

Unveiling Treasures: A Descriptive Catalogue of Some Newly Identified Manuscripts from Kerala

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a catalogue of some newly discovered palm leaf manuscripts from the esteemed Tharananellur Mana in Kerala, offering a profound insight into the diverse spiritual and cultural heritage of the region. The manuscripts encompass a wide spectrum of texts, including excerpts from revered Vedic scriptures, Tantric rituals and iconic hymns like Lalita Sahasranama and Srimad Bhagavad Gita. This collection showcases the coexistence of both Vedic and Tantric traditions within the Mana, highlighting the richness and syncretism of Kerala's spiritual landscape. Noteworthy are the regional variations found in the tantric rituals and textual differences observed in the Lalita Sahasranama, promising intriguing avenues for scholarly exploration. Although the manuscript's precise dates remain undetermined, inviting further study and deeper interpretation. This catalogue serves as a gateway for future research, aiming to unravel the intricacies of Kerala's spiritual tapestry embedded within the manuscripts housed in this venerable repository.

KEYWORDS: Manuscripts, Descriptive Catalogue, Sanskrit, Old Malayalam Script, Kerala culture, Tantric rituals, Vedic rituals etc

INTRODUCTION

Palm leaf manuscripts have long stood as custodians of cultural heritage, preserving the intricate tapestry of knowledge, traditions and history. Kerala, a land steeped in rich heritage has been a reservoir of these fragile yet invaluable relics. In the contemporary age of digital preservation, the endeavour to unearth, digitize and catalogue these manuscripts marks a significant stride towards safeguarding and disseminating this invaluable wealth.

This article unveils the culmination of an arduous yet rewarding endeavour: the identification, digitization and subsequent cataloguing of a corpus of previously unexplored palm leaf manuscripts from the heartland of Kerala. Beyond the mere digitization of aged documents, this undertaking seeks to bridge the chasm between antiquity and modernity, breathing new life into these age-old texts.

The process of identifying these manuscripts involved traversing through archives, engaging with local communities, and collaborating with scholars and custodians who have been the silent guardians of these heritage. Through meticulous digitization

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efforts, employing technology and preservation techniques, these fragile relics have been transformed into accessible digital formats, ensuring their longevity for generations to come.

This catalogue serves as a testament to the resilience of these manuscripts, preserving not just words, but the essence of a cultural legacy. In an era where boundaries of knowledge dissemination have expanded exponentially, this compilation aims to contribute to the scholarly discourse, providing a window into a world that was on the brink of obscurity. The study and documentation of these manuscripts promise a deeper understanding of Kerala's cultural history, shedding light on various facets of its history, language, religion and customs.

Methodology

The methodology involves Identification of Manuscripts, Selection and Preparation for Digitisation, Digitization Process, Cataloguing and Documentation, Accessibility and Preservation and Ethical Sensitivity.

1. Identification of Manuscripts

➤ **Exploration and Survey:** Conducted thorough surveys across Kerala, collaborating with local archives, libraries and communities known for preserving such manuscripts.

➤ **Consultation with Experts:** Engaged with scholars, historians and custodians possessing deep-rooted knowledge of local history and manuscripts to identify potential repositories.

2. Selection and Preparation for Digitization

➤ **Criteria for Selection:** Established criteria based on historical significance, rarity and thematic importance to prioritize manuscripts for digitization.

➤ **Preparation and Handling:** Employed meticulous care and conservation techniques to ensure the safe handling and preparation of delicate palm leaf manuscripts for digitization.

3. Digitization Process

➤ **Technology and Equipment:** Utilized modern digital equipment and for fragile historical documents.

➤ **Digitisation Protocols:** Developed protocols to maintain accuracy, resolution and preservation of the original content during the digitization process.

➤ **Quality Assurance:** Implemented stringent quality checks to verify the fidelity and completeness of digitised manuscripts.

4. Cataloguing and Documentation

➤ **Data Organisation:** Established a systematic method for cataloguing, organizing and archiving digitised manuscripts.

➤ **Descriptive Metadata:** Recorded detailed descriptive metadata including titles, authors (if known), dates, languages, scripts and any unique features or content within the manuscripts.

➤ **Collaborative Input:** Engaged with scholars and experts for accurate interpretation and categorisation of manuscripts.

5. Accessibility and Preservation

➤ **Digital Repository Creation:** At Present, the digital copies of the manuscripts are securely preserved within hard drives and cloud storage spaces. Concurrently, I am in the process of developing a comprehensive digital repository system for these manuscripts. Additionally, efforts are underway towards editing and preparing the collection for future publication.

➤ **Preservation measures:** Implemented long-term preservation strategies and conservation

guidelines to ensure the sustained preservation of manuscripts.

6. Ethical Considerations

➤ **Cultural Sensitivity:** Maintained sensitivity to cultural and religious aspects while handling the manuscripts.

➤ **Permissions:** Adhered to ethical guidelines, obtained necessary permissions when sharing the content.

Descriptive Catalogue of Newly Identified Manuscripts

Title: लळितासहस्रनामावलि:

Lalitāsahasranāmāvaliḥ

No.: 1

Language: Sanskrit

Script: Old Malayalam

Size: 28cm by 2cm

Extent: 20 leaves; written in both sides; 11 lines to a leaf; about 30 letters

to a line

Description: Palm leaf. old Malayalam characters; rather hurried but generally legible and correct writing. Corrections made here and there with black. Some upper side portions are partially damaged; complete.

Subject: Thousand names of Hindu goddess. A part of Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa

Begins: ഹന്തീ: ശ്രീഗണപതഭയ നമ:

ഒറം ശ്രീമഠത്ര നമ:

Reference: The text has been printed in India many times.

Notes: Manuscript contains many textual variations in the names and order some of them are hitherto unknown names. For example,

विसतन्तुनिभाकृतायै नमः in the place of वि(बि)सतन्तुतनीयस्यै नमः, भद्रप्रदायै नमः instead of भद्रप्रियायै नमः etc

Title: वैष्णवनवीकरणप्रकारः

Vaiṣṇavanavīkaraṇaparakārah

No.: 2

Language: Sanskrit

Script: Old Malayalam

Size: 28cm by 2.5cm

Extent: 23 leaves; written in both sides; 10 lines to a leaf; about 36 letters

to a line

Description: Palm leaf. old Malayalam characters; generally legible and correct writing. Some portions are partially damaged;

complete.

Subject: A Tantric temple ritual related to Vishnu.

Begins: ഹരി: ശ്രീഗണപതയേ നമഃ അവിഷ്ണവനവീകരണപ്രകാരം ലിഖ്യതേ തദ്യഥം മുഹൂർത്തദിനം പ്രഗഷ്ടമെഹി രത്നത്രേ ബീജംകുരൂർപണം കുര്യൻ.

Notes: Manuscript possesses a Tantric temple ritual of Kerala. It contains a unique regional variation of the ritual process.

Title: **വിജയാബലിപ്രകാരം vijayābaliprakāram**

No.: 3

Language: Malayalam and Sanskrit

Script: Old Malayalam

Size: 34cm by 2.5cm

Extent: 13 leaves; written in both sides; 11 lines to a leaf; about 47 letters

to a line

Description: Palm leaf. old Malayalam characters; generally legible and correct writing. complete.

Subject: A rare Tantrik ritual of Kerala temples.

Begins: ഹരി: ശ്രീഗണപതയേ നമഃ അവിഷ്ണവനവീകരണപ്രകാരം

വിജയാബലിപ്രകാരത്തെ ചെല്ലുന്നു

തിരുവേണവം വിഷ്ണുപഞ്ചമിയും

ആകുന്നതിനടുപ്പതിന് ഉള്ള ദിവസം..

പൂർവപക്ഷം ഏറെ പ്രധാനം

Ends: ആദിത്യൻ ഉദിച്ചു പേയംകിൽ കുളിച്ച്

പശുദാനത്തെ നിർമ്മല്യം

വറിക്കളഞ്ഞുകൊള്ളൂ. ഇല്ലംകിൽ മഹദ്ദേഷം

സംഭവിക്കും.....

ഇങ്ങനെ

വിജയാബലിപ്രകാരം

ശുഭമസ്തു. ശ്രീ ഗുരുഭ്യേ നമഃ ഓം നമശ്ശിവായ

Notes: Manuscript contains a very rare Tantric ritual performing in the

Vishnu Temples of Kerala. This ritual process is not yet published.

Title: **ധാന്വന്തരഹോമപ്രകാരം Dhānvantarahomaprakāram**

No.: 4

Language: Malayalam and Sanskrit

Script: Old Malayalam

Size: 34cm by 5.5cm

Extent: 2 leaves; written in both sides; 10 lines to a leaf; about 41 letters

to a line

Description: Palm leaf. old Malayalam characters; generally legible and correct writing. Not complete.

Subject: A Tantric ritual of God Dhanvantari.

Begins: അഗ്നിജനനത്തിനു ഷേഡശരക്ഷരത്തിന്റെ അക്ഷരങ്ങളെക്കൊണ്ട് ഷേഡശരക്ഷരക്രിയ

ചെയ്ത് ഹോമപ്രകാരം ഹോമനൂടങ്ങു. വൈഷ്ണവമായിട്ടു അഷ്ടക്രിയ ചെയ്കിലുമ്പം.

Notes: Manuscript contains a very rare tantric ritual for health benefits. The

text is incomplete

Title: **ആഗ്രയണം Āgrayaṇam**

No.: 5

Language: Malayalam and Sanskrit

Script: Old Malayalam

Size: 34cm by 5.5cm

Extent: 2 leaves; written in both sides; 10 lines to a leaf; about 41 letters

to a line

Description: Palm leaf. old Malayalam characters; generally legible and correct writing. Complete.

Subject: A Vedic ritual; a part of sodaśasamskāra performed by husband and wife.

Begins: ഹരി: ആഗ്രയണം അമഠവഠസ്യ സ്ഥഠലീപഠകഠ

കഴിഞ്ഞഠൽ ആഗ്രയണം ചെയ്യു. പത്നിയും

കൂടെ ഇരുന്നൂ പുണ്യഠഹഠ ചെയ്ത് ഔപഠസനത്തിങ്കൽ അന്വഠരബ്ബവുമിട്ടിരുന്ന് ഗണപതിയും നിവേദിച്ചു...

Ends: അധിമഠസത്തിലുമഠഗ്രയണമരൂത്.

ആഗ്രയണത്തിൽ പത്നിക്കു പ്രഠശിപ്പഠൻ തുകിയ

ശേഷം ഹേഠമശേഷമല്ല.

Title: **Thirunakkara Devaswam Records**

No.: 6

Language: Old Malayalam

Script: Old Malayalam

Size: 36.5 cm by 4.5cm

Extent: 9 leaves; written in both sides; 10 lines to a leaf; about 58 letters

to a line

Description: Palm leaf. old Malayalam characters; generally readable and correct writing. Not complete

Subject: An official letter from Thirunakkara devasvam officials to Veluthetathu Tharananellur Mana related to rituals of Thirunakkara temple, Kerala.

Begins: തിരുന്നക്കരൈ ദേവസഠ കെഠയിന്മക്കു എഴുതി

വരുന്നൂ

Title: **Pāttam Records**

No.: 7

Language: Malayalam

Script: Old Malayalam

Size: 34 cm by 5cm

Extent: leaves; written in both sides; 10 lines to a leaf; about 40 letters

to a line

Description: Palm leaf. old Malayalam characters; hurried writing but readable. Incomplete

Subject: A deed related to land

Begins: പടിഞ്ഞഠറെ മനക്കലൈ വെട്ടെകരൂമകൻ

തിരുന്നഠമപേരഠൽ...

Title: ललितत्रिशतीस्तोत्रम्

Lalitātrīśatīstotram

No.: 8

Language: Sanskrit

Script: Old Malayalam

Size: 28 cm by 2cm

Extent: 6 leaves; written in both sides; 8 lines to a leaf; about 30 letters

to a line

Description: Palm leaf. old Malayalam characters; hurried writing but readable. Incomplete

Subject: A famous Stotra of Devi, Part of Brahmanda Purana.

Begins: ഹരിശ്രീ ഗണപതയെ നമ: കകഠരരൂപഠ

കല്യഠണീ കല്യഠണഗുണശഠലിനീ...

Title: श्रीमद्भगवद्गीता

śrīmadbhagavadgītā

No.: 9

Language: Sanskrit

Script: Old Malayalam

Size: 32 cm by 2.5cm

Extent: 3 leaves; written in both sides; 8 lines to a leaf; about 38 letters

to a line

Description: Palm leaf. old Malayalam characters; hurried writing but readable. Partially damaged and incomplete

Begins: വിഷ്ണു: പരമഠത്മഠ നഠരഠയണേഠ ദേവതഠ

അശേഷഠച്യഠനന്യശേഷഠചസ്തഠ

പ്രജ്ഞഠവഠദഠശ്വ

ദേഷസ ഇതി ബീജം...

Title: **ബ്രഹ്മാനന്ദവല്ലി**

Brahmānandavallī

No.: 10

Language: Sanskrit

Script: Old Malayalam

Size: 32 cm by 2.5cm

Extent: 3 leaves; written in both sides; 8 lines to a leaf; about 38 letters

to a line

Description: Palm leaf. old Malayalam characters; hurried writing but readable. Partially damaged but complete

Subject: Brahmananda valli is the second chapter of Taittiriya Upanishad

Begins: ഹരി: ശ്രീഗണപതയെ നമഃ
അവിഷ്ണമസ്തു

ശം നേമിത്രസ്തംവരുണ.....

Ends: അഹം വിശ്വം
ഭുവനമഭ്യഭവഥം

സുവർണജ്യോതി: യ ഏവം വേദ

ഇത്യപനിഷൽ ഇതി
തൈത്തിരീയേപനിഷത്

The manuscripts in the above displayed catalogue are newly discovered from Tharananellur Padinjare Mana, Kerala. They provide a captivating glimpse into Kerala’s rich cultural and spiritual heritage. This diverse collection encompasses a spectrum of texts ranging from Vedic rituals to profound Tantric practices, shedding light on the manifold traditions existing within this revered house.

Notably, the presence of texts such as Lalita Sahasranama, Srimad Bhagavad Gita and excerpts from revered Vedic scriptures like the Taittiriya Upanishad, signifies the repository’s comprehensive spiritual legacy. However, the manuscript’s textual

variations from commonly available versions of Lalita Sahasranama point to the uniqueness of the Tharananellur Mana’s heritage.

Of significant scholarly interests are the tantric texts – Vaishnava Navikarana Prakara, Vijayabali Prakara and Dhanvantara Homa Prakaram. These manuscripts not only unveil tantric rituals but also introduce previously unknown regional variations, presenting an opportunity for deeper exploration into the evolution and diversity of these esoteric practices within Kerala.

The presence of both Vedic and Tantric traditions within the same repository highlights the syncretism and coexistence of diverse spiritual paths within Kerala’s landscape.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the manuscripts discovered in the Tharananellur Mana offer an invaluable glimpse into Kerala’s spiritual and cultural ethos. The diversity within this collection, ranging from Vedic rituals to tantric texts, exemplifies the multifaceted heritage embedded within this renowned house.

The manuscript collection’s potential publication after meticulous editing promises to unlock profound insights into Kerala’s spiritual traditions, elucidating unknown regional variations in Vedic and Tantric rituals and shedding light on the nuanced textual differences in revered works.

The absence of specific dates within this article emphasizes the necessity for meticulous examination and scholarly scrutiny before any definitive dating of these manuscripts. However, the manuscript’s mere existence within Tharananellur Mana attests to their historical and cultural significance, inviting further scholarly exploration and interpretation.

In essence, these manuscripts stand as venerable gateways to uncovering Kerala’s spiritual and cultural richness, inviting scholars and enthusiasts alike to delve deeper into the nuanced world of Vedic and tantric traditions harboured within the storied walls of the Tharananellur Mana.