

# “Vaaram Irikkal”: An Epitome of Vedic Heritage Preservation from Colonial Period.

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## Abstract

*Vedism* is India's oldest stratum of religious activity, for written materials exist. It was one of the significant traditions that shaped Hinduism. There are four types of Vedas—Rig, Yaju, Sama, and Atharva. Yajurveda has two categories: *Krishna Yajurveda* and *Shukla Yajurveda*. The Krishna Yajurveda contains 7 *Khandhas*. *Khandhas* are divided into 44 chapters called *Parchas*. Tradition has it that *Namboothiri* was established in 64(traditional) villages—the 32 original settlements, as given in the *Keralolpathi*. The Vedas comprise a vast corpus of Sanskrit poetry, philosophical ideas, mythology, and ritual incantations developed and composed by Aryans over 3,500 years ago. It also discusses the Yaga culture and Tantric traditions. Regarded by Hindu culture (Hindus) as the primary source of knowledge and the sacred foundation of their religion, the Vedas embody one of the world's oldest surviving cultural traditions. The Vedic heritage embraces a multitude of texts and interpretations collected in four Vedas, commonly referred to as “books of knowledge,” which is unlimited knowledge, even though they have been transmitted orally. The *Rig Veda* is an anthology of sacred hymns; the *Sama Veda* features musical arrangements of accolades from the *Rig Veda* and other sources; the *Yajur Veda* abounds in prayers and sacrificial formulae used by priests, Yaga mantras; and the *Atharva Veda* includes incantations and spells. The Vedas also offer insight into the history of Hinduism and the early development of several artistic, scientific, and philosophical concepts, such as the concept of zero. Expressed in the Vedic language, which is derived from classical Sanskrit, the verses of the Vedas were traditionally chanted during sacred rituals and recited daily in Vedic communities. The value of this tradition lies not only in the rich content of its oral literature but also in the ingenious techniques employed by the Brahmin priests in preserving the texts intact over thousands of years. To ensure that the sound of each word remains unaltered, practitioners are taught complex recitation techniques based on tonal

accents from childhood, a unique manner of pronouncing each letter, and specific speech combinations.

The Kerala Brahmins protect Vedic culture in different ways. They preserve their culture through daily Vedic practice, which some rulers in the colonial period restricted. Tipu Sultan was one of the Muslim rulers who restricted Vedic education and destroyed many temples. The Samootiri provided many grants to Vedic scholars and he promoted Vedic education through Gurukulas. The Samootiri provided funds for the development of cultural practices. Vedic chanting was the part of daily temple pooja. The Sultan of Mysore, Tipu restricted the grants and he tried to demolish Vedic education and Yaga practices. However, the Namboothiri families decided to preserve the Vedic culture through daily practices. At that time Nambootiri Illams or Manas became the centre for Vedic education. Nambootiries from the Irinjalakuda grama play a crucial role in protecting Vedic education. Vaaram Irikkal was the part of daily Vedic upasana. The elder member of the family, the “Karanavar” is the responsible person for transferring the Vedic culture to the next generation. After the completion of Taitiriya kanda, the Changatha, the Vedic student can perform “Vaaram Irikkal.” Vaaram Irikkal is the session for the Vedic scholar, through practice, he can master the subject. The Vaaram Irikkal provides an opportunity mater the Pada Pata. All these practices help to preserve the Vedic education. Especially, Kaimukku Mana, Pantal Mana, Mangalassery Illam, Tharananelloor, and Thuranelloor families play a crucial role in protecting Vedic education. Koodal Manikyam temple was the center for Vedic practices at the time of British rule. The Tipu also tried to destroy the Koodal Manikyam and Peruvanam temples, but the Vaidikas from different families decided to protect Vedic education. The Kaimukku Vaidikan Narayanan Nambootiri provided Vedic education for the scholars at Kaimukku Mana. The British rulers also decided to restrict Vedic and Sanskrit education, they decided to stop the “Othoottu”(a Vedic program) but the Pantal Vaidika decided to practice Othoottu near Pantal Mana, at Rappal Sreekrishna Temple. Also, the Nambootiri families from Mitranandapuram play a crucial role in protecting Othoottu, they conducted Othoottu at Mitranandapuram Vamana Moorthy Temple.

Traditionally, Kerala Brahmins follow a d *Swara* system that is different from other parts of India. Vedic chanting strictly follows the *Matra and Udata-Anudata-Swarita* systems. *Varam* is a Vedic practice. It is strictly based on the Pada system. In the

evening, there will be the ceremony of "*Vramlrikka*" by a trained Vedic scholar. The *Varam Sambradaya* varies from Vedic schools. In Kerala, every system is based on the Brahmin settlement. There are some differences in the Vedic-Tantric practices between the Kerala *Namboothiris*. These types of programs help to educate people about Vedic tradition. In Kerala, Vedic practices are a traditional part of Brahmin culture.

## Introduction

The Krishna Yajurveda contains 7 *Khandhas*. Khandhas are divided into 44 chapters called *Parchas*. In its character, Yajurveda is quite different from the Rigveda. The scholars explain the word Yaju in the Yajurveda; A Yajuh is that which is in prose form. Basically, Yajurveda is in prose form. It talks about the relationship with sacrifices. This Veda is more pronouncedly a ritual Veda, for it is essentially a guidebook for the Yaga system. The Adhvaryu works as per this tradition. This book explains the selection of a plot of land, sacred fires, etc. The Krishna Yajurveda is a mixture of Mantra and Brahmana, whereas the Shukla Yajurveda clears these separate sections. A mix of mantra and Brahmana characterises the Krishna Yajurveda, whereas the Shukla Yajurveda maintains the clear separation of the two. The Shukla Yajurveda is related to the Aditya school, and the Krishna Yajurveda is related to the Brahma school. At the beginning of his commentary on the Shukla-Yajurveda Samhita, Mahidhara tells a story about the two-fold division of the Yajurveda. Rishi Vaishampayana taught the Yajurveda to Rishi Yajyavalkya and other pupils. Once, Vaishampayana got angry with Yajyavalkya and asked him to return what he had learnt. Yajyavalkya vomited the Veda by the power of Yoga. At the same time, the other pupils, at the command of his teacher, swallowed up the Yajush and thus vomited, assuming the form of birds called Tittiri. Thus, the Yajush became dark and was named Krishna or Taittiriya. Then Yajyavalkya prayed to the Sun, who came to him as a horse and gave him back the Yajush. Hence, this Yajurveda was named Shukla or Vajasaneyi. Darsha-purnamasa, Agnihotra, Somayaga, Chaturmasya, Agnihotra, Vajapeya, Ashvamedha, Sarva-medha, Brahma- yajya, Pitrimedha, Sautramani, and so on. For a general idea, the contents can be divided into three sections. The first section comprises the Darshapurnamasa, the second deals with the Somayaga, and the third includes the Agnicayanas. The last section of the Vajasaneyi-Samhita contains the popular

Ishavasya-Upanishad. It is essential to know that the first eighteen Adhyayas of the Vajasaneyi-Samhita are entirely given, word for word, and explained in the Shatapatha Brahmana of the white Yajurveda. Based on this point, some scholars think that the last sections of this Samhita are of a later date. These types of Vedic traditions are used in the Somayagam and Atiratram. Atiratram is the highest level of Yagam performed by the Yajamana. Once Atiratram completed the Yajamana, known as Akkithirippad. Yagam is a highly spiritual and practical ritual as prescribed in the Vedas. The Atiratram is a category of advanced Sruta ritual. As per the Krishna Yajurveda, once the Yajamana is completed Somayaga, he is eligible to perform the Atiratram. Tipu Sultan was against this Yaga practice and he imposed restrictions on the performance of Somayaga. But the Vaidika families continued this Yaga performance. The Kaimukku Vaidika conducted a Somayaga at that time and also conducted an Athirathram after Independence.

There are 7 Khandas in Taittiriya Samhita. The first Khanda was divided into 8 Prapathaka or Parcha. Again, the Parcha is divided into Othu, Panjathi, and Padam. The second Kanda is divided into six Parcha. The third Khanda is divided into five Prapathakas. The fourth Kanda is divided into seven Parchas. The fifth Khanda also has seven Prapathakas. The sixth Khanda is divided into six Parchas. The last Khanda is divided into five Parchas. The Vedic sitting and Othoottu perform as per the Pada Sampradaya. Vedic chanting primarily uses four tones - Udatta, Anudaatta, Svarita and Deerghasvarita. Pathas are the styles of hymnal recitation. There are eleven such ways of recitation: Samhita, Padha, Krama, Jata, Maalaa, Sikha, Rekha, Dhwaja, Danda, Rathaa, and Ghana.

## **Matra System**

Vedic chanting is based on the Matra system. The Kerala Swara system and Matra Sampradaya differ from other Vedic cultures. Trimatra refers to the “three measures”, “Everything generated within the Three Paths is tranquil and has been placed in the (half-measure consisting of) three measures. The Matra system is based on the usage of Padam. As per the Taittiriya Samhita, the word is repeated three times in the same Swara. It may be the last Swara change. It is based on the Swara of the next Padam. The Kerala Vedic Scholars preserve a great Matra Sampradaya (system). The British interventions did not touch the traditional matra system. The

Tharananelloor Narayanan Nambootiri wrote a reference textbook for the Matra system around the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The Tharananelloor family follows this Matra system for the Tantra practices.

## **Conventional Rules**

The Vedic-Tantric rules in Kerala developed in the Brahmin settlements. In seeking to identify the remaining 32 to the south of Perumpuzha river in Kerala proper, it could be seen that eighteen have yielded inscriptions from the locality itself mentioning the village settlement, four prominently in inscriptions from other places, three are mentioned in contemporary or near-contemporary works. Six have carried their continuing Brahmanical traditions and temples to this day. Twenty-three of them survive today. Thirty-one out of thirty-two could, therefore, be identified satisfactorily. Apart from these thirty-two original villages, several others emerged by fusing elements from existing ones. Thus, many Upagramams and other independent settlements developed, constituting a network throughout Kerala, with command over land, many tenants, and feudal privileges. In fact, by the close of the eighth century, the Brahmana settlements had become a vital force in society to such an extent that society itself was completely reoriented with these groups providing intellectual leadership.

Chellur, or Perumchellur, is a village identifiable with the present-day Taliparamba in the Kannur district. It is one of the northernmost of the traditional Brahmana settlements of Kerala. It lies on the banks of the river Parassini, near Ezhimala. These two factors have made the village geographically necessary. The never-extinguished sacrificial fire altars of the Vedic culture of that village and the association of the place with Parasuraman indicate that the Brahmana culture of Chellur conformed to that of the Brahmana settlements elsewhere along the west coast of peninsular India. It is well-known that Parasuraman or Bhargavaraman tradition is cherished by all the Brahmanas of the west coast. The tradition originated in the Saurashtra region and moved gradually southward. Archaeological evidence also suggests that the Brahmanical tradition of Vedic sacrifices moved to the south along the west coast.

1. Payyannur, 2. Perumchellur, 3. Alathur, 4. Kaaranthola, 5. Chokiram alias Sukapuram, 6. Panniyur, 7. Karikkat, 8) Isanamangalam, 9) Thrssivaperur

and 10. Peruvanam 11. Chaamunda, 12. Irungatikkutal, 13. Avattiputhur, 14. Paravur, 15. Airanikkalam, 16. Muzhikulam, 17. Kulavur, 18. Atavur, 19. Chenganatu, 20. Ilibhyam, 21. Uliyannur, 22. Kalutanatu 23. Ettumanur, 24. Kumaaranallur, 25. Katamaruku, 26. Aranmula, 27. Thiruvalla, 28. Kitangur, 29. Chengannur, 30. Kaviyur, 31. Venmani, 32. Neermanna.

## **Othukottu**

This Vedaparayana (the process of reading the Veda) may last weeks and months. The participants should repeatedly read Veda at least 64 times throughout this whole process. After this process, they can memorise this portion of the Veda, consisting of 44 Parchas, which is the highlight of this ritual. The group consists of minor children to senior adults who utter the hymns in a unique rhythm.

The participants are allowed to read based on their knowledge of Veda. When a Brahman child completes the first Vedic learning and Upanayanam phase, he can participate in the Othukottu. It starts in the early morning and continues until midnight, and only three intervals are provided in between – for meals and evening sandhya lathanum. The Kerala Nambootiris tried to protect the Veda traditions from British interventions. The British rulers did not support Vedic education and they stopped the grants for Vedic institutions and oriental institutions. At that time some of the Vedic scholars from Irinjalakuda grama (Pantal Vaidika, Kaimukku Vaidika, Tharananelloor) decided to protect Vedic education. For this, they started Vedic teaching in their own homes. Also, they conducted Vedic conferences in the name of Othukottu. The English rulers are not aware of the learning styles so the Vedic scholars can easily participate and perform Vedic sacrifices. The Pantal Vaidika conducted a Vedic Conference (Othukottu) at Rappal temple, Thrissur district.

In Kerala, only 6 Vaidika Kudumbams exist. Five, including Panthal Mana, conduct Yajurveda Othukottu in Rapal—the ghee, which is worshipped continuously for three months. In Vamanamurty Temple, too, Othukottu is performed for three months before the idol of Vamanamoorthy. If the ghee that has heard the chants is consumed, it is believed to bring prosperity to families, married lives, and offspring and prosperity to children's studies. A custom to preserve Vedas, it has been traditionally followed by these temples for many centuries.

## **Vedic Sacrifice- Krishna Yajurvediya**

Athirathram or Atiratra is one of the seven categories of Soma Yagnas. Atiratra refers to the “building up of the fireplace and performed overnight”. Seventeen priests are required to perform the ‘Agni’. The course of time is 12 days. The piling of the altar of Agni is a Srouta ritual of Vedic religion. The Brahmana texts' mantras and theological explanations are mentioned in the Yajurveda Samhitas (Taittiriya, Kathaka; Vajasaneya). The practice of this ritual was generally discontinued from the late Vedic period.

The first day begins with the Yajamana and his priests entering the ritual enclosure carrying three sacred fires in pots. The main ritual vessel is prepared from clay. A symbolic animal sacrifice would be performed for Vayu. After the selection of five chief priests, fire is produced by friction. This is followed by tying a turban around the head of Yajamana. A golden breastplate protects him; he is given a staff, closes his fists, and is deprived of speaking (except for recitations), bathing, etc. The Yajamana picks up the main ritual vessel filled with fire and takes three steps with it. The first day begins with the Yajamana and his priests entering the ritual enclosure carrying three sacred fires in pots. The main ritual vessel is prepared from clay. A symbolic animal sacrifice would be performed for Vayu. After the selection of five chief priests, fire is produced by friction. This is followed by tying a turban around the head of Yajamana. A golden breastplate protects him; he is given a staff, closes his fists, and is deprived of speaking (except for recitations), bathing, etc. The Yajamana picks up the main ritual vessel filled with fire and takes three steps with it.

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### **Kamakodi Yajurveda Patasala**

Being the land of Adi Sankara, Kerala has always inclined toward Vedic knowledge and philosophies. The Vedic tradition is still preserved in some of the homes of the Namboothiri community in Kerala. There are a few schools for Vedic learning in Kerala, and the most prominent among them is the Kamakoti Yajurveda Patasala, near Irinjalakkuda, in Thrissur district. Near the renowned Koodalmanikyam temple in Irinjalakkuda, the Kamakoti Yajurveda Patasala focuses on Yajurveda. This cultural institute was registered as an NGO partnership organisation 1979 to promote Yajurveda in India. The gurukula system of teaching is followed at the Kamakoti Yajurveda Patasala. The Gurukula system is residential, where the shishyas (students) live in gurus' houses and learn and help their gurus in day-to-day activities. Brahmin boys, after upanayana, the initiating ritual in which boys are invested with a sacred thread that symbolises their maturity and transference of knowledge, usually at the age of 8 -10, are eligible for the course. Brahmins from other states of India who are interested to learn Yajurveda in Kerala style are also admitted here.

At the time of British rule, the Vedic scholars from different parts of Kerala started Vedic teaching their own homes.

1. Kaimukku Mana
2. Pantal Mana
3. Mangalassery Illam
4. Irinjalakuda Sampradaya(system)
5. Sreeraghavapuram Sabha

For the preservation of Vedic traditions, the scholars teach the whole Samhita Pata. After the completion of Samhita, they teach Pada Pata. Through this structured education, a student becomes a master of all the portions and all the Kandhas related to the Samhita. But it was very difficult for maintenance of these traditions during British rule since support or assistance was not provided to the development of Vedic traditions. They were also against

Sanskrit education. So it was very difficult to transfer the Vedic traditions to the next generations. But the Kerala Nambootiris carried the traditions forward on their own initiative by firstly, teaching Vedas and Tantra to their own sons and also providing Vedic education at their own homes. Some Devaswom/ temples provide financial assistance and a place for this purpose.

## **Vedic Sandhya**

Vedic Sandhya was the part of Nithyasana (daily practice). The Vedic Sandhya was conducted for the memorization of Vedic chanting. Through daily practice, the Vedic students memorize the Veda mantras. The students do not use any Vedic text but they directly hear the Mantras from the teacher and they continuously chant these mantras with a strict Matra system.

Offer ghee through some Yajurveda mantras and clean the Homa Kunda (fire pit).

आकृत्यै प्रयुजेग्रये स्वाहा, मेधायै मनसेग्रये स्वाहा, दीक्षायै तपसेग्रये स्वाहा, सरस्वत्यै पूष्णेग्रये स्वाहा, आपो देवीर्बृहतीविश्वशंभुवोद्यावापृथिवी उरो अन्तरिक्षं बृहस्पतये हविषा विधेम स्वाहा ॥

This mantra invokes Agni(fire), goddess Saraswati and Lord Pooshan (one of the twelve Suns). Utmost importance has been given to yajna (fire oblation). Performance of yajna (fire oblation) is essential if we have to attain विद्या, उत्साह, बुद्धि, सत्यवाणी, धर्माचरणं | Hence we pray to Agni, the fire god first and then to goddess Saraswati, who is the goddess of knowledge and to Lord Pooshan to have their blessing so that we can attain our goal without impediments.

The Vedic sounds are very different from each other. There are the exact words in different Othu. In Krishna Yajurveda and also Rigveda, one entire Parcha is the same.

There are 7 Kandas in Taitiriya Samhita. The first Kanda was divided into 8 Prapathakas or Parchas. Again, the Parcha is divided into Othu, Panjathi, and Padam. Second, Kanda is divided into six Parcha. Third, Kanda is divided into five Prapathaka. Fourth, Kanda is divided into seven Parcha. Fifth Kanda also seven Prapathaka. The sixth Kanda is divided into the sixth Parcha. The last Kanda is divided into five Parcha. The Vedic sitting and Othoottu perform as per the Pada Sampradaya.

Chanting was used as a way to help memorize teachings as well as expressions of commitment. Also known as oral prayers, it is one of the popular ways of expressing

devotion. The whole practice of chanting is both active and passive but receptive. Chanting involves conscious effort. Chanting has existed for a long time across various faiths and religious institutions such as Buddhism, Vedic Hinduism, Christianity (orthodox), Judaism, and various strands of Paganism. The Vedas or the Vedic texts are a body of sacred texts written in Sanskrit from 1500 - 1000 BCE. Apart from liturgical material and mythological accounts, the Vedas include poems, prayers, and religious eulogies representing the Vedic Hindu religion. The Vedas are divided into four major parts - the Rig Veda, the Sama Veda, the Yajur Veda, and the Atharva Veda. Chanting or reciting prayers in Sanskrit (Hindu Vedic chanting) is a simple praise or eulogy called stuti, sukta or stava. These chants are considered the oldest unbroken oral traditions since the existence of Vedic literature, which dates back to the Iron Age. The whole concept of Vedic Chanting can be seen in two parts - Tone and Recitation (Patha). Vedic chanting primarily uses four tones - Udatta, Anudaatta, Svarita and Deergha Svarita. Pathas are the styles of hymnal recitation. There are eleven such ways of recitation - Samhita, Pada, Krama, Jata, Maalaa, Sikha, Rekha, Dhawaja, Danda, Rath and Ghana.

The scholar can recite the Veda through the Matra and Swara sampradaya only after Samhita Pata. After Pada, the scholar can perform the Othoottu or Othukottu. Varam Irikkal is performed with the help of Krama. The first, Samhita, is the simplest form of recitation that approaches the mantra as it is. Padha, on the other hand, is recited in a way where each word is broken down. Krama, the third technique, adds the first absolute level of difficulty into the recitation through a pattern of repetition. Jatapatha, the first of the more challenging paths, alternates between a repetitious interposing and transposing of words. Between Jatapata and the last technique are six other methods (called Mala, Shikha, Rekha, Dwaja, Danda and Ratha) that again are built-in combinations and permutations that have ensure that the order and words of the Vedas remain unchanged throughout the chant.

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