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A Scholar Poet from the Neighbouring Land: Uddaṇḍa Śāstrin's Perceptions of Kerala

SUMMARY: The present paper proposes to investigate the perceptions of Kerala in the works of Uddaṇḍa Śāstrin, a remarkable scholar, who came in search of patronage to the court of Mānavikrama, the Zamorin of Calicut of the 15th century A.D, from Lāṭapura, a famous Brahmin centre in Toṇḍamaṇḍala, in Chengalpattu, in the present Tamil Nadu. Often stereotyped as a haughty outsider looking down upon his contemporaries with contempt, Uddaṇḍa was actually a sharp-witted scholar, who readily appreciated the scholarship of his adopted land, even while mincing no words when he encountered mediocrity. His message poem *Kokilasandēśa* and his play *Mallikāmāruta*, as well as many stray verses still current in Kerala, apart from being a veritable treasure of information as far as medieval Kerala is concerned, are of great cultural significance as they register the perceptions of a gifted scholar poet from the neighbouring land. Unfortunately, in popular imagination, he is projected as a haughty outsider outsmarting indigenous scholarship, but ultimately defeated by a native prodigy in the form of Kākkaśseri Bhaṭṭatiri. This paper aims at retrieving Uddaṇḍa's valuable and often unbiased insights of Kerala, which are often overlooked in popular perceptions of him. As a sensitive author who recorded his impressions on crossing the geographical boundaries of his native land to reach Kerala, his firsthand accounts of great cities, centres of learning, famous temples, food habits and festivals, such as Ōṇam of Kerala, that can be found in his works are really worth probing.

KEYWORDS: Kerala, Uddaṇḍa Śāstrin, Zamorin, *Mallikāmāruta*, *Kokilasandēśa*

Sojourn in foreign, even neighbouring lands often prompts writers to record their perceptions of the culture of the place with which they are brought into contact as they experience something different from their own culture. The perceptions of ‘outsiders’ are very interesting since their perspective, nurtured by their own traditions, is often different from that of native writers. Travelogues and literary works set in alien lands give us such valuable insights of the land depicted, comprising the day to day life of the people, with descriptions focusing on cities, terrains, pilgrim centres and cultural activities. There were many foreign travellers, such as Ibn Batuta (1342–47), Ma Huan (1403) and Abd-al-Razzāq (1442), who visited Calicut (Kozhikode) and other parts of Kerala in medieval times and who left their vivid impressions of the land and the people in their accounts. *The Lusiads*, a Portuguese epic poem written by Luís Vaz de Camões (c. 1524/5–1580) also gives a graphic account of the impressions about the voyage of the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama (1469–1524), who landed in the city of Calicut and ushered in an era of European colonization of India.¹ However, in contrast with the travelogues of these foreigners, the accounts of Uddaṇḍa, who was a Brahmin Sanskrit scholar, admitted to the scholarly assembly of the rulers of the land, were written by a person earnestly trying to mingle with the local culture and not of an outsider looking critically at the society. It is against this backdrop that the present paper proposes to investigate the perceptions of the Keralan land in the works of Uddaṇḍa Śāstrin, who came to the court of Mānavikrama, the Zamorin of Calicut of the 15th century A.D., in search of royal patronage.² Uddaṇḍa was a great scholar trained in many branches of knowledge and a gifted poet with absolute mastery over Sanskrit. He is remembered for his acclaimed stature at the court of the Zamorin of Kerala and also for his famous message

¹ For an excellent account of this encounter, see Pierdominici Leão 2019: 159–178.

² For detained accounts of the legacy of the Zamorins, see Krishna Iyer 1999 and Haridas 2016.

poem *Kokilasandeśa*³ and the play *Mallikāmāruta*, apart from many stray verses still popular in Kerala. Fortunately for us, he recorded his impression of medieval cities, centres of learning, famous temples, food habits and festivals, such as Ōṇaṃ (Mal.) in his works. The present paper will explore the way in which Kerala is portrayed by the scholar poet from the neighbouring land in his works, his assessment of the lifestyle, manners and Sanskrit scholarship of the land and other interesting aspects of Keralan culture.

From the autobiographical accounts he gives in the preface of the *Mallikāmāruta*, we can understand that Uddaṇḍa Śāstrin was a Brahmin of the cluster village (*agrahāra*) called Lāṭapura on the banks of the river Pālār in Toṇḍamaṇḍala (Tuṇḍīramaṇḍala), which falls in the modern Kāncīpuram district of Tamilnādu.⁴ He was the son of Raṅganātha and Raṅgadevī and his family belonged to Vādhūlagotra, and followed the *Āpastambasūtra*.⁵ His real name seems to have been Irugupanātha. He belonged to a very learned family and received his education under eminent scholars in almost all the branches of knowledge. He recorded that he had visited various kingdoms, such as Andhra, Kalinga, and Karṇāṭaka. It appears that he did not find satisfactory support and patronage in those places. There is an interesting verse attributed to him which was addressed to the king of Karṇāṭaka, whom he was apparently not happy with about the type of patronage he received. Here the poet says:

³ About Sanskrit *sandeśakāvya*s, see: Lienhard 1984: 113–128. About messenger poems of Kerala, see: Kunjunni Raja 1980: 225–237 (Sanskrit), George 1968: 51–55 (Manipravālam).

⁴ See *Mallikāmāruta*, p.12.

⁵ We do not know if Uddaṇḍa was a Telugu Brahmin whose family had migrated to the Tamil speaking country at some point of time or a Tamil Brahmin. In any case, he must have been proficient in Tamil also, as illustrated by his Tamil exclamation of eulogy to Punam Nampūtiri, which will be discussed subsequently.

*mā gāḥ pratyupakāarakātaratayā vaivarṇyam ākarṇaya
śrīkarṇāṭavasundharādhīpa sudhāsiktāni sūktāni naḥ/
varṇyante kavibhiḥ payonidhisaritsandhyābhrevindhyāṭavī-
jhañjhāmārutanirjharaprabhṛtayas tebhyaḥ kim āptam phalam//⁶*

Hear, O King of Kaṛṇāṭaka, please do not lose your countenance

Worrying how to reward our nectar-sprinkled verses.

Do poets not describe oceans, rivers, evening sky, the Vindhya forests,

Whirlwinds, waterfalls and the like? and yet what do they get from them?⁷

After coming to Calicut, Uddaṇḍa Śāstrin became a court poet of King Mānavikrama Śaktan Tampurān, who, in the words of Kunjunni Raja, was “the brightest luminary in the firmament of the history of Kozhikode prior to the advent of the Portuguese and one of the greatest patrons of literature Kerala has produced” (Kunjunni Raja 1980: 63). At the time of Mānavikrama, who belonged to the latter half of the fifteenth century A.D., Calicut was one of the most prosperous places of India. Ibn Batuta, who had visited the place in 1342–47, records that Calicut is “one of the greatest ports of the Districts of Malabar in which merchants from all parts are found” (Narayanan 2006: 69). The coast line of Kerala was frequented by foreign merchants from different parts of the world, such as Greece, Rome, Persia, Syria, China, and Arabia, and after the Kodungallur Port had become unusable in the great flood of 1341, Calicut sprang into prominence as a major port for international trade under the Zamorins. In this connection, it may also be recalled that there is a legend regarding Lakṣmī, the Goddess of Wealth, appearing before the hereditary first secretary of Zamorin, offering a boon to him. He asked her to be stationed in the big bazaar until he returned and then committed suicide, never to return, so that Lakṣmī had to remain there forever (Narayanan 2006: 31).

⁶ The Sanskrit text as given by K. Kunjunni Raja (Kunjunni Raja 1980: 76).

⁷ This and all the other subsequent English translations of the original verses, unless specified otherwise, are by the present author.

Uddaṇḍa's admiration for Kukkūḍakroḍa (Kōḷikkōṭ alias Calicut/Kozhikode) is revealed through the glowing description of the city, found in the *Mallikāmāruta* and the *Kokilasandeśa*. In his *Mallikāmāruta*, the remarks of the stage manager (*sūtradhāra*) in the prologue seem to have an autobiographical significance. He refers to the general decadence of the minds of good-natured people (*sumanas*) elsewhere. Their moon-like minds are swallowed by the evil planet of Rāhu in the form of the *kali* era. The learned assemblies in other places are 'harsh' (*paruṣa*) due to rivalry (*paurobhāgya*). He compares such assemblies with salt markets, where he has to present his own talent in acting, which is like camphor. This comparison means that by performing before ignorant assemblies of people, he shares the fate of a person who has to sell such a valuable article like the fragrant camphor in a market which sells common salt, to people who cannot understand its worth. The comparison shows the frustration he had to endure in other places, which failed to spot his real talent. On the other hand, he maintains that the assembly of the city of Calicut is pure in its intellect due to the presence of Lord Śiva, the presiding deity of the temple of Tali (Sthalī). The *sūtradhāra* reveals his admiration for the great city, which he describes as 'famous in the three worlds'.⁸ Evidently, through these words, the poet himself makes a comparison between other places and the city he adopted for his stay, where he seems to have received the recognition and patronage he had been unsuccessfully seeking elsewhere. One of the major attractions of the city seems to be its wealth gained through maritime

⁸ *aham asmi sakalaharidantaranagarasamsadārādhanajñātasārprayogapāṭavo viṣṭapatritayaprakhyātam kukkuḍakroḍanagaram upasṛtya kutūhalābhyāgato raṅgacandro nāma śailūṣakīśoraḥ adya khalu prāyeṇa sarvataḥ kalikālavidhūntadakavalitavivekacandramassu sumanassu paurobhāgyapauruṣeṣu pariśadantareṣu lavaṇāpaṇeṣu iva ghanasāram abhinayasāram akhilabhuvanaghasmarakarālakālakūṭakavalanaprabhāvaprakāṭita kāruṇyāvāṣṭambhasya puratrayanītambinīkapolapatrāṅkurakṛntanalavitrasya kaṅkanakvaṇītasatīrīkṛtasabda brahmavyavasthasya bhagavataḥ śrīsthalīśvarasya sannidhānāt udbhūtatattādṛṣanirmaladhiṣanāyām aṣeṣakalākamalīnīvikasanavālākaprabhāyām sabhāyām prayujya saphalayitum abhilaṣāmi / (Mallikāmāruta, pp. 5–6).*

activities. The following lines of the *Kokilasandeśa* pinpoint the maritime splendours of the city:

*yatra jñātvā kṛtanilayanām indirām ātmakanyām
manye snehākulitahṛdayo vāhinīnām vivoḍhā/
tattaddvīpāntaraśatasamānītaratnaughapūrṇam
naukājālam muhur upaharan vīcibhiḥ śliṣyatīva//⁹*

I suppose that the ocean seems to embrace the goddess of prosperity, his own daughter, with his waves, on knowing her as residing here, bringing forth fleets of boats filled with heaps of jewels, collected from hundreds of various islands.

Here the poet refers to the presence of boats laden with precious jewels, coming from different parts of the world, as a gift given by the ocean to his daughter Lakṣmī, who has settled in the city. It seems that Uddaṇḍa was greatly impressed by the prowess and splendour of Mānavikrama, the reigning Zamorin, one of the most powerful monarchs at that time. His play *Mallikāmāruta* contains a graphic description of the king sitting in the assemblage, fanned by courtesans, chowries held in their lotus-like hands, and surrounded by all valorous people of four directions, who prostrate before him, being prompted by the knitted eyebrows of the guards.

*āsthānamadhyagatam uddhataśauvidallabhṛūkṣepacoditanamaccaturantavīram
śrīvikramam caturavāravadhūkarābjavyā hūtacāmaram alokata lokanātham
(Mallikāmāruta, p. 13)*

The very first address made by him to the king on his first meeting is replete with figurative expressions suggestive of the valour of the king:

⁹ The Sanskrit text after Kunjunni Raja (Kunjunni Raja 1980: 82).

*pratyarthibhūmipālapratāpagharmothapuṣkalā[rā?]varta/
viśvambharākuṭumbin vikrama viśvaikavīra vijayasva//
(Ibid.)*

O Vikrama, the Puṣkara and Āvarta cloud of the summer in the form of enemy kings!

The Husband of Earth, the sole hero of the world! Be victorious!

In another interesting verse ascribed to Uddaṇḍa, which he is supposed to have recited also at the first meeting with the King, he exhorts the latter to prevent the flag held aloft in the king's victory marches from going beyond the path of the Sun up in the sky; for, the tiger emblem in the flag may terrify the deer in the moon and consequently, when it flees away, the moon will become thoroughly spotless as a result of which it will become equal to the faces of the spouses of the king. It is said that the term *uddaṇḍa* occurring in the verse resulted in the poet being known by that name.¹⁰ Uddaṇḍa Śāstrin's admiration for Calicut and its ruler was more than reciprocated by the host, who made him the court poet. According to tradition, Uddaṇḍa Śāstrin adorned the court of Mānavikrama and was a member of the learned assembly known as 'Eighteen and half poets', the half consisting of the Malayalam poet Punam Nampūtiri and the rest scholars and poets,¹¹ including the *mīmāṃsā* scholars of two generations of the Payyūr families, Cennās Nārāyaṇan Nampūtiri, the author of the *Tantrasamuccaya*,

¹⁰ Kunjunni Raja (Kunjunni Raja 1980: 75) doubts the authenticity of the story, pointing out that the poet himself recorded that he had recited another verse of his on meeting the king for the first time. Another objection is that the tiger was actually the emblem of the Colas and not that of the Zamorin, but this is countered by M. G. S. Narayanan (Narayanan 2006: 80–81) with the argument that the Zamorin had defeated the Cola king in battle and it is customary for the victorious kings to take hold of the emblem of the defeated king.

¹¹ The Malayalam word for half is *ara* and according to some scholars, it signified *aracan*, meaning the king and not 'half', and many compounds in Malayalam such as *aramana* (palace), and *arayannam* (the royal swan) support this argument. As per this interpretation, there would be 18 royal poets. However, there seems to have been some patronizing attitude attached to vernacular poets in medieval Kerala.

Kākkaśeri Dāmodara Bhaṭṭa and another five Brahmins from Tiruvegappura. There is a traditional story associated with this Kākkaśeri Dāmodara Bhaṭṭa also. The story goes that Uddaṇḍa Śāstrin used to take part in the annual assemblage called Revatīpaṭṭattānam, securing the honour of the place and defeating all other scholars every year. The native Nampūtiri Brahmin scholars felt humiliated and hurt by his haughty temperament and overbearing nature. The story goes that they prayed to the deity at the temple Elavaḷli in central Kerala for the birth of a scholar among them who could defeat Uddaṇḍa Śāstrin in the assembly. A Nampūtiri lady of the Kākkaśeri family was pregnant at that time. She gave birth to the prodigious Dāmodara Bhaṭṭa, who even at the tender age of twelve could defeat Śāstrin in debate in the Tali temple (Kunjunni Raja 1980: 62–64). Their encounter reminds one of the story of David and Goliath: The story goes that on seeing the diminutive size of his rival, Uddaṇḍa tried to demoralize him by exclaiming “*ākāro hrasvaḥ*”, meaning ‘your size is small’, upon which Dāmodara outwitted him by retorting “*na hi nahi, ākāro dīrghaḥ*”, ‘No no, the *ā* sound is long’. In discourses prevalent in Kerala, the pomp and glamour associated with Uddaṇḍa are often contrasted with the simplicity of Dāmodara, who ultimately wins the day. An autobiographical verse attributed to the latter challenging his rival runs as follows:

We possess no umbrella, no horse, no group of speakers, no bards, no moustache, no silk robe for forehead, no décor of clothes. But we possess speech of no mean order, which is as mature as the cluster of the waves dancing in the milky ocean agitated by the great Mandara mountain.¹²

¹² *na chatram na turaṅgamo na vadatām vṛndāni no bandino na śmaśrūṇi na phālapaṭṭavasanam na hy ambarādambaram/ asty asmākam amandamandaragiriprodhūdadugdhodadhi-preṅkhadvīciparamparāparinatā vāṇī tu nāṅṅiyasī//* (Kunjunni Raja 1980: 86)

Here there is possibly a veiled hit at the dress and demeanour of his rival. In the ensuing arguments, Uddaṇḍa, on being refuted by his rival in every statement, finally made an indisputable statement, saying, “Your mother is chaste”. Tradition maintains that Dāmodara refuted even this, quoting the scripture which states that the bride is enjoyed by Soma, Gandharva and Agni before her marriage is actually consummated.¹³ It is said that by defeating Uddaṇḍa in debate, Dāmodara restored the glory of the native Brahmins of Kerala. Uddaṇḍa seems to have gone back to his own place after his defeat. Despite this anticlimactic turn of events, Uddaṇḍa remains in popular memory as the formidable scholar poet of the neighbouring land, whose witticisms and exploits have become a part of Kerala’s folklore. He loved the land and its people very much and became deeply engaged in its lifestyle. Uddaṇḍa himself described the features of his sojourn in Kerala. He records that he took ablutions in the great rivers of Kerala and paid visit to holy temples and served worthy people and appreciated their scholarship.

Uddaṇḍa’s perceptions of Kerala are expressed mostly in his occasional stray verses and the message poem *Kokilasandeśa*, which has a lot of autobiographical elements. The *Kokilasandeśa* is especially interesting as the heroine in the poem is a damsel from Cennamangalam (Sanskritised as Jayantamaṅgalam in the poem), who belonged to a house called *Mārakkara*. This house exists even today, lying between the two arms of the Āluva (Alwaye) river. Tradition maintains that the poet contracted a *sambandha* type of marriage (wherein usually a Brahmin male enters into a dissoluble matrimonial alliance with a non-Brahmin upper caste lady) there and, in all probability, it is his wife who is fictionalized as the heroine. The poem centres on the message of a separated hero living in Kāñcī on the banks

¹³ *somaḥ prathamō vivide gandharvo vivida uttarah/*
ṭṛtiyo ’gniṣṭe patisturīyaste manuṣyajāh// (Rgveda, 10.85.41.)

of the river Kampā¹⁴ to his beloved. Proceeding through Kāñcī, Tuṇḍīra, Cola (modern Tamil Nadu) and Hoysala (Mysore) lands, the messenger has to reach his destination passing through places such as Tirunelli (Āmalakadharaṇī), Northern Koṭṭayam, the abode of the Purali kings, Talipparambu (Sampadgrāma), Tṛccemmaram (Śambara), Kolattunāṭu (Kola), Kōḷikkōṭ (modern Calicut/Kozhikode, Sanskritised as Kukkuḍakroḍa), Vettattunāṭu (Prakāśa), Tṛpraññoṭ (Śvetāraṇya), Tirunāvā, Camravaṭṭam (Śambarakroḍa), Āīvāñceri, Mūkkola, Porkkalam (Raṇakhala), Tṛśūr (Trichur, Sanskritised as Vṛsapurī), Peruanam, Ūrakam, Irinñālakkuṭa, Koṭuññallūr, and Tiruvañcikkulam (Añjanakhala). The poet shared his perceptions of various cities, rivers, shrines, festivities, scholars and poets of Kerala in this work, which shows the features of a travelogue in Sanskrit. These, along with his occasional verses, give us a graphic picture of Kerala and its geocultural and social features in the 15th century. The reminiscences and accounts left by Uddaṇḍa, apart from their historical significance, are interesting because of the scholarship, wit and humour of the author. It is a pity that he left no account or reference of the royal assemblage of Calicut of which he was a member. Temples of Kerala seem to have had a great fascination for the scholar poet. He recorded his impressions about many temples spread all over North and Central Kerala. He mentions the Viṣṇu temple of Tirunelli, the Śiva temple of Koṭṭiyūr, the Caṇḍikā temple at Purali, the Rājarājeśvara temple of Talipparamba, the Kṛṣṇa temple of Tṛccambara, the Śiva temple of Tṛprañnode, the Viṣṇu temple of Tirunāvā, the Śāstā temple of Camravaṭṭam, the Śiva temples of Tṛśūr (Trichur) and Peruvanam, the Viṣṇu temple of Irinñālakkuṭa, and Tiruvañcikkulam. A remarkable feature of these references is their geographical accuracy and wealth of legends associated with them. A significant omission is that of the famous Śrīkṛṣṇa temple of Guruvāyūr, belonging to the Zamorin, which he did not mention anywhere.

¹⁴ Shankar Rajaraman and Venetia Kotamraju inform us that Kampā is “today no more than a tank at the Ekambareshwar temple” (Rajaraman and Kotamraju 2012: 3).

Some of the interesting incidents in Uddaṇḍa's life took place in temples. He seems to have been fascinated by the hourglass-shaped percussion instrument called *iṭakka*, which is used in Keralan temples for the ritualistic singing called *sopānasāṅgīta*. Once, in the Tali temple of Calicut, he imitated the drumming sound of it in the verse composed extempore.

*nṛtyaddhūrjaṭikaragataḍamarukaḍumuḍumuravaparipanthinyaḥ
kalpakṣmāruhavikasitakusumajamadhurasamadhusahacāriṇyaḥ/
manthakṣmādhavaravimathitajalanidhighumughumughanaravamada-
manthinyaḥ
śailābdhīśvaranṛpavara vidadhatu budhasukhamayi tava vacasām
śrenyaḥ//¹⁵*

O great lord of the mountain and ocean, may the cluster of your words,
which vie with the *dumu-dumu* sound of the *ḍamaru* drum
in the hands of the dancing Śiva,
which go together with the sweetness of the honey
from the flowers of the wish-yielding tree,
and which destroy the pride of the *ghumu-ghumu* sound of the ocean
being churned by the Mandara mountain, give pleasure to the learned.

Apart from this, he left some accounts about his encounters in several interesting stray verses. Once he had visited the Mother Goddess Ūrakam temple near Tṛṣūr. He reached there around noon and it was customary in temples to offer a feast for Brahmin visitors. Though he was hungry and could not get anything to eat there, he is supposed to have composed the following verse addressed to the deity. It should be noted that the temple is called *valayālaya* in Sanskrit and *valaya* also means zero. Uddaṇḍa makes fun of the goddess using *double entendre*:

¹⁵ The Sanskrit text as given by Kunjunni Raja (Kunjunni Raja 1980: 79).

*kāntaḥ kapālī kaṭhinaḥ pītā te meneti mātus tava nāmadheyam/
kathaṃ tu bhadre valayālayasthe vadānyatā mādr̥śi bobhavītu//*
(Ibid.)

Your husband is a beggar with a skull; your father is hard in stuff;
The name of your mother is “I do not have anything;”
O goddess having the abode in Valaya (zero),
How can there be charity on your part for people like me?

Uddaṇḍa left some valuable impressions of the Ōṇaṃ festival, celebrated in the Malayalam solar month of *śimha* (Mal. *ciṅṅgam*), falling in August/September, which is characterized by the ceremonial welcome accorded to Mahābali, the displaced King of the land, on his annual visit. People celebrate the event with feasts, boat races, flower carpets, new dresses, and children playing a bow-like instrument accompanied by loud singing. In Uddaṇḍa’s words:

*coḷūyante prthukatatayaś cāpatāḍṇinya uccaiḥ
sarvā nāryaḥ patibhir aniśam lambhayanty arthakāmān/
babhramyante sakalapuruṣair vallabhābhyaḥ pradātum
citraṃ vastram śravaṇakutukaṃ vartate keralesu//*
(Ibid.)

Gangs of lads, playing their bows hoot loudly again and again;
All women make their husbands provide wealth and pleasure;
All men are wandering hither and thither to present beautiful
garments to their women. The festivity of Ōṇaṃ takes place in Kerala.

This charming verse describes the *villukottu* (playing the bow-like wooden instrument) and the joyous invocations of flowers by young boys and the intimacy growing between men and women with the former satisfying every need of the latter, and the gift of new clothes to the spouses. It is remarkable that even though bow strumming and many other folk characteristics of the festival have disappeared

due to the increasing urbanization of the Keralan society, Ōṇam has retained its essential nature as a festival of shopping and gift giving.

Another festival mentioned by Uddaṇḍa is the Maghāmaha festival (*Māmāṅkam*) being celebrated in Tirunāvā, on the banks of the River Nilā. The *Kokilasandeśa* passage reads:

*sākam kāntair milati lalitam keralīnam kadambe
matpreyasyaḥ piyasakha mahāmāghasevāgatāyāḥ/
pāyam pāyam mukhparimalam mohanam yatra mattāḥ
prāyo'dyāpi bhramarakalabhāḥnaiva jighranti padmān//*¹⁶

O dear friend, I am sure that the intoxicated bees here do not care
for the fragrance of the lotuses,
after having drunk again and again the fragrance of the face
of my wife, who had come here
to do service at the Mahāmāgha festival,
when Kerala women were converging along with their husbands.

The festival was celebrated in the lunar month of *māgha*, (January/February) every twelve years. The central feature of the festival was the attempt by the suicide squad of the Valluvanāḍu king to attack the Zamorin, king of Calicut, who usurped the right to preside over the festival from the former. It is intriguing that Uddaṇḍa's stereotype reference does not contain any mention of the specific details of the festival and one may suspect that it may not be a first-hand account.

Uddaṇḍa, being a scholar poet, appears to have great regard for many cultural centres of Kerala, the most important of which seems to be the Nilā river basin. This is not surprising as it was the seat of mediæval learning as can be vouchsafed from the galaxy of great poets, mathematicians and philosophers hailing from the region. There seems to be a tradition prevalent in Kerala that it is the Nampūtiri Brahmins living in the region lying between the Vallī and Kauṇī rivers that are

¹⁶ The Sanskrit text from the *Kokilasandeśa* Unni 1997: 75.

superior; among them, those belonging to the region between the Nilā and Curṇī rivers are the most superior of all. Uddaṇḍa also accepts this tradition, as is evident from the following verse in the *Kokilasandeśa*.

*sarvotkṛṣṭā jagati veditāḥ keraleşu dvijendrāḥ
vallīkaunyoś tadapi mahimā kāpi madhyasthitānām/
tatrāpyasyāḥ salilapavanāḥ yatra yatra pratante
teṣām teṣām atiśayajuṣaḥśīlavidyābhimānāḥ//
(Ibid.: 76)*

The Brahmins of Kerala are considered to be the most superior in the world; and among them, there is a special greatness for those living in between the Nilā and Kauṇī. There again wherever the moist breezes of the Nilā river blow, there the character, knowledge and graces of people become reputed.

It is significant that the same view is expressed in the following passage composed by Akkittam Nārāyaṇan Nampūtiri, a great grammarian of uncertain date:

*tatra vallīkaviṇayor nadyor madhye dvijātayaḥ/
praśastagrāmavāstavyāḥ antarvāṇayaḥ uttamāḥ//¹⁷*

The Brahmins residing in the region between the Vallī and Kauṇī are celebrated, and gifted with inborn oratory.

The Vallī river mentioned here is identified with the Valliyār alias Kaṭaluṅ-tippuḷa near Calicut and the Kauṇī with the Mīnaccil river of Koṭṭayam.

The great scholars of the region who won the admiration of Uddaṇḍa include the Payyūr Bhaṭṭas (Unni 1997: 79–81), Netranārāyaṇa known as Āḷvāñceri Tamprākkaḷ (Ibid.: 76) and members of the Kūṭallūr

¹⁷ The verse quoted by Vaṭakkumkūr Rājarājavarma Rāja (Rājarājavarma Rāja 1997: 523).

Nampūtiri family, mainly celebrated for their scholarship in grammar. With regard to the Payyūr Bhaṭṭas, who belonged to Porkkalam (Raṅakhala) near Kunnankulam in the modern Tṛṣūr (Trichur) District, it can be seen that there seems to be six generations of scholars from the fourteenth century who were first rate scholars of *mīmāṃsā* philosophy. Uddaṇḍa seems to have been an ardent admirer of Kerala's contributions to *mīmāṃsā*, and he refers to King Hariścandra of Purali as the person who introduced the Bhaṭṭa system of *mīmāṃsā* to Kerala. The Payyūr Bhaṭṭas used only two names in their family, viz. Ṛṣi and Parameśvara, and this has resulted in a lot of confusion in their identification. It seems that Uddaṇḍa was acquainted with Parameśvara the author of *Jaiminīyasūtrārthasaṅgraha* and Ṛṣi, his father (Ibid.: 30). Uddaṇḍa recorded that Mahārṣi, the elder member, was well-versed in both branches of *mīmāṃsā*, viz. *pūrvamīmāṃsā* and *vedānta*. He refers to the galaxy of scholars coming over to the abode of the great scholar being accosted by flocks of parrots in the assembly hall.¹⁸ The fact that Mahārṣi alias Ṛṣi was a great admirer of Uddaṇḍa is clear from his testimony proudly quoted by Uddaṇḍa in *Mallikāmāruta* about himself.

*vede sādharabuddhir uddhatatare tarke param karkaśaḥ
śāstre śāntamatih kalāsu kuśalaḥ kāvyeṣu bhavyodayaḥ/
ślāghyaḥ satkavitāsu ṣatsv api paṭur bhāṣāsu sa tvam kṣitau
sarvodaṇḍakaviprakāṇḍa dadase kasmai na vismeratām//
(Mallikāmāruta, p. 15)*

You are committed deeply to the Veda, tough in logic, sharp-witted in *śāstras*,
adept in arts, lovely in poetry, adorable in good poetry,
and clever in six languages.

O the greatest among all formidable poets!

In this world, to whom you do not cause wonder?

¹⁸ *vidvadvṛnde vivaditum anasyāgate yatra śaśvad-
vyākhyāśālāvalabhinilayas tiṣṭhate kīrasamghaḥ/
(Unni 1997: 76)*

This verse makes an interesting remark that Uddaṇḍa was fluent in six languages. Śrīranganāthācārya, the commentator of the *Mallikāmāruta*, states that these six languages were Sanskrit, Prakrit as well as *apabhraṃśa*, *paśācī*, *māgadhī* and *śaurasenī* (*Mallikāmāruta*, p. 17) but this is arguable. It seems more probable that Uddaṇḍa might have meant local languages such as Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam, in addition to Sanskrit and Prakrit, since the dialects of Prakrit, such as *paśācī*, *māgadhī* and *śaurasenī*, are already comprised in it and there is no evidence of his scholarship in *apabhraṃśa*. This brings us to the attitude of Uddaṇḍa to various vernacular languages. Kerala is replete with anecdotes related to the sociolinguistic attitude of Sanskrit writers to vernacular poets. There is a story of Melputtūr Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa rejecting the request of Pūntānam Nampūtiri to go through the latter's poetry since it was written in Malayalam. As a Sanskrit scholar writing exclusively in Sanskrit, it appears that Uddaṇḍa also was not very kind to vernacular poets who wrote in a local language. He ridicules them in the following manner:

*bhāṣākavinivaho 'yam doṣākaravad bhāti bhuvanatale/
prāyena vṛttahīnaḥ sūryāloke nirastagoprasaraḥ //*
(Ibid.: 64)

In this world, this herd of vernacular poets,
mostly lacking metre and ineloquent,
looks like the moon, which is mostly devoid of
circular shape and of obstructed rays in sunlight.

He also challenged poetasters in the following manner:

*palāyadhvam palāyadhvam re re duṣkavikuñjarāḥ/
vedāntavanasañcārī hy āyāty uddaṇḍakesarī//*
(Ibid.: 77)

Flee away, flee away, ye poetaster-elephants!
Uddaṇḍa, the lion moving in the forest of *vedānta*, is coming!

His utter contempt for mediocrity is revealed from the following verse:

*udāttamadapittaladviradarājagaṇḍasthalī-
vidāraṇavinodanakṣapitavāsaraḥ kesarī/
katham nu kalahakramaṃ vitanute paretāṭavī-
purāṇakuṇapāśanaprakaṭitārave pherave//
(Ibid.)*

How can a lion, who spends the day through
the entertainment of splitting the cheeks of
elephant kings bilious with the rut caused
by severe intoxication, quarrel with a jackal,
who makes noise when eating the decayed flesh
in the woods of the graveyard?

Yet another verse brings forth the contrast between poetasters and Uddāṇḍa.

*ekadvyaḥṣarakaṣṭipīṣṭighaṭanāsañjātagarvodhatāḥ
kanthāmātrakuvindakāḥ kavayituṃ sajjanti lajjāmucaḥ/
svargānargalanirgalatsurasaripāthaḥprapātaprathā-
pratyaḥkhyānapaṭīyasāpi vacasā jihreti jihvā mama//
(Ibid.: 64)*

Shameless guys who are haughty due to the mere composition
of one or two letters, and who are weavers of tattered clothes,
are preparing to write poetry;
My tongue is ashamed of even the speech which is adept
in repudiating the fame of the waterfall of the divine river
falling unobstructed down from the heavens.

But it would be wrong to say that he was prejudiced against vernacular poets as a whole, since he readily admired Punam Nampūtiri, a great poet who wrote in *maṇipravālam*. Uddāṇḍa once said:

*adhikeralam agryagiraḥ kavayaḥ kavayantu vyaṃ tu na tān vinumaḥ /
pulaḥkodgamakārivacaḥprasaram punam eva punaḥ punar āstumahe //*
(Ibid.)

Let eloquent poets compose verses in Kerala;
we are not going to salute them.
Again and again, it is Punam, whose eloquence
makes ones hair stand on its end, whom we salute.

The story goes that when once Punam composed a verse extolling Mānavikrama, expressing his anguish with the word ‘alas’ (*hanta*) over the disappearance from the earth of the sandal mark in the form of the king at the time of the great deluge, Uddaṇḍa was overwhelmed with admiration and gave his silken garment to the poet exclaiming “this silk garment for that ‘alas’” (*anta hantaikk inta paṭṭu*) (Ibid.). If the above incident was true, it would also signify that even if he belonged to a Telugu clan, the poet usually spoke Tamil, the language of his childhood environment, in ordinary conversation in Kerala, which is quite natural for Tamil Brahmins settled in this land.

Not less interesting is the story prevalent in Kerala about Uddaṇḍa being invited to a rice gruel feast by the famous Payyūr Bhaṭṭas. Rice gruel is the simple food of Kerala consisting of rice cooked with water. Though Uddaṇḍa initially was reluctant to attend, he finally conceded in deference to the wishes of the scholarly hosts. It is said that he immensely relished the feast and composed the following verse, rich in culinary details and Ayurvedic insights, in his admiration.

*śuṅṭhīkuṅṭhīkṛtāmbhogatagarimabharām paītharīm jātharāgnes
tāpam nirvāpayantīm śramaśamanakarīm māyujāyūbhavantīm/
maudgaiḥ śalkaiḥ parītām parimalabahulām maṇḍitām kerakhaṇḍaiḥ
nīṅṅām śrāṅṅām surāṅṅām punar akṛta sudhām yaḥ sa vedhāḥ sumedhāḥ //*¹⁹

¹⁹ The Sanskrit text as given by Kunjunni Raja (Kunjunni Raja 1980: 78).

That creator is really wise in having made the nectar of the gods available for human beings in the form of rice gruel cooked in an earthen pot, which has toned down the heaviness in the water with its dried ginger, which removes the heat of the digestive fire, which removes fatigue, which is the real physician for bilious preponderance, which is surrounded by particles of green gram, which is intensely fragrant, and which is decorated with coconut pieces.

More erotic in imagery is the following verse, also extolling the charm of the rice gruel, sung by him on the same occasion:

*aṅgajatāpaniyantrī suruciralāvanyasampadā sukhadā/
adharīkr̥topadamśā śrāṇā śoṇādharīva ramaṇīyā//*
(Ibid.)

The rice gruel, which controls the fatigue of the body, which gives pleasure with the wealth of its salt, which supersedes any side dish, is as enchanting as a beautiful girl of red lips, who removes the pain of Cupid, who soothes with the wealth of her beauty, and who bites her lower lip.

It is really significant that Uddaṇḍa could relish a typical simple Kerala dish and be carried away by its charm, which shows his amazing readiness to absorb local culture.

Uddaṇḍa seems to have been close to the family of Kūṭallūr Nampūtiri also, a traditional *gurukula* of Sanskrit grammar, living on the banks of the Nilā. Himself a scholar of the top order, being impressed by the learning of the Kūṭallūr Nampūtiris, he is reported to have recited a verse in appreciation of the pleasant and content life of the Keralan Brahmins:

*svasmin veśmani pūrṇaveśmavibhave pūjyān samārādhayan
preyasyā guṇapūrnayā guṇavatā putreṇa mitreṇa ca/
sārdham prāvṛṣi keralesu nivasan prīṭyā samākarnayan
līlām rāghavakṛṣṇayoḥ kṣapayate kālam sa dhanyo janaḥ//*
(Ibid.)

Such people who spend their time worshipping good people in their houses full of all resources, living in the company of a worthy son and wife and friend in Kerala, in the rainy season listening to the story of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa with great enthusiasm, are indeed fortunate.

However, he seems to have turned down their request to be with them teaching students in their academy with the following remark:

*vācā vākyapadapramāṇapadavīsañcārasampūtayā
sannahyatpratimallagallamakuṭīkuṭṭākadhāṭṭījuṣā/
sāṭopam viharan kathaṃ nu ramate sāhityamudrārāse
prauḍhastrīrasikāya bālavanitāsaṅgaḥ katham rocate//*
(Ibid.)

How will one, entertaining himself with his speech purified by the travel in the path of *mīmāṃsā*, grammar and logic, which has the majesty caused by smashing the head of the daring opponents, derive pleasure in the aesthetic experience characteristic of literature? How can the union with a small girl be interesting for a person deriving pleasure from the contact with accomplished women?

Uddaṇḍa was charmed by everything he saw around including the magnificent cities, antique temples, rivers and above all the royalties, damsels and the learned communities with whom he had opportunity to mingle. At the same time, he was critical of mediocrity of all types, with which he could not compromise, whether it was related to scholarship or literary creativity. His haughtiness might have caused ill feeling against him at times. His ultimate defeat and humiliation might have caused great relief to his detractors. However, there is no question about his true greatness as a poet and a scholar. His revelry in erotic imagery, scholarship, ready wit, thorough knowledge of local customs, familiarity with the terrain, willingness to acknowledge the worth of real scholarship and uncompromising attitude to mediocrity are all facets of his colourful personality which make his accounts lively.

No wonder the exploits of this traveller from the neighbouring land are still cherished fondly by the people of Kerala.

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