Early Medieval Temples of Eranad: A Study of Karikkat, Pulpatta and Trippanachi

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Abstract: Early medieval period (c. 9th – 12th century CE) marked a remarkable change in the socio-cultural and political history of Kerala. The migration of Brahmins and corresponding changes occurred in the worshipping pattern as well as the expansions of agriculture are some of the noteworthy features of this period. Almost all structural temples, both Saivite and Vaishnavite, were developed in this period. The early medieval temples of Eranad, one of the northern most political sub units of early medieval Chera state, was also the outcome of this cultural environment. This article focuses on three temples; Karikkat, Pulpatta and Trippanachi that developed in connection with the Brahmin settlement of Eranad. The architectural features of these temples have shown that they are built in typical Kerala style and belonged to early medieval period. These three temples had a decisive space in the early medieval socio-political settings of Eranad.

Keywords: Early Medieval Kerala, Temple Architecture, Kerala Style, Eranad, Pulpatta, Trippanachi, Karikkat

Introduction
Eranad is one of the seven Taluks in the present Malappuram district of Kerala. It was part of the erstwhile Malabar district of colonial India under Madras presidency (Logan 1887) 2010. In the pre-colonial time (from 13th to 18th century CE) Eranad was a political unit under the control of Zamorins of Calicut (Ayyar 1938) 1997, Nambuthiri 1986, Haridas 2016) and in the early medieval time (from 9th to 12th century CE) it was one of the fourteen provincial subdivisions called Nadu of Chera state (Narayanan 1996) 2013). Most of the archaic temples of this region belonged to this period. The wide distribution of Iron Age burial monuments called Megaliths in the Eranad has also pointed to the antecedent settlement formation of the region (Devadas 1993). However, historically this region has witnessed a continuous occupation from the early Iron Age to the modern times.

Geomorphologically the region of Eranad is a land mostly of hilly areas and based on the physiographic divergence it can be divided in to three distinct zones; the high lands, the midlands and lowlands. The coastal tracts comprise of plains whereas the
midland and highlands are hilly areas. The major rivers of the region are Chaliyar, Kadalundi and Bharathapuzha. The main subsistence form of the region was agriculture during the medieval period. Most of the temples are developed in the surroundings of the rich agrarian tracts of these river valleys.

Not many remarkable attempts are there to study the history of the early medieval temples in Kerala. The *Temple architecture of Kerala* of K V Soundara Rajan (1974) and the *An Architectural survey of the Temple of Kerala* of H Sarkar (1978) are the two available noteworthy works on Kerala temples. Both Soundara Rajan and Sarkar used inscriptive evidences to substantiate the chronological phases of the architectural features of the temples. S. Jayasankar has conducted a district wise temple survey and edited a narrative account on all temples of Kerala (2004). Rajan Gurukkal’s *Kerala Temple and Early medieval agrarian system* is one of the pioneering studies that focused on the material milieu of the early medieval temples (Gurukkal 1992). This work has unraveled the role of temple in the consolidation of agrarian society in the early medieval Kerala. Gurukkal mainly used the epigraphical and literary evidences for this study and did not highlight the architectural and iconographical aspects of the early medieval temple. In this context, the present study tries to present the historical significance of the early medieval temples of Eranad such as Pulpat, Karikkat and Trippananchi, based on architectural, iconographical and epigraphical evidences.

**Features of Early Medieval Temples**

Prior to the study of the temples of Eranadu, it is imperative to get an idea about the features of the early medieval temples of Kerala. The course of the evolution of temples in Kerala can be traced back to the early historic phase when the monolithic cave temples such as Vizhinjam and Madavoorpara in Thiruvananthapuram, Kottukal in Kollam district, Kaviyur in Alapuzha, Kallil in Ernakulam, Trikkur and Irinilancode in Trissur, Bhranthanpara in Palaghad etc were formed. Most of such cave temples have either Jain or Buddhist cultural links. The structural temples, mainly dedicated to Shaiva and Vaishnava, are developed from the early medieval period. Based on stylistic features, the temple architecture can be classified into two; Dravidian and Kerala style. Dravidian temples are the earliest and are fully made of dressed stones.

Vizhinjam shore temple, Varkkala Janardana Swami temple, Tiruvallam Parasurama temple, Thiruvananthapuram Sree Padmananbha temple etc are the good examples for the Dravidian style. In Kerala, many of the temples are small shrine with a single *mandapa* in front of it and have a square base with a domical roof. Most of the structural temples of Kerala are in typical Kerala Style. It has many differences from the Dravidian type. They were constructed with the available natural materials including laterite and granite stones, timber, clay and palm leaves. The iconic or aniconic representations of idols and the artistic features like murals etc are common to the temples during the period under discussion. Some of such temples have inscriptive evidence that have hinted at the process of its evolution and historic setting.
H Sarkar observed the three phases of temple architecture in Kerala; early phase, middle phase and late phase. The early phase is placed from 9th to 11th century CE. Temples are seen on square, circular, apsidal ground plans. Both sandhara and nirandhara types of temples are seen. Hypaethral temples were also seen in this phase.
A period from 11th to 14th century is the second phase of the temple development. Almost all structural temples from where the epigraphs of Second Chera period (9th - 12th CE) are discovered are developed during this phase. The Kerala Style temples are prominently constructed during this phase. Temples in square, circular, apsidal, rectangular, elliptical are seen in this phase. Typical Dravida tradition and indigenous Dravida Kerala styles are developed. Temples of Sarvatobhadra types continued to be built, temples with two or three Ghana-dwaras respectively built in this phase. The practice of enshrining the consort of a god at the back of the garbhagriha must have received great fillip in this period. Other characteristics of this phase are the practice of placing a bhuta figure near pranala, and carvings on hasti-hasta banisters depicting dance-scenes, inspired by the Chola plastic tradition. All the later temples are included in the third phase from 14th to 19th century.

Based on this structural analysis of the temple, this study reveals the structural features and the historical settings of the temples of Eranad.

**Early Medieval Temples of Eranad**

The above mentioned architectural features are obviously visible in the early medieval temples of Eranad. They were developed in the surroundings of fertile wetland agrarian zones of the Brahmin settlements like Karikkat, Trippanachi and Pulpatta (Figure 1). The temples of these settlements are the massive edifices that seemingly demonstrated the wealth and prosperity of the temple region.

**Distribution of the Temples**

**Pulpatta** (11°09′00.06″ N, 76°04′59.32″ E): The Pulpatta temple (Figure 2) is a massive circular edifice dedicated to Shiva built on laterite blocks and granite basement with Dwitala Vimana, located 6 km North West of Manjeri. The temple is in typical Kerala style with Dravida influence (Table 1). It has a detached namaskara mandapa. Now the temple is in a ruined condition. The architectural features and the vattezhuthu epigraphical evidence with grantha script has found on the base of shrine to the right of sopana. It is a record of the transfer of land to the temple. Pulipottai Ur (temple administrative body), Eranattu Arunuttuvar (five hundred militia of Eranad) and Etattirainattu Mumuttuvar (three hundred militia of Etattirainattu) collectively make provision for Uttu (feast) by assigning land to Pulpatta temple. This inscription has pushed back the date of the temple to the 11th century CE.

**Karikkad** (11°08′43.37″ N, 76°07′15.23″ E): Karikkad Sastha and Subrahmanya temple is situated in Karikkad village near Manjeri town dedicated to Sastha and Subrahmanya. Inside the prakara wall there are two shrines. The circular shrine with dwitala vimana is dedicated to Subrahmanya (Figure 3) and the rectangular shrine with dwitala vimana dedicated to Balasubrahmanya (Figure 4). Both these temples have separate Namaskara mandapa and Balikkal. The elliptical shaped Sastha temple is located in the outer pradakshina pada. This is one of the traditional Brahmin settlements of Kerala (Veluthat (1978) 2013:47). The temple have two sets of epigraphs (Narayanan
2013:488-489). One belongs to 10th century CE found on the floor of the entrance at Sastha temple and the other one of 11th century on the right side of the Upana of Subrahmanya temple.

Figure 2: Pulpatta Temple

Figure 3: Karikkad Subrahmanya Temple
The 10th century inscription refers to the presence Chalaippuram or Salaippuram, means the land assigned to the Brahmanic educational institution attached to the temple. The
11th century inscriptions refer to the land grant to the temple to meet the expenses of Tiruvakkiram, (sacred feast to the Brahmans). Land is purchased for gold and assigned for Tiruvakkiram. Certain Paiyyanattu Iravikelan, the Urvachan (drummer) makes land grant to meet the expense for Brahmin feast by the land that he purchased. Fines are also prescribed for the violation of rules. Items for feast like ghee and curd are mentioned. These inscriptions have revealed that the temple seems to have developed during 10th century or even earlier and flourished into an established worshiping center during 11th century.

Figure 6: Trippanachi Narasimhamurti Temple

Trippanachi (11°09'47.71″ N, 76° 02'54.74″ E): Trippanachi temple, locates 10km North West of Manjeri. The ekatala circular temple is dedicated to Mahavishnu (Figure 5) and the ekatala square temple is dedicated to Narasimhamurti (Figure 6) and both have separate namaskara mandapa and balikkal. In between these two shrines, a small square temple is there of Ganesha. An elliptical shape Sastha temple (Figure 7) is located in the outer pradakshina pada. A discarded broken sculpture, identified as Vishnu (Figure 8), is found in the temple compound. Based on the iconographic aspects it may belong to 11th century CE. It was a Brahmin settlement and there were around seventy-two Brahmin residences in the surroundings of the temple, that region are known as ‘korlayadu’ according to the local information. The architectural style of the temple pushed back it to the early medieval period, c.11th century CE.
Figure 7: Trippanachi Sastha Temple

Figure 8: Broken and Discarded Sculpture of Vishnu at Trippanachi Temple
### Table 1: Architectural Features of Temples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Temple</th>
<th>Adisthana</th>
<th>Sopana</th>
<th>Balipita</th>
<th>Inscription</th>
<th>Chronology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pulpetta Siva temple</td>
<td>Circular temple,</td>
<td>₹37.3</td>
<td>Laterite</td>
<td>Broken</td>
<td>11th century CE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Granite upana, jagathy,</td>
<td></td>
<td>With lion</td>
<td>Vattezhuthu inscription on kumuda</td>
<td>Probably Late phase of early phase and the</td>
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<td></td>
<td>octagonal kumuda, kantha</td>
<td></td>
<td>depiction</td>
<td>Refers to Arunnuttuvur of Eranadu,</td>
<td>beginning phase of middle phase</td>
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<td></td>
<td>with kampas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Munnuttuvur of Etattrinattu</td>
<td>Based on inscription and architectural features</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and gala-padas,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>valabhi, kapoda</td>
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<td></td>
<td>and prati</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karikkad Sastha temple</td>
<td>Elliptical shape</td>
<td>₹37.3</td>
<td>Laterite</td>
<td>Broken</td>
<td>10th century CE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>upana, jagathy, vritta-kumuda, kantha</td>
<td></td>
<td>With lion</td>
<td>Vattezhuthu inscription is inscribed on the floor of Ayyappan shrine mentions Tacciyur, cantanam, Chalaippu(ram), Ennaikkatu, prassthi, matrparigraham, tirukkoyil</td>
<td>Based on inscription and architectural features. It has two Pranala on the right side of the temple.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>with kampas</td>
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<td>depiction</td>
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<td></td>
<td>and pattika</td>
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<tr>
<td>Karikkad Subrahmanya temple</td>
<td>Circular temple</td>
<td>₹37.3</td>
<td>Laterite</td>
<td>Broken</td>
<td>11th century CE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of Subrahmanya Rectangular shape temple of Balasubrahmanya jagathy, octagonal kumuda, kantha with gala-padas, valabhi, simple kappíthpati.</td>
<td></td>
<td>With lion</td>
<td>Vattezhuthu inscriptions are seen on jagati and kumuda datable to 11th century</td>
<td>Based on inscription and architectural features.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>depiction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trippanachi Narasimhamurti temple</td>
<td>Circular temple</td>
<td>₹37.3</td>
<td>Laterite</td>
<td>Broken</td>
<td>11th century CE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of mahavishnu, Square temple of Narasimhamurti</td>
<td></td>
<td>With julika</td>
<td>No inscription found</td>
<td>Based on architectural features.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Upana, jagathy, Octagonal kumuda</td>
<td></td>
<td>depiction</td>
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</table>
Discussion
The structural temples are the institutionalized form of worshiping center developed in the agrarian villages of Kerala during the early medieval period (8th to 13th century CE). This period witnessed the expansion of agrarian settlement in the fertile agrarian zones of the catchment areas of the river valleys, which resulted to the proliferation of Brahmin settlement and the formation of brahmanic social order in the society (Gurukkal 1992). The early medieval temples of Eranad developed in association with the Brahmin settlements and located in the prosperous agrarian tracts. Karikkad, Sukapuram and probably Trippanachi were the traditional Brahmin settlement of the region. It is believed that there were thirty-two traditional Brahmin settlements in Kerala (Narayanan 1996:141-149, Veluthat (1978) 2013). Among them Karikkat, Karantola, Chokkiram or Sukapuram, and Panniyur are located in Eranad. These temples had significant role in the consolidation of agrarian society of early medieval Kerala. According to the epigraphical evidences, almost all these temples possessed various functionaries include, Poduval, Uralar, Parada, Drummer (Uvachar) etc. Karikkat and Trippanachi were the large Brahmin settlements or Brahmakshetras and owned a sumptuous amount of land. These three Brahmin settlements had a significant space in the early medieval socio-political scenario of early medieval Eranad.

The architectural splendors of these temples seemingly indicate their economic and political backing. These temples received land grants and enjoyed the overlord-ship of the rulers of Eranad. Eranad was a political unit under the Chera Kingdom ruled by the Eralanadu Nattudayavar. Eranattudayavar appears in the Jewish Copper plate and Trichchambaram inscription of 11th century CE as one of the witnesses among other Nattudayavars (Narayanan). It shows that Eranadu had a significant space in the early medieval polity of Kerala. Eranattu Arunnuttuvvar appears in the ruling body of the Pulpatta shiva temple, which shows that it was received political backing of Eranatu. Edattirainatu, Munnuttuvar also appears in the Pulpatta inscription, hinted at the possible existence of different power units within Eranad. Therefore the temple of Eranad became the vital hub of economic and political functions of the nadu.

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References