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***Pallivēṭṭa*, or the 'Royal Hunt', in Prescriptive Literature  
and in Present-day Practice in Kerala**

**SUMMARY:** The ritual manuals produced in Kerala are unique in their nature since most of them do not make a precise difference between the systems of *Saiva* and *Vaiṣṇava* but rather adopt a synthesized approach. The authors of these ritual manuals were ready to introduce or omit rituals that were described in the early texts, according to need. The manuals that were written in the early period included initiation rituals and gave importance to the theological aspect; the later ones completely omitted these elements, being written as guides for temple rituals. They are not, however, uniform in their ritual prescriptions. While these manuals were intended as guides for the performance of rituals, in practice some of the rituals prescribed in the manuals are left out, altered or localized. In this article, '*pallivēṭṭa*', a ritual that is presently performed during the annual festival in Kerala temples, is examined to show how this ritual is described in the manuals and how it is practised today.

**KEYWORDS:** Kerala, *pallivēṭṭa*, royal hunt, *parivēṭṭai*, *pariveṣa*, *pariveṣaṇa*

## **Introduction**

Festivals (*utsava*) are an important feature of Indian temple culture.<sup>1</sup> It is said the virtue of a temple depends on five different aspects: the religious austerity of the *ācārya* (*tapas*), recitation of the Vedas (*japa*), following the rules as instructed in the scriptures (*niyama*), festivals

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<sup>1</sup> See also Davis 2010: 24–40; Ganesan 2005, Barazer-Billoret 1999.

(*utsava*), and the giving of food (*annadāna*).<sup>2</sup> The *Vijayottarāgama* (Ganesan 2005: 4) lists the effects on those who perform the festival while defining the term *utsava*, underlining the importance of the *utsavas* of a particular temple: “the *utsava* is that which extricates the creatures who have fallen into the stain of ignorance from their bondage, and thereby it brings about the manifestation of their power of knowledge”. *Ajitāgama* (25: 1) adds that the *utsava* prevents all misfortune and brings prosperity to the worlds.

In the ritual manuals that are produced in different regions of India, we find descriptions of various types of festival, including daily (*nityotsava*), weekly (*vārotsava*), monthly (*māsotsava*), annual great festivals (*mahotsava*) etc. Kerala, a state in the south-west region of India, is well known for its temple festivals. The ritual manuals produced in Kerala also describe such festivals, and it is common knowledge that the temples in Kerala, perform a ‘great annual festival’ (*mahotsava*) that usually goes on for ten days. During this festival, several rituals are performed and among these, on the ninth day, a ritual called *Paḷḷivēṭṭa* (in local vernacular Malayalam) or ‘royal hunt’, known in some texts of other regions as *mṛgayā*, is performed with pomp and ceremony. This paper will analyse the way in which this ritual is described in the manuals of Kerala and how it is currently practised.

### Ritual Manuals of Kerala

The ritual manuals originating in other parts of India tend to be devoted exclusively to a particular system of worship, such as *Śaiva*, *Vaiṣṇava*, *Śākta* etc. But several of the ones coming from Kerala, commonly called “Kerala-Tantra”, do not differentiate between the *Śaiva* and *Vaiṣṇava* cults. The synthesis of *Śaiva* and *Vaiṣṇava* ritual systems appears to be a unique feature of the theistic ritual literature of

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<sup>2</sup> *ācāryatapasāmnāya japena niyamena ca /  
utsavādannadānena kṣetravyḍdhis tu pañcadhā //*  
cf. Sambasivan 2014: 117.

Kerala<sup>3</sup>. *Īśānagurudevapaddhati*, *Kalaśacandrikā*, the *Putayurbhāṣā*—a ritual manual that is written in the local vernacular Malayalam, the *Tantrasamuccaya* etc. are typical of this type. However, some of the *paddhati*'s produced in Kerala prior to the above mentioned manuals were essentially *Śaiva* or *Vaiṣṇava*. The *Śaivāgamanibandhana* of Murāridatta, *Prayogamañjarī* of Ravi and *Viṣṇusamhitā* of Sumati are three examples of this type.

### Description of the 'Royal Hunt' in Kerala ritual manuals

The ritual manuals of Kerala contain detailed outlines of the annual temple festival and include the hoisting of the flag, propitiatory oblation of rice inside the temple (*śrībhūtabali*), propitiatory oblation of rice outside the temple (*grāmabali*), the royal hunt (*paḷlivēṭṭa*, or *mṛgayā*) and the ceremonial bath (*tīrtha-snapana*), as well as certain other minor rituals that are performed during the annual festival. They give a great deal of importance to the *bali*, or propitiatory oblation, that is offered inside the temple during the festival days and to a *bali* known as *mahābali* (*Śaivāgamanibandhana*, T. 379, p. 313; *Prayogamañjarī*, 18: 95) or *grāmabali* (*Putayurbhāṣā*, p. 205; *Tantrasamuccaya*, 9: 197) performed the day before the ceremonial bath; this *grāmabali* is offered in the nearby village of the temple, in a garden, in a forest or at a crossroads.

The ritual manuals usually give the 'royal hunt' immediately after the description of the *grāmabali*. In temples where the duration of the annual festival is ten days, the 'royal hunt' takes place on the ninth day, while in those where the annual festival is observed for only seven days, the hunting procession is held on the sixth day.

### The 'royal hunt' in the early ritual manuals of Kerala

Both the unpublished *Śivāgamanibandhana*<sup>4</sup> of Murāridatta and

<sup>3</sup> See also Sarma 2012: 104–107.

<sup>4</sup> Manuscripts of this text are available in the Calicut University Manuscript Library (Malayalam Department) Ms. No. 2433; Trivandrum

the *Prayogamañjarī*<sup>5</sup> of Ravi, two early Śaiva ritual manuals of Kerala, provide a detailed prescription for the *bali* offered on the days of *utsava*. However, these texts only cursorily mention the *grāmbali* with no mention of the ‘royal hunt’:

*evam kṛtvā yathānyāyam kuryād rātrau mahābalim /*  
*ārāmeṣu vanānteṣu grāmatīrtheṣu sarvataḥ //*  
 (Śaivāgamanibandhana, T. 379, p. 313)

Having done thus according to the prescription, during the night, one should perform the great offering (*mahābali*) in gardens, forest regions, and in holy waters (*grāmatīrtha*) in the village all around.

*pūrvokteṣu baliṃ vidhāya nikhilasthāneṣu pūrvakramāc*  
*charvayāṃ nikhilair janaiḥ parivṛto vādyaiḥ samastair api /*  
*yātrāpūrvadine mahābalim ataḥ kuryāt prabhūtodanair*  
*nānābhakṣyavimīśritaiś ca parito grāmasya bāhye punaḥ //*  
 (*Prayogamañjarī* 18: 95)

Having performed the *bali* (offering) during the night in all the above-mentioned places, in the same order as above, surrounded by all the people and by musical instruments of all kinds, then, the day before the *yātrā* (the religious procession), one should offer the great offering [*mahābali*] with an abundance of cooked rice, along with different kinds of dishes, around the village and then (*punaḥ*) outside it.

The *Pradyota*, a commentary on the *Prayogamañjarī* by Trivikrama, omits the ‘royal hunt’.<sup>6</sup>

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Manuscripts Library, Ms. No. 18818–22 (5 mss.); French Institute, T. 379, and also in the two private collections of Puliyanūr Mana (Ms. No. 108) and Taraṇanallūr Mana (Ms. No. 177A); See also Sarma 2009: 326–327.

There are twenty-seven chapters (*paṭala*) in this text, and in its twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth chapter, the text describes the *utsava*. At the beginning of the twenty-fourth chapter, the text mentions the importance of the festival:

*sthāpīto 'pi vidhānena prāsāde paramēśvaraḥ*  
*utsavaṃ tīrthyātrāṅ ca snānaṃ prāpya prasīdati /*  
*devasannidhaye cātra maṅgalāyāghaśāntaye*  
*utsavaṃ kārayec chaktyā saṃvatsarakṛtaṃ param //* (T. 379, p. 313).

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed description of this text, see Sarma 2009: 321–326.

<sup>6</sup> Ms ORI, Trivandrum, T. 413, p. 263.

Similarly, *Viṣṇusamhitā*, a *Vaiṣṇava-paddhati* produced in Kerala, mentions only the *mahābali* with no reference to the 'royal hunt':

*tīrthasnanadināt pūrvadine kṛtvā mahotsavam //*  
*vighneśaṃ devatās cānyās tatra yatnena pūjayet /*  
*tatra sāyaṃ paribhramya datvā caiva mahābalim //*  
*praviśya devam ācāryaḥ prārthayet susamāhitaḥ /*  
*(Viṣṇusamhitā 20: 98cd–100ab)*

On the day before the day of the sacred bath, having celebrated a great festivity, one should perform the worship of Ganeśa and other deities in a grand manner. Then, in the evening, one should go around (taking the deities), and give the great offering (*mahābalim*). Then entering [the temple], the *ācārya* should pray to the god, concentrating his mind.

The *Īśānagurudevapaddhati*, which contains rituals related to Śiva as well as to Viṣṇu, provides a lengthy description of the *bali* to be offered on the days of *utsava*, but does not mention *mahābali* (or *grāmabali*) or 'royal hunt', but rather goes on to explicate the rituals that are to be performed on the night before the ceremonial bath.<sup>7</sup>

The *Puṭayūrbhāṣā*<sup>8</sup>, a ritual text in the local vernacular Malayalam, contains, in its ninth chapter, a brief account of the festival, in which there is a mention of *grāmabali*<sup>9</sup> and of a procession of the deity through the village, but no reference to the 'royal hunt'.<sup>10</sup>

Thus we find that the early ritual texts of Kerala describe a *grāmabali* in their chapters on festivals but do not include the 'royal hunt'. A procession is however mentioned before the *mahābali* (*grāmabali*) in the *Śaivāgamanibandhana* (T. 379: 313), the *Prayoga-mañjarī* (18: 95) and the *Viṣṇusamhitā* (20: 99c). At present in Kerala, apart from a few temples, such as the Guruvāyūr Temple in the Trichur district (a description of the royal hunt that takes place in this temple

<sup>7</sup> cf. *Īśānagurudevapaddhati*, 4: 477.

<sup>8</sup> For more details of this text, see Sarma 2009: 333–334.

<sup>9</sup> In the edition of this text the editor introduces a heading "*grāmabali (paḷḷivēṭṭa)*". But the text only describes the *grāmabali* and not the 'royal hunt'.

<sup>10</sup> *Puṭayūrbhāṣā*, 9: 98–100.

is described in the following pages), the *grāmabali* is not observed during the annual festival.

### Kerala ritual texts that introduce the ‘royal hunt’

In Kerala the introduction of the ‘royal hunt’ seems to date from the period of *Tantrasamuccaya*<sup>11</sup> by Nārāyaṇa (born 1428 A.D.)<sup>12</sup>. The ninth chapter of this text contains a description of the ‘royal hunt’ as a part of the rituals related to the annual festival. Most of the temples in Kerala are, even now, following the *Tantrasamuccaya* system for their ritual practices.

The *Tantrasamuccaya* first describes the *bali* to be offered during the days of the festival, followed by a description of the *grāmabali* (*bali* that is offered outside the temple) and the ‘royal hunt’ as follows:

*tīrthasānādinādharedyurabhisāyaṃ so ’yam ācāryako  
grāme caityacatuṣpathādiṣu baliṃ kurvan parītyākhile /  
grāmānte mṛgayāpracāravihṛtim kṛtvā suyodhaiḥ samam  
pratyāpatya tataḥ svakautukagataṃ mūle samāyojayet //*  
(*Tantrasamuccaya* 9: 197)

On the day before the sacred bath, around late evening, the *ācārya*, performing the offering in the outskirts of the village, in the places of worship (*caitya*), crossroads and other places, should move around (the village) [and] at the borders of the village the hunting procession should take place with well experienced fighters. Returning thereafter, the [*caitanya*] transferred [from the *utsavabimba*] onto his [viz. the deity’s] *kautuka* thread should be joined with the principal (*mūle*) image.

However, the text does not refer to the *mṛgayātrā* or ‘hunting procession’, as South Indian temple *āgamas* usually do, but instead mentions ‘*mṛgayāpracāravihṛtim*’, hunting as a pleasurable activity.

In the *Vimarśinī*, a commentary on the *Tantrasamuccaya*, the commentator, Śaṅkara, describes the ‘hunting act’ as a game and explicitly

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed description of this text, see Sarma 2009: 332–333.

<sup>12</sup> cf. Unni 1990: 34.

sets out the manner in which the act of hunting must be performed in the following comments on the above verse (9: 197):

*tataḥ*, [Then], *tīrthasnanādinādharedyuh* = *tīrthasnanādināt pūrvedyuh*, [on the previous day of the Sacred Bath], *abhisāyaṃ* = *sāyantānalikāle*, [at the time of the [*bali*] offering of the evening], *so 'yam ācāryakāḥ svayam evākhile grāme*, [the *ācārya* himself in the whole village], [*caityacatuṣpathādiṣu*] *caityam* = *prasiddhāśvatthādivyṛkṣasthānaṃ*, [the popular places where the holy trees like fig trees are planted], *catuspatham* = *caturṇām pathām saṅgamaḥ* [the junctions [where] four roads meet], *ādiśabdena viśeṣasthānāntarāny ucyante* [by the word *ādi* (etc.) the other special places are referred to]; *tatra tatra baliṃ kurvan*, [in all those places making the offering (*bali*)], *parītya* = *parito gatvā* [having gone around], *grāmānte* = *grāmasamīpasthāne* [in the places near the village], *suyodhaiḥ* = *suprasiddhairyoddhṛbhiḥ*, *samaṃ* = *saha*, [with the well known fighters (hunters)], *mṛgayāpracāravihṛtim* = *tikṣṇamṛgahananādikrīḍāṃ*, *kṛtvā*, [having done the pleasurable hunting of the cruel animals], *pratyāpatya* = *punaḥ svasthānam āgamyā* [on returning back to the original place], *tataḥ*, [thereafter], *svakautukagataṃ* = *devaṃ*, *mūle* = *mūlabimbe*, *samāyojayet* | [should unite the deity in to the principal image]. (*Vimarśinī* ad *Tantrasamuccaya*, 9: 197)

Another commentary on *Tantrasamuccaya*, the *Vivaraṇa*, comments:

[*tīrthasnanādinādharedyur iti*] *grāmabalimṛgayābhidhānam*  
[This refers to the (day of) offering of *bali* around the village and the hunting].  
*kṣiprabalyanantaram* [after the immediate offering?], *gopurād bahir niṣkramya* [going outside the gateway [of the temple]], *mantrau śārṅgiṇītyādimanubhiś caityacatuṣpathādiṣu baliṃ dadyāt*  
[offering should be given in the place of holy fig trees, four road crossings, etc. with the mantras “*mantrau śārṅgiṇī*” etc.]  
*sarovanagrāmāntasīmādīnām ādiśabdena grahaṇam*.  
[The lake, gardens, outskirts of village, etc. are to be taken by the word *ādi*.]  
*mṛgayāpracāravihṛtis tv evaṃ divaiva vā syāt*.  
[The diversion of going hunting could be in the daytime itself also]  
*pratyāpatyeti*. *baliṃ vidhāyeti parītyety uktaṛītyā prāsādam prāpyety arthaḥ*. [Returning back means, after reaching the temple, as it has been said “after offering *bali*” and “surrounding”]  
(*Vivaraṇa* ad *Tantrasamuccaya* 9: 197)

The commentator here mentions the ‘*mṛgayāpracāravihṛtim*’ only as a ritual which may also be performed during the day, without any elaborate description of the ritual itself:

*mṛgayāpracāravihṛtis tv evaṃ divaiva vā syāt*

The diversion of going hunting may also be in daytime

Apart from the *Tantrasamuccaya*, there are two ritual guides written in local vernacular Malayalam which are in use today: the *Kuḷikkāṭṭupacca*, a prose version of the *Tantrasamuccaya*, widely used by the priests of Kerala temples and the *Kriyāpaddhati*, a recently published guide to assist the priests.

The *Kuḷikkāṭṭupacca* (1986: 271), describes the *grāmabali* as a ritual to be performed on the day before the *ārāṭṭu* (ceremonial bath), which takes place after the ‘royal hunt’ (*paḷlivēṭṭa*): on the eve of the *ārāṭṭu*, once the *śrībhūtabali* (the *bali* that is offered on the days of festival inside the temple complex) has been performed, the deity should be brought out of the temple (for *grāmabali* and *paḷlivēṭṭa*). When the Lord comes out through the temple gate (*gopura*) for the *paḷlivēṭṭa* (royal hunt), *bali* must be offered on both sides of the entrance while the *mūla* is recited, as well as at the roots of auspicious trees, such as *aśva*. Further, *bali* should be offered at the border of the village (*grāmasīma*) followed by a ‘hunting call’ (*nāyāṭṭuviḷi*) by armed soldiers accompanying the deity. Once the *grāmabali*, and the ‘royal hunt’ have been performed, the deity should be brought back to the temple in a procession with lights and the playing of musical instruments.

The *Kriyāpaddhati* (2010: 104) also describes the ritual in the same way, but specifies that the offering of *bali* should be made in the location where the ‘royal hunt’ takes place and also proposes that the chief-priest (*tantri*) announce ‘*eyyām*’ meaning ‘let the arrow be loosed’.

There is another ritual manual, the *Anuṣṭhānapaddhati* (1983: 164), a late *paddhati* text in prose, which also refers to the ‘*mṛgayā*’ or hunting:



*sarvāsu baliṃ datvā grāmānte bhaṭaiḥ saha mṛgayāṃ kṛtvā  
prākārāntarbhāgaṃ praviśya kṣetrapālāya baliṃ datvā tatra samāpayet*<sup>13</sup>

Bestowing offerings in all the directions and having accomplished the hunting with the soldiers at the borders of the village, [and the deity along with the *ācārya*] entering the inner portion of the temple courts, the ritual is to be ended with the offering of the *bali* to the guardian deity (*kṣetrapāla*) of the temple.

Here too we see that the text prescribes that the 'royal hunt' be performed along with the soldiers after the *bali* offering.

### Performance of the 'royal hunt' ritual in present-day practice

In the temples of Kerala where the 'royal hunt' ritual takes place, the present-day practice is generally as follows: a mock forest is prepared in a location not far from the temple in which a tender coconut, a symbolic representation of an animal, is placed. The deity mounted on either an elephant or a vehicle (*vāhana*) moves in silent procession towards the mock forest. A man<sup>14</sup> representing the deity performs the 'royal hunt' ritual by shooting an arrow which pierces the tender coconut. The procession immediately breaks out in music, with the playing of drums and musical instruments and begins to go back to the temple with the deity.

Below are more detailed descriptions of the 'royal hunt' rituals that take place in two well-known temples of Kerala.

<sup>13</sup> In the appendix of the edition of the *Anuṣṭhānapaddhati*, the editor, Vasudevasomayajī, includes a chapter that describes the festival attributed to *Kāmikāgama* (The colophon of the appendix reads: *iti kāmikāgame śivapārvaṭīsamvāde utsavapaṭalaḥ*) and also provides in its notes a detailed description of the hunting procession under the headings, *śaivamṛgayātrā* and *vaiṣṇavamṛgayātrā*.

<sup>14</sup> While it is the King who shoots the arrow in the Śrī Padmanābhasvāmī temple in Trivandrum, in other temples there are families who have the right to shoot the arrow.

### ***Pallivēṭṭa* in the Trivandrum Śrī Padmanābhasvāmī Temple<sup>15</sup>**

The Trivandrum Śrī Padmanābhasvāmī temple is one of the important shrines of Viṣṇu in South India. It was recently in the news due to the discovery of the invaluable collection of treasures stored in the temple's secret chambers. There are two bi-annual festivals followed in this temple during the (Malayalam) months of *Tulām* (mid-October to mid-November) and *Alpaśi* (mid-March to mid-April) and which last for ten days. The festivals are celebrated with rituals such as *Anujñā* (obtaining permission to organise the festival), the hoisting of the flag, daily processions held inside the temple complex, the *Kāṇikka* or the special offering performed on the eighth day etc. The ninth and tenth days of the festivals are the most important ones and consist of the *pallivēṭṭa* (royal hunt) and the *ārāṭṭu* (ceremonial bath).

On the day of the *pallivēṭṭa*, a mock forest is set up in the middle of the public road nearly a kilometre from the temple and a tender coconut is placed therein. The route that the deities are supposed to take is washed and cleaned and spread with white sand. The deities<sup>16</sup> move out for the hunt when the conch is sounded at around 08.30 p.m. after the routine night procession inside the temple complex is concluded. The deities go out from the west gate of the temple and return through the north gate. On the way they halt for the hunting ceremony.

The king (the senior member of the Travancore royal family, the custodians of the temple) who is ceremoniously attired, carries the sword in his hand, while all the other members of his family are armed. Men representing the armed forces of the infantry, cavalry,

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<sup>15</sup> The seventh chapter, *Mygayāvarṇana*, in Svāti Tirunāl's *Syāna-dūrapuravarṇanaprabandham* describes the 'royal hunt' performed in the Padmanābhasvāmī temple in detail. See V.S. Sharma 1985: 947–953, Bayi 1995: 312–314. The description of the 'royal hunt' given in this paper is based on the way it is followed presently, which I have watched on several occasions; here the descriptions are taken from elsewhere (Sarma: forthcoming).

<sup>16</sup> Padmanābha, Narasiṃha and Kṛṣṇa are the three deities who participate in this hunting procession.

artillery, spear-men etc., flag bearers and men dressed as soldiers with swords and shields add to the grandeur and colour of the procession. Mounted police and police on foot are also present.

The temple elephant goes first, the occasional clanking of its chains being the only sound since, until the hunting begins, total silence is maintained. Then follow the temple staff carrying the temple flags of varying shapes. While all those accompanying the procession walk on either side of the processional path, the king walks in the middle. Temple musicians follow soundlessly. The three vehicles carrying Lord Padmanābha in the centre and Lord Naraśiṃha and Lord Kṛṣṇa, on the right and left respectively, follow the King. The procession reaches the hunting area and after performing a short ritual in the mock forest, the *Tantri*, or chief priest, gives a bow and arrow to the king. The king who is the executant of the Lord, prays to Him and shoots an arrow into the coconut. Until this point the procession has moved in total silence since it is supposed to be on a hunt. The moment the arrow pierces the coconut, the conch is sounded and the sound of musical instruments erupts into the atmosphere in an explosion of joy. The procession then wends its way back to the temple, entering through the north gate.

### ***Paḷlivēṭṭa* in the Guruvāyūr Temple<sup>17</sup>**

As in other temples of Kerala, the renowned Guruvāyūr temple, one of the principal Kṛṣṇa temples in India located in the Thrissur district of Kerala, also performs the '*paḷlivēṭṭa*' or the 'royal hunt' ritual on the ninth day of the annual festival, but with certain distinct features. Once the *bali* offering inside the temple is over, the deity mounted on an elephant is taken through the nearby streets in a grand procession consisting of eight men dressed as soldiers carrying swords and shields, musicians and attendants carrying the imperial regalia

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<sup>17</sup> For a detailed description of the 'royal hunt' ritual in the Guruvāyūr temple, see Seth 2009: 265–280.

of flags and *sūrya-māra* or sun cover.<sup>18</sup> The *grāmabali* takes place during this procession, on the completion of which the deity returns to the temple to come out mounted on a cow-elephant, in readiness for the ‘royal hunt’, performed in silence. Many people dressed in costumes<sup>19</sup> representing animals are gathered outside the temple. One of them is dressed as a wild boar—the ‘official’ wild animal of the royal hunts. When the person playing the role of *paḍa-nāyakan* (commander-in-chief) of the Lord is ready to accompany, the Lord asks, “Have the animals come?”, the crowd assembled there, the drummers as well as the men dressed as animals and the elephant carrying the Lord, all run into the temple and circumambulate the shrine nine times. During the last round, an effigy of a wild boar is pierced by an arrow, slung on a bamboo pole as if it has been killed by the Lord, and carried once around the temple. This marks the end of the ‘royal hunt’ ritual in the Guruvāyūr temple.

### ***Pallivēṭṭa* and *Parivēṭṭai***

There is a ritual in Tamil Nadu known as *parivēṭṭai* which has some similarity to the *pallivēṭṭa* ritual of Kerala. This ritual is performed in several temples of Tamil Nadu but at present it does not commonly include any performance with ‘hunting’ as the theme. The *parivēṭṭai* usually consists of a procession, often on a horse-vehicle<sup>20</sup> (*vāhana*).

<sup>18</sup> A heart-shaped ornament carried during festival processions in Kerala.

<sup>19</sup> “Traditionally, devotees participate in the *pallivēṭṭa* for one of two reasons: either because they believe it will ward off illness in the coming year, or because their mothers vowed that they would do so if they recovered from an illness; small children are carried by either their fathers or uncles.” Seth 2009: 278–279.

<sup>20</sup> In the *Sāmrājyalakṣmīpīṭhikā* (*The emperor’s manual*), there is a chapter that describes the royal hunting (*mṛgayālakṣṇasvarūpakathanam*). While describing the dress code for the King during hunting the text states that the King should be dressed as a horse-soldier (*sādiveṣadhara*); See also ‘*hayārūḍhair atipraudhair mṛgayāyāṃ mṛgeksane*’ (*Sāmrājyalakṣmīpīṭhikā*, 130: 8ab).

Since 'pari' means horse in Tamil<sup>21</sup> and *vēṭṭai* means hunting, the word *parivēṭṭai* seems to indicate a procession on a horse for hunting.<sup>22</sup>

However, those South Indian *āgama* texts that can be dated from the 12<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> century<sup>23</sup> describe a ritual named 'pariveṣa' or 'pariveṣana', which, according to several scholars<sup>24</sup>, is presently known as *parivēṭṭai*<sup>25</sup> in the local Tamil vernacular.

In the *Mahotsavavidhi*, attributed to Aghoraśiva,<sup>26</sup> a ritual manual setting out an ideal method for temple priests conducting a nine-day *mahotsava*, the *pariveṣana* (perambulation) is described thus:

In the garden or some other pleasant place, at each corner, the god should be entertained at every step with offerings of fruit and other edibles and with betelnut and other condiments, along with Vedic praises and hymns, with the music of lute and flute, with singers and dancers and *Rudraganikas*. Then the deity is brought back to the temple.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>21</sup> cf. Tamil Lexicon: 2508.

<sup>22</sup> cf. Tamil Lexicon: 3822.

<sup>23</sup> For a discussion on some of the South Indian *āgama* texts, see Goodall 2004: xiii–xxxiv.

<sup>24</sup> According to Sri Sambadha Sivacarya and Dr. Ganesan of IFP, the *pariveṣa* ritual is presently known as *parivēṭṭai*.

<sup>25</sup> In Vaiṣṇava shrines the *parivēṭṭai* is also known as *Vēḍu-pari*, see L'Hernault and Reiniche 1999: 3.73; there is also a ritual known as '*pāḍiyavēṭṭai*', which is similar to *Parivēṭṭai*. Though I have not found any reference to this in the texts, there is an inscription that mentions the *pāḍiyavēṭṭai* (ARE 1919: 482); This inscription "records the gift, by purchase, of the village Kūḍalūr agrahāram by Surappa-nāyaka, son of Pōttu-nāyaka of Kāśyapa-gotra, for the *pāḍiyavēṭṭai* and the *tōpputtirunāl* festivals." (ARE, GO No. 1003: 26). According to L'Hernault and Reiniche (L'Hernault and Reiniche 1999: 3.73–74), during this *pāḍiyavēṭṭai*, a scene is enacted which depicts the theft of jewels by Tirumaṅgai Āḷvār. Viraraghavacharya (Viraraghavacharya 1954: 563) observes that the "Padiya Vettai (Hunting) festival first commenced in 1456" in the Tirupati Temple.

<sup>26</sup> See on the discussion of the authorship of this text, Davis 2010: 9–13; See also Davis 1992: 367–378.

<sup>27</sup> "tadyathā – udyānādiṣvevaṃ kaṇekaṇe (!!!) vedastutiśrutivīṇāveṇugāya-kaṅṅtakarudraganikāśahitaṃ phalādyupahārais tāmbūlādibhiś ca pade pade devaṃ

Davis (Davis 2010: 110) observes thus:

the term *pariveṣaṇa* indicates service or attendance, and may be used to denote ceremonies of attendance in royal courts. But the *pariveṣaṇa* ceremony here, as Aghoraśiva describes it, involves the deity perambulating through parks and woods.

In the *Sūkṣmāgama*<sup>28</sup> (13: 254–266ab), after the *nagarabali*,<sup>29</sup> the deity arrives back at the temple and is taken to a *maṇḍapa* inside the temple; while the deity is in this *maṇḍapa* the *pariveṣa* ritual is performed. In this ritual, the decorated image of Śiva will be placed in a pavilion on a *siṃhāsana*. First fruits and flowers are offered followed by *nīrājana* and the ritual continues with several entertainments, including storytelling, enacting a battle, magic tricks, playing of music etc:

*nānādeśakathāvākyaiḥ dharmayuddhādidarśanaiḥ*<sup>30</sup> /  
*vinodavākyair anyaiś ca mahājālādidarśanaiḥ* //  
*vīṇāveṇuṃṛdaṅgādivādyair anyaiś ca śobhitam* /

Along with entertainments, with the storytelling of different countries, show of righteous fighting, other diverting talks, and magic shows and so on, and other musical performances with lute, flute, drum etc.,

As in the *Sūkṣmāgama*, the *āgamas* such as *Rauravāgama* (18: 110) and *Dīptāgama* (87: 1–6) place the *pariveṣaṇa* rite in the temple's assembly hall, as part of an entertainment for the divine Lord. The description of this ritual in the *āgama* texts clearly shows that

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*santoṣya ālayaṃ praveśayet.*" Davis 2010: 160.

<sup>28</sup> See also *Raurava*, *Kriyāpāda*:

*śanaiḥ pradakṣiṇaṃ kṛtvā praviśyāsthānamaṇḍapam* //  
*pariveśakrameṇaiva pariveṣaṃ samācaret* /  
*evaṃ pratidinaṃ kuryād aharniśi viśeṣataḥ* //  
(*Raurava*, KP, 18:105cd–106).

<sup>29</sup> In the Kerala texts *nagarabali* is referred to as *grāmabali*.

<sup>30</sup> Among the entertainments indicated, there is an enacting of warfare (*dharmayuddhādidarśanaiḥ*), which closely echoes the 'royal hunt' followed in Kerala.

the *pariveṣaṇa* (perambulation) is intended to give pleasure to the deity through delightful offerings and enjoyable performances.

It is worth noting here that in the well-known Tiruvaṇṇāmalai temple<sup>31</sup> during the annual festival (*mahotsava*),<sup>32</sup> on the 8<sup>th</sup> day of the festival, Lord Subrahmaṇya (usually it is Śiva who goes in procession) goes on a horse in procession to a nearby village and while he is there, an act of hunting, without any particular object to represent the quarry being included as is done in Kerala, takes place after which the temple elephant circumambulates around the Lord several times. In this temple the ritual is known as the '*pariveṣa*' (locally known as *parivēṭṭai*).

Even though the textual sources that describe the *pariveṣa* ritual do not mention a 'hunting' act, they do describe mock warfare in front of the deity (*dharmayuddhādidarśanaiḥ*, *Sūkṣmāgama*, 13: 259d), that rather resembles the hunting. The particular ritual performed in the Tiruvaṇṇāmalai temple includes the act of 'hunting' and the *paḷlivēṭṭa* performed in Kerala does carry an echo of this ritual.

### 'Royal hunt' and Mṛgayātrā

While we find that the Kerala texts prescribe the performance of a 'royal hunt' during the festival, it seems that they do not use the term '*mṛgayātrā*', or 'hunting procession', which is the most common

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<sup>31</sup> There is another well-known '*parivēṭṭai*' that is related to the renowned Sri Varadarajaperumal temple, Kanchipuram, where the Lord of this temple goes in an annual procession to the Lakṣmi-Narasimha Perumal temple in Pazhaya Seevaram village, located 20kms east of Kanchi Varadaraja Perumal temple on the Kanchipuram-Chengalpet State Highway. Once the Lord of Varadarajaperumal reaches the Pazhaya Seevaram village he is welcomed with a '*parivēṭṭai*' festival. But we find no hint of any hunting here, but simply a grand procession.

<sup>32</sup> The ritual described here was explained to me by Śrī Karthik Śivācārya, a priest of this temple. For a detailed discussion of the *parivēṭṭai* ritual in Tiruvaṇṇāmalai, see L'Hernault & Reiniche 1999: 3.73–74.

term in South Indian temple *āgamas*. For example in the *Ajitāgama*<sup>33</sup> (27: 271–272), *Uttarakāmika*<sup>34</sup> (6: 273–277) and in *Raurava*<sup>35</sup> (KP 18:111ff) we find the prescription for the *mṛgayātrā*.

<sup>33</sup> *tīrtharkṣādahni pūrve tu mṛgayātrā bhavet tataḥ /  
tatpūrve 'hni [ca] deveśaṃ ṅṅttarūpaṃ maheśvaram //  
kṛṣṇagandhaṃ samālipyā kārayec ca mahotsavam /  
vyatyāsenāthavā caite kalpayet kalpavittamaḥ //Ajitāgama, 27: 271–272 //*

<sup>34</sup> *mṛgayātrām viśeṣeṇa snapanam karma kalpayet /  
svakālavihitaṃ caitad iṣṭadaṃ parikīrtitam //  
prātas sandhyārcanan nityaṃ yāgamaṅṅtapaveśanam /  
rathādhyārohanaṃ yānan tato madhyāhnapūjanam //  
rathe ced dhūpadānāntaṃ naivedyāntaṃ śivālaye /  
yātrārthasnapanam paścāt tato naimittikārcanam //  
vinodadarśanaṃ cānte Pradoṣe pūjanan tataḥ /  
punar homaniveśaś ca tato grāmapradakṣiṇam //  
yātrārthasnapanam pūjā ṅṅttageyādi darśanam /  
tato dhāma niveśaś ca devyā saha niveśanam //  
(Uttarakāmika 6: 273–277) //;*

See also *Uttarakāmika* 6: 278–327.

<sup>35</sup> *ṅṅttotsavasya kāle tu mṛgayāṃ vā samācaret //  
kāle vā mṛgayāyās tu tathā ṅṅttotsavaṃ bhavet /  
vyatyāsenāśayā caitau kalpayet kalpavittamaḥ //  
sukhāsanādibimbaṃ vā viśeṣāt tripurāntakam /  
pratisaram bandhayitvā pūrvoktavidhinaiva tu //  
tathāiva ca dviguṅakām arcāṃ kṛtvā viśeṣataḥ /  
sarvālaṃkārasaṃyuktaṃ daśāyudhasamanvitam //  
gajāśvādisamārūḍhaṃ ghorarūpaṃ mahāravaiḥ /  
yatheṣṭakāṣṭabhāgaṃ vā viśeṣākhyam abhāgakam //  
kārayec chīghrayānaṃ ca nānābhaktajanaś saha /  
mṛgādīnāṃ vadhārthāya ghorarūpaṃ bhayāvaham //  
tasmin vai mṛgayāne tu mṛgā vā yadi vā narāḥ /  
hatāś cet prāṇinaḥ sarve śivasāyujyam āpnuyuḥ //  
tataḥ śamanahomaṃ ca snapanādīni kārayet /  
pūrvavat sthāpayed dhīmān sa puṇyāṃ gatim āpnuyāt //  
(Raurava, KP, 18: 111–118);*

In this passage (*Raurava*, KP, 18: 117) the *Raurava* speaks of animals as well as humans (*narāḥ*) killed during this procession who are elevated to the status of śiva (*śiva sāyujya*);



In the *Mahotsavavidhi* too, we find a description of a procession<sup>36</sup> on the evening of the eighth day of the festival, but the text does not refer to it as *mṛgayātrā*. According to the description, on that evening during the *mahotsava*, 'Śiva is mounted on a horse vehicle and, at the time of procession, around him are the *Rudraganikas*, wearing

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In the description of a chariot procession by Oderic of Pordenone (1265–1331), in the 'Travels of Oderic of Pordenone into China and the East, in 1318, Section 6—Of a Strange Idol, and of certain Customs and Ceremonies', we find an echo of what *Raurava* mentions:

"In the kingdom of Moabar there is a wonderful idol in the shape of a man, all of pure and polished gold, as large as our image of St. Christopher; and there hangs about its neck a string of most rich and precious stones, some of which are singly more valuable than the riches of an entire kingdom. [...] At each annual festival of this idol, the king and queen of the country, with all the pilgrims, and the whole multitude of the people assemble at the temple; and placing the idol on a rich and splendid chariot, they carry it from the temple with songs and all kinds of musical instruments, having a great company of young women, who walk in procession, two and two, singing before the idol. Many of the pilgrims throw themselves under the chariot wheels, that they may be crushed to death in honour of their god, and the bodies of these devotees are afterwards burned, and their ashes collected as of holy martyrs. In this manner, above 500 persons annually devote themselves to death. Sometimes a man devotes himself to die in honour of this abominable idol. On which occasion, accompanied by his relations and friends, and by a great company of musicians, he makes a solemn feast; after which, he hangs five sharp knives around his neck, and goes in solemn procession before the idol; where he takes four of the knives successively, with each of which he cuts off a piece of his own flesh, which he throws to the idol, saying, that for the worship of his god he thus cuts himself. Then taking the last of the knives, he declares aloud that he is going to put himself to death in honour of the god; on uttering which, he executes his vile purpose. His body is then burned with great solemnity, and he is ever after esteemed as a holy person." (quoted from (<http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00generallinks/kerr/vol01chap12sect01to05.html>; accessed 7 August 2014).)

<sup>36</sup> "*rātrau gajārūḍhaṃ saptame rathaṃ rātrau kalpatarau aṣṭame prātaḥ āndolikā rātrau aśvāropanaṃ kṛtvā yānakāle aśvārūḍhā kuntādyāyudhayuktāḥ dhanuḥ khetakayuktāḥ sarvālāṅkārasahitarudraganikāḥ parito vrajeyuḥ.*" Davis 2010: 160.

all their ornaments, riding horses, and carrying weapons such as spears, bows, and shields.<sup>37</sup>

*Mahotsavavidhikrama Āgamaśekhara*<sup>38</sup> has, however, a description of the *mṛgayātrā*, the hunting procession. According to this text, the *Rudraganika* (here called *Rudradāsas*), wearing their ornaments and carrying weapons such as swords, shields, bows, arrows, and spears, surround Śiva, mounted on horses. They are accompanied by the auspicious sounds of the *bherī* drum, *paṭaha* drum, singing, and other instruments as they wander in a specifically westerly direction.<sup>39</sup>

As Davis (Davis 2010: 110–111) observes:

Other Āgama texts give different accounts of the *Mṛgayātrā*. For example, *Kāraṇāgama* recommends that Śiva present himself for this ceremony in the form of *Kirāta*, a mountain huntsman, or Tripurāntaka, conqueror of the three cities. Soldiers accompany him on the procession carrying a variety of weapons, along with all the local people. They should capture elephants, deer, monkeys, and various birds like peacock and cuckoo on this hunting expedition.<sup>40</sup>

We also find *mṛgayātrā* descriptions in other texts, such as *Uttarakāraṇa* (24: 103ff), *Makūṭa* (4: 217ff), *Suprabhedā* (I, 14; 135b–136a) etc.

The *pāñcarātra-āgamas* seem not to have used the term *mṛgayātrā*, but we find the ‘hunting ritual’ mentioned there, too, with the terms, ‘*mṛgayā*’, ‘*mṛgayotsava*’ etc. For example in the *Īśvara-saṃhitā*, a 14<sup>th</sup>-century *pāñcarātra* text,<sup>41</sup> we find the usage of ‘*mṛgayotsava*’ (13: 255b) and *mṛgayā* (13: 256c):

*pūrvoktavidhinā kuryān mṛgayotsavam uttamam /  
vane vane samānīya savilāsaṃ jagatpatim //  
tatra tatra viśeṣena samabhyareya yathāvidhi /  
mṛgayāṃ kārayet paścāt savinodaṃ munīśvarāḥ // 13: 255–256 //*

<sup>37</sup> Davis 2010: 110.

<sup>38</sup> For a detailed discussion on this text, see Davis 2010: 5.

<sup>39</sup> cf. Davis 2010: 110.

<sup>40</sup> See also *Rauravāgama*, Vol. I, p. 84, n. 16.

<sup>41</sup> cf. Matsubara 1994: 29–30.

The best type of hunting festival should be done following the procedures prescribed earlier. O great sages, taking the lord to each [part of the] forest with pomp, and offering special worship in those places then and there, following the procedures prescribed, the hunting festival should be performed with entertainments.

The references given above to the *mṛgayātrā* clearly show that these texts are indicating a 'hunting procession' as part of the *utsava*. *Mahotsavavidhikrama Āgamaśekhara* goes further, suggesting an actual hunt and stating that the soldiers, as well as the public, who accompany the deity in a hunting procession should 'capture elephants, deer, monkeys, and various birds such as peacocks and cuckoos on this hunting expedition'. Thus we see that not only the Kerala texts, but also the South Indian *āgama* texts give an important place to the depiction of the 'hunting ritual' during the festival.

### **Paḷlivēṭṭa and Royal Consecration Rituals**

It is significant that the hunting ritual that is performed in Kerala is called 'paḷlivēṭṭa', in which the word 'paḷli' indicates royal relationship as<sup>42</sup> 'paḷli' means 'anything belonging to royalty'<sup>43</sup>. In Kerala<sup>44</sup> the word *paḷli* is used as a prefix in some other rituals, such as, *paḷliuṅartal* (waking the deity up), *paḷlikkurup* (putting the deity to bed) etc.

As L'Hernault and Reiniche (L'Hernault and Reiniche 1999: 3.73–74) observe, even though the *paḷlivēṭṭa* (or *parivēṭṭai*) may be related to the royal consecration rituals (Heesterman 1957: 127–140), since in the royal consecration, during the 'chariot drive' ritual, there

<sup>42</sup> Tamil Lexicon (2552) has an entry for this term and indicates that it is a mock-hunt: "paḷlivēṭṭai - paḷli—a mock-hunt in the temple-festival at Trivandrum in which the Maharajah takes the chief part".

<sup>43</sup> cf. Tamil Lexicon: 2552.

<sup>44</sup> It is also seen in Tamil usage e.g.: *tiruppaḷliyarai*—bed-chamber of a deity; *tiruppaḷliyuṅarttu*—To sing an aubade and request a deity to wake up early in the morning; *tiruppaḷliyelucci*—a poem sung for waking up the deity in a temple.

is a 'raid on a herd of a hundred or more cows' and also the 'shooting of an arrow', these two acts may not be enough to relate the '*paḷlivēṭṭa*' to the royal consecration ceremony. But it is worth noting that these two acts are related to the consecration ceremony and are carried out on the day previous to it; similarly the *paḷlivēṭṭa* is performed just before the ceremonial bath. Not only in the Kerala texts, but also in the early sources, we see that the Lord is given the status equal to that of an emperor,<sup>45</sup> and it is well-known that 'hunting' is a popular pastime among kings.<sup>46</sup> Thus, even though we do not find a clear relationship between the '*paḷlivēṭṭa*' and royal consecration rituals, the hunt may be viewed as a pastime of the Lord, when He is compared to an emperor.

### Conclusion

As we have seen, the early ritual manuals of Kerala, such as the *Śaivāgamanibandhana*, *Prayogamañjarī*, *Viṣṇusaṃhitā* etc., do not describe the *paḷlivēṭṭa*, or 'royal hunt', to be performed on the day before the ceremonial bath. But the *Tantrasamuccaya* seems to have introduced the 'royal hunt' ritual into the festival and at present this ritual is performed with great ceremony in the temples of Kerala during the annual festival. As already mentioned, there are references to 'royal hunt' in the South Indian *āgama* texts and these may have been the source for the author of the *Tantrasamuccaya*, who might have consulted the South Indian *āgama* texts as well as the early Kerala ritual texts.

Even though, as we know, all the ritual texts produced in Kerala mention the *grāmabali* as an important ritual during the festival, in the majority of temples this ritual is not performed. This shows that in practice certain rituals given in the texts are skipped while

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<sup>45</sup> *cakravartyupacāreṇa sugandhāmalakādibhiḥ* (*Somaśambhupaddhati*, 1.1.33ab; *Kālottara*, Ms IFP T. 59, p. 40; *Bṛhatkālottara* (Ms A43/1 = A) 11:17ab); see also *Īśānagurudevapaddhati*, KP, 48: 042ab.

<sup>46</sup> See Sarangi 1993: 292–293; See also Chapter 130, *Mṛgayālakakṣaṇa-svarūpakathanam*, in *Sāmrājyalakṣmīpīṭhikā*.

at the same time others are given great importance and the details of their performance are altered according to the local context, as we have seen in the procedure of the 'royal hunt' performed in the Trivandrum Śrī Padmanābhavāmī Temple and Guruvāyūr Temple.

Not only in Kerala, but elsewhere too, we see that certain rituals and customs of the temples need not strictly follow the ritual manuals that they are taken from, but are often influenced by local customs and practices.

It is also worthy of note that the authors of the ritual texts had a practical approach towards including or omitting certain rituals in the manuals they were composing. As we discussed at the beginning of this article, in Kerala, the early ritual texts produced were either Śaiva or Vaiṣṇava and the later manuals did not follow any particular system. While the early manuals, such as the Śaivāgamanibadhana, Prayogamañjarī, Īśānagurudevapaddhati, Viṣṇusamhitā, included rituals related to the initiation (dīkṣā) in detail, the later manuals, such as the Tantrasamuccaya, miss out the initiation ritual<sup>47</sup> completely and instead prescribe a 'mantradīkṣā' (listening to the mūlamantra of a deity from the teacher) ritual. Since the later manuals do not follow a particular system, Śaiva or Vaiṣṇava, it might have been difficult for an author to describe the initiation ritual that essentially calls for a description in line with a particular system. From Tantrasamuccaya onwards we see that the ritual manuals of Kerala were written as guides for performing rituals in the temples, rather than as manuals for those seeking salvation.

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<sup>47</sup> For a detailed study of this topic see, Sarma 2010: 443–454.

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*Pallivetta* procession at the Trivandrum Śrī Padmanābhasvāmī Temple—Sree Uthradom Thirunal Marthanda Varma leading the procession with a golden sword in his hand. (photography by S. S. R. Sama)



*Pallivetta* ritual in the Trivandrum Śrī Padmanābhasvāmī Temple—Sree Uthradom Thirunal Marthanda Varma with bow and arrow. (photography by S. S. R. Sama)