

**The synthesis of Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava systems of worship in ritual manuals - a unique feature  
of the ritual literature of Kerala**

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by

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Most of the tantra literature of Kerala is in the form of ritual manuals which do not differentiate between the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava cults. Initially some of the earlier texts produced in Kerala were essentially either Śaiva or Vaiṣṇava. Śaiva texts, such as the Śaivāgamanibandhana and Prayogamañjarī dealt not only with temple rituals but also included the dīkṣā process, treating it as part of the installation procedure related to a temple. The Viṣṇusamhitā, a Vaiṣṇava manual, dealt with rituals related to Viṣṇu and the initiation process based on the Pāñcarātra system. But even though the first two texts are Śaiva manuals and the third is a Vaiṣṇava manual, they share many parallel passages and ideas.

It is in later literature, such as the Īśānagurudevapaddhati, that we find reflected the syncretistic tradition now commonly dubbed ‘Kerala-Tantra’. The Īśānagurudevapaddhati, although it refers to itself as a work of the Śaivasiddhānta, deals primarily with the Śaiva system and describes Śaiva initiation in detail, nevertheless it also describes the rituals of many other Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava deities, such as Gaṇeśa, Durgā, Kṣetrapāla, Caṇḍeśvara, Indra, Narasimha, Varāha, Sudarśana, Vāmana, etc. The text also introduced the deity Śaṅkaranārāyaṇa, which is a form that represents both Śiva and Viṣṇu.

The Tantrasamuccaya, which is later in date than the Īśānagurudevapaddhati, is a ritual manual widely used in Kerala for temple rituals and deals with rituals connected with seven deities, viz. Viṣṇu, Śiva, Śaṅkaranārāyaṇa, Durgā, Subrahmaṇya, Gaṇapati and Śāstā. This text is an important example of harmonious synthesis of the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava liturgical systems. But, probably partly as a result of this harmonisation, the text focussed more on rituals to be followed in temples, and gave less importance to doctrine, in particular salvation, the primary goal of theological schools.

Most texts composed after the Tantrasamuccaya, such as the Śeṣasamuccaya, Bahudaivatya, Anuṣṭhānapaddhati, Tāntrikakriyā, Anuṣṭhānasamuccaya, Tantraprāyaścitta, Kriyāleśasmṛti, Kriyāsaṅgraha, Kriyāsāra, Tantrasārasaṅgraha etc., continued to follow this pattern and dealt with both Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava cults. The Śeṣasamuccaya in particular further described in detail rituals related to Śākta and other systems, such as those focussed on the worship of other gods, like Brahma, Sūrya, Vaiśravaṇa, Vīrabhadra, Saptamātrī, Kṣetrapāla, Rurujit etc.

Two works, the Vaiṣṇavānuṣṭhānakalāpasaṅgraha and the Śaivānuṣṭhānakalāpasaṅgraha, are unique in the sense that, while one deals with Śaiva rituals and the other deals with Vaiṣṇava rituals, they are both written by the same author, Gartavanaśaṅkara.

From these works we can see how, over time, a harmonious synthesis between the *Śaiva* and *Vaiṣṇava* systems of worship in ritual manuals gradually developed.

The Kerala brahmins (Nambutiri-s) who perform rituals in temples, worship in *Śaiva* as well as *Vaiṣṇava* temples without limiting themselves to a particular cult or system. But in the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu, not only is there a clear cut differentiation between the *Śaiva* and *Vaiṣṇava* systems of worship, but the followers of these two cults are also clearly divided into two different groups.

Now though a harmonious intermingling of both these systems is followed by Kerala brahmins, when one considers their day-to-day life and the customs they follow, the Kerala brahmins seem to be much closer to the *Śaiva* system. For example, the Taliparumba temple, one of the earliest temples devoted to *Śiva*, is venerated by all Kerala brahmins. Many of the customs described by the *Śāṅkarasmṛti* (or *Laghubharmaparakāśikā*), a manual which describes the customs of Kerala brahmins, are suited to the *Śaiva* system. The prescriptions for *snāna* (4:1:8), for *dantadhāvana* with special instructions for a *dīkṣita* (4:1:23; 4:1:34), the rules for smearing ashes (4:2:19-38), the rules for making ashes (4:3:1-28), the rules for collecting ashes (4:4:1-17) etc. are other examples that can be considered in this respect. But even though the Kerala brahmins might be living their day-to-day life as *Śaivas*, they do not seem to have reservations about performing *Vaiṣṇava* rituals.

This paper will discuss features of the synthesis of *Śaiva* and *Vaiṣṇava* ritual systems that appear to be unique to Kerala and will also contain a brief survey of Kerala's published and unpublished theistic ritual literature.