*mudra*), with vocal and instrumental accompaniment, is called *nritya*. Either of these forms of dance may be performed in one or other of the two fundamental moods of the Bharata Natya, (1) the *tandava* or energetic masculine mood, (2) the *lasya* or graceful feminine mood. The term *natya* refers inclusively to narration through dance and song.

The acclimatization of the Sanskrit culture, represented by the Bharata Natya, in Travancore, developed from more or less academical disquisitions on the stories and teachings of the Puranas into dramatic representations that gripped the imaginations of the unsophisticated auditors by transforming second-hand description into first-hand living embodiments of powers and virtues, with their complementary opposites. For this purpose the Brahminical settlers chose a group of men called Chakkiars to whom they taught the Sanskrit stories (*nataka*) and the dramatic methods of the Bharata Natya. The Chakkiars became professional drama-dancers: their performances were limited to temple precincts and Puranic stories. To the dramatic presentation musical accompaniment was given by drums and cymbals played by members of the Nambiyar community. Women of the same community, known as Nangiyars, danced as celestials (*devasthri*: *deva*—a heavenly being, *sthri*—a woman).

Developments in the staging of the dance-dramas took place. Ordinarily the performances were in the open-air, a natural

concession to the climate of the Kerala coast. But the Aryan influences led to the building of theatres, including stage, dressing-room and auditorium. A model reconstruction of one of these theatres, made from its extant basement and tradition, indicates its oval ground-plan and the traditional disposition of the pillars with a view to reducing shadows cast by interior light.

Developments took place also in the technique of expression. Scholars give varying accounts of the place of vocal disquisition in this early era of the Kerala dance-drama. It would seem to have yielded to a tendency to objective elaboration that is characteristic of the other arts of Travancore. The classified emotions (*rasas*) were expressed in a manual language (*mudra*, *angya*) taken over from the Bharata Natya, reinforced by highly developed and classified facial expressions (*bhava*).

These developments belonged to a phase of the dance-drama of Travancore called Kudyattam, in which two or more performers took part, as distinguished from the Kathaprasangham, which was carried through by a single actor. But they constituted a fine art of expression that was comprehensible only to the student, and gave nothing to the understanding or feelings of the commonalty. For the benefit of the latter, homilies on the four virtues (*artha*, wealth; *dharma*, duty; *kama*, desire; and *moksha*, liberation) were given as, so to speak, curtain-raisers to the Kudyattam.

"This evolution of the histrionic art, predominated by Aryan influence," says Mr. M. Raja Raja Varma Raja, in an article on "The Stage in Kerala," "cut it adrift from the native Dravidian features which it so long inherited. It amounted almost to a revolution, and, as in the case of all revolutions, it cannot stand long without a revival. When reborn, it cannot, of course, identify itself with original form. The neo-drama borrowed both from the old and the new, but kept the trinity of harmonies (*nrityam*, dance; *gitam*, song; *wadyam*, instrumental accompaniment) as its heirloom. So was born the Krishnan-attam (Krishna dance-drama) under the patronage of the Zamorin (chief) in North Malabar."

But the origin of the Krishnattam (to put the two words into the usual single form) goes much further back than the

seventeenth century in which the Zamorin referred to flourished. According to another scholar, Mr. M. S. Krishna Aiyar, in articles on "Kerala Drama," "the Chakkiar wanted to improve their art further, and afford greater enjoyment to the spectators. So, leaving the beaten track of narrating the stories of the *natakas* (Sanskrit drama), they pitched upon a new kind of literary work, Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda* (song of Govinda, or Sri Krishna), and rendered it in *abhinaya* (dramatic gestures)."

When this adaptation of the poem by the twelfth century Bengali saint to the Kerala dance-drama took place cannot be dated certainly and exactly, nor is it necessary here to detail the modifications through which the dance-drama went until it reached the form of the Krishnattam, a cultural achievement which is placed in or about the fourteenth century, two centuries before the Elizabethan culmination of drama in England. The point of interest here is that in the Krishnattam arose the special technique of presentation that came to be the characteristic expressional feature of the future Kathakali (dance-drama). In the Krishnattam the actor was relieved of the necessity of chanting the story, and so set free to give his attention entirely to the elaborate work of bodily gesture (*abhinaya*) and hand-language (*angya*). The singing was given to another participant who became the voice of the actor, a change that put upon the audience the extended imaginative task of unifying the two exponents of sound and sight into one mental and emotional entity. In addition to this expressional development, which passed on into the Kathakali through the successor to which we shall refer in a moment, along with the elaborate crowns used by the actors, the subject-matter was extended beyond the Krishna stories, and the restriction of the performance to the temples and to the Chakkiars fell away.

Somewhere about the fifteenth or sixteenth century, as a result of a cultural feud between two chieftains of the Kerala (south-west) region, the technique of the Krishnattam was thrown into the enactment of the story of Rama, as told in the epic known as the Ramayana, and a new aspect of the Kerala stage, the Ramanattam (dance of Rama) came into existence.

The closer affinity of the story of Rama with the temperament and imagination of South India, in which its events are largely located, than the more remote themes of the Mahabharata, was probably responsible for the developments and modifications in the new phase that a renaissance in art usually evokes. So important was the performance of the Ramanattam esteemed that eight consecutive days were given to it in episodes. The differential costuming of an increased cast was developed. Wooden masks were supplanted by facial make-up. Local divergences in the manner of finger-language (in front of the face in some places, below the face elsewhere) were ultimately blended in that of the Kathakali as we know it today. As to language and subject-matter: Sanskrit and Malayalam were both used in a definite order: dramas were composed by Maharaja Kartika Thirunal and Maharaja Utharam Thirunal and by eminent poets for the now established dance-drama of Kerala (Kathakali and Ramanattam are frequently used as synonymous terms). This outburst of dramatic composition, not since equalled, has caused the first six decades of the nineteenth century to be looked back to as the Augustan age of the Kathakali.

Thus the original Chakkir-kuthu evolved into the Kathakali, which gathered into itself elements from all the phases of the past—the religious intention, Puranic repertoire and humorous injections of the kuthu; the opening dedication from the “Gita Govinda”; the costuming of the Krishnattam; the gestures of the Ramanattam. Out of these elements and modifications of them the Kathakali achieved a synthesis of dance and drama marked by a unique style and impressiveness. Such impressiveness can only be fully felt in presence of the actual drama; we can here only make an attempt to describe it in foreign and inadequate words.

The Kathakali is, in its pure form, enacted on the ground; but recent developments from that of a religious oblation to that of a popular entertainment have brought it frequently indoors and on to platforms, with loss of traditional atmosphere. Where the Kathakali is played in its pure form, an awning of cloth

separates the celestial paradigms of the drama from their terrestrial counterparts, the seen and heard action being regarded as symbolical of cosmic reality. A brass oil-lamp, similar in shape and size to that shown in Pl. XLVIII, 2 but perfectly plain, about four feet high, with burning wicks hanging over the edge of the reservoir, stands between the actors and the auditors. A few accessories, bench and stool, are conveniently placed, but otherwise stage "properties" are nil. When the drama is ready for performance, a curtain about six feet from the ground at its upper edge is stretched across the stage by two attendants and held in position. Behind this the actors and musicians assemble and go through an unseen but heard prelude of consecration that imparts an air of solemnity and mystery to the occasion. The appearance of the head and shoulders of one of the "characters" in full stage costume and make-up over the edge of the curtain gives the impression of a vivid other-world that no repetition appears to diminish. This finished, the curtain is carried away, and the dance-drama begins.

We shall not here touch on the literary aspect of the Kathakali: its substance is in the classical literature and tradition of India. We shall concern ourselves only with the Kathakali as a visual and audible art, and summarise its costuming, make-up, movement and accompaniment, as clearly as possible for those who have not the opportunity of witnessing it.

The first impression of a Kathakali ensemble on the eye of one to whom it is new, particularly a non-Indian, is probably that of a curious blend of elaborateness, incongruity and dignity. The "characters" (celestials and heroes) move with rapid stateliness (sometimes making a complete turn with the quickness of a ballet star) in a decorated jacket and voluminous skirt and dangling stole (or garland)—a costume that, to the uneducated eye, has an elaborateness and heaviness that seem to be out of keeping with the temperature and humidity of the tropical Kerala region. Similar costumes are seen in wall-paintings in temples and palaces; but whether the paintings influenced the Kathakali or the Kathakali the paintings, or both developed together, is a question that would take us too far afield.

The costumes of women characters (played by men) are simpler than those of the masculine characters; the skirt is a little longer; they have no crown, but a head-cloth falls across the shoulders. The crowns of the Gods and demons are large, elaborate, and distinctive, and give the impression of rich jewellery at a distance. Jewelled ornaments are prominent—girdles, loin-chains, necklets, armlets, bracelets, anklets (loaded to give a tinkling sound in movement), finger-rings, and long silver left-hand nails. Such decoration cannot be thrown into the term “barbaric”: this term can only be applied to that which is uncivilized and brutal, whereas the Kathakali ensemble is a symbolic and stylistic expression of powers and functions beyond human capacity but based on the human form.

The same applies to the facial make-up of the actors. The Kerala stage, like that of other regions, sought to increase the impressiveness of certain of its characters by the use of masks. A glance at dramatic history indicates that masks were used as a means of submerging limited human personality under super-human conceptions; though masks were used in highly conventionalized dramas of human personality, such as certain of the semi-historical dramas of Bali. The substitution of facial make-up for the traditional painted wooden mask in the early Ramanattam may have reduced the weight and heat of the actor's load of paraphernalia; but it did not reduce the effect of physical difference between the characters and the auditors. It appears, indeed, to have found the means of combining the expressional continuity of a special type (Gods, demons and others) with some touches of change in passing emotions.

The make-up for Krishna, Rama, and their companions consists of green complexion with white “beard” of a ribbed mixture of lime (*chunam*) and powdered rice. For sages (*rishis*), Brahmins and women the complexion is reddish yellow. Demons (*asuras*, contra-divinities; not the irresponsibly wicked beings that the term usually connotes outside India, but something of the distinction of Milton's Satan) are given a complexion of green with an area of red about the eye-brows and nose; also white knob-like excrescences on the end of the nose and in the

middle of the forehead. Special personages, such as Kali, the Goddess of Destruction, and Hanuman, the deified leader of the monkey-army that assisted Rama, are distinguished by, in one case, a black complexion; in the other, by a mixture of yellow and red surfaced with lime and powdered rice, an area of black including the eyes, lips and chin. A similar area of black on a ground of red distinguishes other special characters. The eyes and eye-lashes are emphasized in black; and the "whites" of the eyes are given a reddish tinge by a vegetable extract.

When we turn to the bodily movements that form the dance proper of the Kathakali, we are faced with an extraordinary multiplicity and apparent complexity of movement beyond verbal description, and in their meanings far beyond anything conveyed in even the most advanced western interpretative dance. Part of this came over from the Bharata Natya, and part came out of the rhythmical sense of the Keralan people. Like the Bharata Natya, the Kathakali may be put into three main divisions of presentation. The *natya* itself (from which Hindustani *natch*, English *nautch*) is the fullest performance with the maximum of staging, acting and accompaniment. Within this there may be *nritya*, the representation of an episode in the life of a personage, masculine or feminine, out of the epics or Puranas, the episode being concerned predominantly with one of the nine emotions (*rasas*)—*sringara*, desire; *vira*, valour; *karuna*, pathos; *adbhuta*, wonder; *roudra*, wrath; *hasya*, ridicule; *bhayanaka*, fear; *bibhatsa*, loathing; *shanta*, peace. The representation of the *rasas* as single static elements of the Kathakali is frequently made. The third main division of the Bharata Natya is *nritya*, pure rhythm; an abstraction of the fundamental *talam* (time, organized rhythm) which humanity is conceived as sharing with the rhythm of all nature, with the æsthetical difference that, while the rhythms of nature are beyond human control, the dance-artist can put his and her version of bodily rhythm into design—into which, be it added, neither drama nor feeling (other than that of the joy of the dancer and the watcher) have any part.

The movements of the Kathakali fall into a series of dynamic designs (*anghara*), each design consisting of a number of steps,

postures (bodily attitude), and gestures (limb movement), the combination of which is called *karana*. Within the *karana* is a motion-language to which all movable and visible organs contribute—the head and neck, the arms and hands, the eyes and eyebrows, the lips and teeth and tongue, the feet and toes, and others. In the *nritya* all the possibilities of controlled and designed movement are used in demonstrations of rhythmical virtuosity. But in the Kathakali proper they constitute a strict sign-language of extraordinary range. The smallest set (4) belongs to the neck because of its limited range of movement. The most striking phase to the new-comer to Kathakali is likely to be the side-to-side movement of the neck which carries the head, without losing its vertical position, towards each shoulder in turn. Movements of the head and eyes are tabulated to express the nine *rasas* described above.

These movements are small in number compared with the hand-and-finger signs (*angyas*, *mudras*, the latter being the most widely known term). There are 24 primary *mudras* (single and double) which give 404 signs; and 40 secondary (combined) *mudras* which give 55 signs; a manual code of 459 signs. Each primary *mudra* represents a number of ideas: the largest representation is made by the *hamsapaksha mudra* (right-hand palm upwards, forefinger bent towards but not touching the straight thumb, the other three fingers straight side by side), this giving 42 signs in double usage and 11 in single usage, 53 in all, covering all sorts of ideas and objects from a *deva* (deity) to a tortoise, including such apparently disparate ideas as “you” and “I”. The 24 primary *mudras* provide a wide range of expression: some of the *mudras* are difficult, some forceful, some beautiful. Memory and use of so many meanings to a single *mudra* is helped by connotation, like single words in English that have a number of meanings that are only understandable by the association in which the word is used, the word “life,” for example, having 19 meanings.

The mastering of such a visual and mental vocabulary (not to mention the fixed fluctuations of horizontal designs in position, the kinds and successions and repetitions of steps, the cycles of gesture, the communications of eyes and feet and other

organs that the Kathakali makes visually vocal) obviously calls for time and practice. To these must be added the exercise necessary to attain the physical pliability, agility and control that the dance-drama calls for. We are not surprised, therefore, to learn that aspirants to mastery of Travancore's most distinctive art put themselves under a teacher at from 12 to 14 years of age, and undergo a close systematic course of training not only in the mental and rhythmical details of the Kathakali, but in massage, hygiene, dietetics, and ways of living consonant with the artistic end in view. After six years of constant training, with an ever-increasing proficiency in the various phases of the art, the apprentice reaches the distinction of public performance. His future eminence as a Kathakali actor depends on his enthusiasm, ability and physical endowment.

After a period of energetic history the Kathakali fell upon decline; but a revival of the art set in some twenty years ago, and thanks to the keen interest of His Highness the Maharaja of Travancore, and the rise of schools of indigenous dance, the Kathakali has again taken its place as the chief living art of the State, and has, by its artistic uniqueness and technical perfection, drawn students from other parts of India and admirers from various parts of the world.

A form of dance-narrative is the Ottam Thulal, in which the reciting dancer is accompanied by a singer and a cymbalist; the story is told in Malayalam. The costume has nothing of the Kathakali elaborateness save in the head-dress. This entertainment is very popular.

We may close this section of our summary of Dance and Drama with a note on one of the reserved forms of the art. Performances of Bharata Natya and Kathakali may be seen by visitors without distinction; but the Bhadrakali Pattu (dance of Kali) is performed in special temples or in the homes of Brahmins and Kshatriyas, and there be few outside the Hindu fold who may witness this artistic ceremony of propitiation and praise to Kali as the Goddess who presides over the "ills that flesh is heir to." The dance is the culmination of a ceremony that lasts all day and for a number of days. The first part of the

ceremony consists of observances that are not germane to our subject. These include the laying out on the consecrated floor of a delineation of Kali in various colours obtained from vegetable powders, lime, husks, leaves, powdered rice. The result is a very impressive relievo. At a point in the ceremonial, at the end of the day, after much chanting in praise of the various parts of the body and in invocation of the Goddess, the "picture" on the ground is swept away, and the fire-dance (*tiyattu*) is performed. The dancer's face is painted black with simulated pustules of smallpox on it. He wears a crown on which a figure of Kali is shown in front, with long flowing hair attached. The story performed is the killing of the *Asura* Darika, one of the celestial "opposition," imaginatively related to Milton's dark angels under Lucifer. Kali, impersonated by the dancer, relates the event to Shiva symbolised by a large brass floor-lamp. Shiva is presumed to be dancing, and Kali takes the opportunity to go away and perform a circumambulation (*pradakshina*) of Mount Kailasa, Shiva's home in the Himalayas. The *pradakshina* is simulated by a dance several times round the lamp. This over, that is to say, Kali having returned from Kailasa and Shiva having finished his dance, Kali recounts her fight with and killing of Darika. No words or music are used; the story is told entirely in *mudras* (finger and hand gestures as in the Kathakali). A torch is lighted and powdered resin thrown on it and directed in succession to ten points of the compass. The spurts of fire from the torch give the name (*tiyattu*, fire-dance) to this concluding part of the Bhadrakali Pattu.

Associated with the dance-drama of the Kerala region; though not so widely performed as formerly, is the shadow-play known in Malayalam as Olapavakuthu (*ola*, leather; *pava*, doll; *kuthu*). At present it is mainly performed occasionally in the Palghat taluk of Malabar, but efforts towards its renaissance have been considered in Travancore, and a recent demonstration of the play during the birthday celebrations of the Maharaja roused fresh interest in it. Students variously claim its origin as in the Malayalam area; others in the Tamil area of the south-east. Its subject is the Ramayana (like the Ramanattam) as told by the Tamil poet Kambar of fifteen or more centuries ago.

The stanzas and technique have been transmitted orally in a mixture of Malayalam, Tamil and Sanskrit. The stanzas are first chanted, and then elaborated in prose for the understanding of the audience, while the shadow of the personage referred to is seen on the screen. There is no music to the play.

The characters for the Olapavakuthu are cut out, in classical forms, in antelope leather, and the details of features, dresses and ornaments, all of which must conform to tradition, are indicated by numerous perforations. Heads and limbs are made separately and fastened loosely by strings to the body for free manipulation: the figures are about two feet high.

The stage for the *kuthu* is a 42-foot-long construction with a white cloth curtain on the side of the audience which is squatted in the open air. Some distance behind the curtain a row of lamps burning coconut-oil provides the light against which the shadows appear on the screen. The figures are pinned on the stage side of the cloth during the narration, and movements are made by rods attached to the limbs. Owing to the elaborate dissertations on the meaning of the stanzas, the shadows remain for long stretches on the screen, and movements are few and far between. All the same, the *kuthu* draws large and patient crowds as to a religious function. The performance is given for seven consecutive days, or a multiple of seven, and lasts from 9 p.m. till dawn.

A comparative study of the history and features of the shadow play of south-west India and the somewhat similar play, the Wayang kulit (*wayang*, dance; *kulit*, shadow) of Java should yield valuable data on the art-history of south Asia and the Archipelago. There is apparently some ground for the hypothesis that the Indian play is ancestral to the Javanese play. A notable difference, however, is the absence of music in the *kuthu*, while the *wayang* is accompanied by the large Javanese orchestra (*gamelan*).

If the Olapavakuthu is to survive (and it would be a great pity if it did not) it will apparently have to undergo considerable renovation in the reduction of exposition, a change that would have the desirable effect of quickening the movement of the figures on the screen, and bringing the *kuthu* nearer the natural desire of the Keralan people for rhythmic representation.

CHAPTER XIV

THE ART OF PROCESSION

By J. H. COUSINS

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To the usual list of major arts (architecture, sculpture, carving, painting, drama, music, dance, literature), India adds the art of symbolical spectacle: her cultural life seems almost to move in a series of processions. There are, of course, processions all over the world, but they are different. There is the Lord Mayor's procession in London, that marks the accession of another man to the Chief Magistracy of the city, and goes no deeper than the event. There is the Orange procession in Northern Ireland which celebrates the victory of a Dutch-English king over a Scottish-English ex-king on Irish soil, and gives to history, through the intensification of art, the sounds and colours of sectarian emotion. There are in Catholic countries the beautiful processions at various time which impress on the spectators events in the life of the Founder of the Faith, as in the month of May, or doctrines such as that enunciated in the procession of Corpus Christi.

None of these, however, comes within the special scope of art. To some extent they have qualities that may be termed artistic; but the first two referred to are mainly historical, the third wholly religious, and none of them is concerned with the purpose and ways of art.

To realize the place of art in procession, it has to be remembered that, apart from the visible and audible features of art, such as form, design, colour, rhythm, sound, there is the central impulse to express free ideas and general feelings through the external details of art. This is the symbolical element without which there may be artistic imitations but no real creative art.

It is more than likely that the symbolical element was predominant in the arts of the ancient world of the West. Despite the realism of the Bacchic processions, there was an element of symbolical significance that went deeper than the

personalities and actions of the ceremonies. Indeed, the realistic presentation of the Bacchic origies in literature may owe as much to imagination as to historical fact.

India is a land of processions. Every day in every way some elongated group of people is moving somewhere silently or with community song. Many of these processions, bridal, funeral, or otherwise, go their way with only group-intention, caring nothing or very little for the people among whom they pass. But there are other processions that move on an all-India road, like the procession of the Dasara which is the most universally observed symbolical spectacle in India, and has attained world-fame as developed in Mysore State.

Though the art of symbolical spectacle in Travancore State has not reached the dimensions of that of Mysore, it has a variety and significance of its own that are rapidly drawing outside attention. It takes its substance from the traditional ideas of Vedic India, adapts them to its own conditions and temperament, and in its great observances, the Vettai and Arat processions, twice a year, exalts the simple movement of walking from one place to another into an art-ritual by acting on the art-principle that a spectacle without a spectator is a misnomer, and by unifying the mover-on and the looker-on in a symbolical significance that concerns both of them.

To these crucial observances of the Hindu year in Travancore has been added a personal event in the birthday procession of His Highness the Maharaja, and the three coincidental observances at one season aptly demonstrate two main phases of the art of symbolical spectacle, the personal and the impersonal; that which is concerned with the life of an individual yet recognizes a larger life; that which represents to eye and ear personages and events that are externally related to history (that which has happened) yet embody ideas that are eternal and surround every individual with their meaning, and never cease happening.

The birthday procession of the Maharaja of Travancore expresses the paradox of processional art. Its splendour of appearance, that the orient can attain without vulgarity, has as

its centre the figure of simplicity that gives occasion and life to the whole. Beautiful horses that walk under their lance-bearing riders with steps so rhythmical that they seem to say that, given a chance, they could contribute their share to the revival of Indian dance; great gorgeously caparisoned elephants that, with their brisk and sensitive steps, seem to say that, given two chances, they could do the same without appearing ridiculous; soldiers in coloured uniforms marching smartly with swinging arms; officers of State in temple dress (bare brown bodies above a white cotton skirt, bare head and bare feet); the insignia of the temple (umbrellas, symbols, utensils); music; an ornamental palanquin borne on the shoulders of many men; and all these signs and tokens of oriental regality as the prelude and postlude of—no, not a climax of grandeur or power in proud pose and resplendent dress, but a slim young figure, also in temple dress, brown and beautiful, that leans on a cushion in the palanquin, smiling gently and bowing to the quiet multitude that all along the white-sanded processional route covet India's most treasured boon, the *darshan* (sight) of the holy. For be it remembered that the Maharaja of Travancore is not only the compassionate father of his family of six millions, with their religious faiths and social distinctions and degrees, but is also the head of the Hindu community of his State, and both punctilious in temple observance and an exemplar of the personal virtues enjoined by his faith, the virtues of gentleness to all living beings, human and sub-human, calm in all circumstances, truth in thought, purity in action. In the birthday palanquin he becomes a paradox so acute that it attains a spiritual beauty that sweeps the heart with purifying emotion.

The other two processions mentioned, the Vettai (hunt) and the Arat (immersion), are two phases of one transaction that is full of universal truth expressed with impressive art. Briefly stated, the ancient story is that Vishnu, as the protector of the universe, set out to hunt and destroy a demon of destructiveness—the old and ever new opposition of good and evil in one of its presentations. The procession simulates the progress of Vishnu to the point when he runs the demon to earth in a forest. The climax of the myth takes place on or near the spot, in front of the Sundaravilasom Palace in Trivandrum Fort,

where two hundred years ago an attack, happily unsuccessful, was made on the life of Maharaja Marthanda Varma, "the maker of modern Travancore." Here, at the junction of three roads, a pile of shrubbery stands as the forest. At the foot of the pile a coconut represents the hiding demon. The hunt takes place at night. At the expected hour, shortly after eight, the approach of flickering high-held torches tells of the coming of Deity on his redemptive mission. There is no music, no conversation, nothing that would raise the suspicion of the demon whose hiding-place has been discovered. Organized rhythmical movement in semi-darkness takes on an acute impressiveness in silence as the sacred, civil and military units of the procession, all in bare feet on white sand, move almost ghostlike to their places, watched by dimly seen rows of faces of spectators over neighbouring walls. The tense figure of the Maharaja, now officiating as Sri Padmanabha-dasa (follower of Vishnu), emerges in the space in front of the forest as chief archer of the hunt. Behind him loom three decorated palanquins that have been carried shoulder high from the temple. One of these bears an image of Vishnu armed with bow and arrow, flanked by images of Krishna and Narasimha, aspects of Vishnu. The slim regal figure in bare body and long loin-cloth, standing out alone, the executant of the Divine Will, receives a bow and arrow from a priest in exchange temporarily for the State sword which he has carried from the temple, and after a moment's adjustment, fires the arrow into the hiding-place of the demon. Instantly the silence is broken. Evil has been destroyed—blessed anticipation!—music breaks out, and the procession returns in triumph to the temple.

But—and here is what may be taken as the most subtle, as it is also the most practical, point in the procession-drama—the image of Vishnu cannot yet be returned to its place of sanctity in the temple, but must remain outside the sanctuary, on a couch surrounded by foliage representing part of the forest of the hunt, until he can be given a purificatory bath the next day. Though a representation of Deity, the image has suffered symbolical pollution by the hunt, and cannot resume its deific position until it is purified. Good, in overcoming evil, has, in

the nature of things, to descend to the plane of evil, and in doing so suffers defilement. Its duty done, it must strenuously rid itself of the tendencies and stains that it has taken from its contact with evil. On this universal psychological law, so applicable to human action, particularly in peace following war, a law theologized and dramatized in the Vettai procession at the level of Deity, rests the necessity of the Arat procession of the day following the Vettai.

In the late afternoon the images are carried out from the Sri Padmanabhaswami temple by the three-mile road to the edge of the vast Arabian Sea, escorted by His Highness as Sri Padmanabha-dasa accompanied by the Elayaraja (heir apparent) and the consorts of the ladies of the ruling family; with temple accessories; Brahmin officers of the State in temple dress; Nair officers in old-time costume of scarlet body-band and turban, plain skirt with sword and shield, descendants of the ancient protectors of the country; cavalry; infantry with band and trumpeters; servants and decorated elephants. The processionists, with the exception of the military and Nair officials, walk bare-headed and bare-footed. His Highness wears only a *dhoti* (skirt) and carries the State sword. The procession reaches the beach at sunset; spectators have lined the way, and surround the place of purification. Preliminary *puja* (worship) is performed. The images are carried to the edge of the ocean, and, escorted by Sri Padmanabha-dasa, are immersed thrice in the water, each immersion being followed by worship. An illuminated procession escorts the purified images back to the temple.

The story symbolized in the two processions is not the only meaning of them: they are perhaps the most exoteric in symbolizing spectacularly the triumph of good over evil, the extirpation of that which obstructs the spiritual life, and the attainment of purification and peace through the destruction of the passions. And in a more profound interpretation, in which the temple is a representation of the Cosmos, such ceremonials, carried out through the art of symbolical spectacle, anticipate the final withdrawal of the external universe into the being of Brahma. Assuredly art has no profounder impulse or vision.

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