

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Way back in 1992, then director of American Institute, Dr. Mahendiratta asked me, “Can you write on Kerala Temples for our encyclopedia of Indian Temple Architecture”? I had hardly two minutes to answer to the question. I was thinking, though born in Kerala and visited the temples, I never thought about researching and writings of Kerala Temples. My research was more on Ajanta and the architecture of north India. As an Art Historian, I visited the Kerala temples with Dr. George Michell, while he was travelling in Kerala, researching for the “Living Wood Exhibition” but never initiated to work on them. Dr. Mahendiratta was waiting, keenly observing me with his characteristic stare. “Yes Sir”, I answered. There started my research on Kerala Temples. I should start this preface acknowledging him, American Institute of Indian Studies and the editors of the fourth volume of Encyclopedia of Indian Temple Architecture for pushing me to research on Kerala Temples.

But, I should thank first and foremost my brother Asokan Poduval, an alumnus of Faculty of Fine Arts, for considering me worthy enough to attend the Post Graduate Course in Art History at Baroda. I had no intention of joining academics but wanted to do theatre as a full time profession. My interest in History was rather restricted to researching for historical plays and stories. Asokan rightly thought that I am wasting my life in Kerala and brought me to Baroda, luring me with a hope of joining National School of Drama, New Delhi. I should also thank the authorities of NSD for not giving admission in the school. It was not an easy transition from a history graduate from Kerala to become an art historian, I had to cross the language barrier, as well as enter into new realm of knowledge. My teachers, Dr. Ratan Parimoo, Dr. Deepak Kannal and Dr. Shivaji Panikkar nurtured the art historical knowledge and enthusiasm into a new comer to the field, like me. Seniors, Kavita Singh and Gouri Parimoo and my classmates YS Alone, Apurva Kulkarni, Anahita Contractor and Nilopher Patel encouraged me further, at times challenging and often supporting. Rekha Rodwittiya supported my studies through Inlaks Take Off Grant. She also mentored and made sure that I develop as a scholar. She was great in inculcating values of life in me which helped in developing my personality. She continues to do so even today, as affectionately as she did earlier.

I consider International Seminar on Ajanta organized by the Baroda Art History Department in 1988 where I met Walter Spink who, brought in major shift in my career. Looking at my work on Ajanta Doorways for my MA dissertation; he invited me to visit Ajanta joining with his student group from USA. Association with Walter continued as I visited Ajanta every year and studied the monuments in detail. In fact Walter Spink taught me how to look at architecture in detail without missing even the irregular chisel mark or a flaw in the rock. I met many scholars during these visits like Dr.Suresh Vasant, Dr.AP Jamkhedkar, and Dr.Vidya Dehejia. The Junior Fellowship of American Institute of Indian Studies gave me an opportunity to browse through their humongous collection of photographs and fantastic library. It also brought me in contact with Prof.MA Dhaky, who taught and inspired me to write on Architecture. He would go painstakingly through my writing and correct with red pen slowly changing the whole page into red. Nambiar Sir, Director Administration, Mishraji the archivist, Yadavji the librarian, Subbu Swamy, the accountant, Nandaji, head of photography Ravi the draughtsman all made the institute more congenial for young scholars to work in the institute. Back in Baroda, Dr.Parimoo, Deepak Kannal and Shivaji Panikkar assigned me to write a paper for Ajanta Volume and asked me to join the editorial board of the book along with them.

In mid 1989, on my visit to Ajanta along with Walter Spink, I met Dr. George Michell, who remains a lifelong friend and mentor. We analyzed Ajanta together, and I was initiated to a new methodology of looking at Architecture. We met again at Benares during the International Conference on Looking at India's Past at the American Institute of Indian Studies [AIIS] and George invited me to join him in his travel to Karnataka and Kerala along with Dr.Anna Dallapiccola. It was my first experience of entering into a Kerala, not as a devotee but an art historian. I also felt the bias of caste and creed in the temples for example, Anna being a woman was not allowed to enter Taliparamba and Chengannur temples and once three of us were restrained into a room because the 'protectors' of the temple had thought that we defiled the sacredness of the temple. At times I got the preference because my caste name. We strained our necks to see clearly the fabulous wooden sculptures carved on the ceilings of Namaskara Mandapas and enquired why cannot we enter the namaskara mandapa and the answer was that it is reserved for the Malayala Brahmins only.

After I started working on the chapters of Kerala Temples for the AIIS encyclopedia, I visited around ninety temples in Kerala, important as well as significant. Everywhere along with the architecture I observed the behavioral patterns of the devotees and the temple staff. I hardly saw them using namaskara mandapa for any ritual purpose. Soon the AIIS documentation team arrived with Nandaji as photographer and Ravi as draughtsman. We had great time, ignoring the displeasure of Dr.Murti, who was heading the team. Even Murti, proudly displaying his sacred thread was not allowed on the namaskara mandapas during the temple working hours because he was not a Malayali Brahmin. When the temple closes after the midday puja, we *all* had free access.

When I joined the Department of Art history as research assistant, Deepak Kannal, who took over as the head of the department from Dr. Parimoo, acknowledged the fact that I can teach and gave me the opportunity to teach to the newly introduced post graduate course in Indian Architecture. At that time I was working on the Kerala chapters of the AIIS encyclopedia as well on my earlier Doctoral thesis on Roda Group of Temples. I dropped that topic for two reasons, one my guide was too busy to guide me as he wanted someone else to finish the work before me as well as I realized fact that the subject is forte of one who taught me to write on architecture, Prof.MA Dhaky. I soon started working on the Architectural Inventory of Sacred Center at Vijayanagara, visiting the excavation camp at Hampi every year. There I had the opportunity to work with another scholar who would be a lifelong friend and mentor, Dr.John Fritz. At the Hampi camp I came in contact with brilliant archeologists and architects from all over the world. They with the mentoring of George Michell, taught me how to measure and draw a building. Scholars came visiting the camp, like Arjuna Appadurai, CS Patil and Snehal Shah. Snehal, who works in Ahmadabad remained as big brother, closely monitoring me through the years.

Deepak Kannal, who was heading the UGC DSA program in Baroda, gave all the encouragement which an academician needs in the formative years of his career. Together we visited most of monuments in India, and introduced me to site exploration and analysis. While working on the project on Utpatti Pidugu we visited the remotest sites in India, and travelling with Deepak Kannal was always full of excitement and fun. We would furiously argue about the monuments, sculpture, films, actors, literature, political issues and all but remain as friendly as ever. The students

and colleagues like Nitesh Patel, Harshad Padiya and Praful Gohil did express their amazement with these fierce arguments at the sites and our companionship afterward. That is the fun of working together as both of us would assure them later.

When I dropped my earlier doctoral thesis subject, it was George who suggested that I should work on Kerala temples. I did not want to work on the stylistic analysis and chronology of Kerala temples as it has been meticulously dealt by scholars of stature like Stella Kramrisch, Soundararajan, H Sarkar and KR Srinivasan. Then I thought about the experiences I had during the previous visits to the Kerala Temples. Namaskara Mandapa came as an architectural riddle which the previous scholars have not dealt with and needed to be explored further. I also remembered a caste based hierarchy which personally experienced. Once I went to temple with a group of people which also included a Malayali Brahmin. While entering the temple he rang the bell next to the door. As grown up in South Kerala where every devotee is allowed to ring the bell, I did the same. The group with the majority of north Kerala Poduvals objected my action. I stood my ground and said that “the Malayali Brahmin also did the same”. “But, he was doing the *manasa puja* [silent worship]” they retaliated. Just for the argument sake I said, “What makes you feel that I have not done *manasa puja*”? The seniors of group who were my from village pardoned my ignorance of the caste system and hierarchy and explained to me that only a Malayali Brahmin can do *manasa puja* and even if the person is a rogue he has to be respected, thanks to his *jati* and *varna*.

The above incident happened in 1984, almost fifty years after the Temple Entry Proclamation. Later visiting the temples as an art historian I realized that though there has been equality and progressive measures in the social and economic realms of Kerala, not much change happened in the caste hierarchy within temple premise. And namaskara mandapa stands as a surviving element of architecture representing the vestige of caste hierarchy and segregation, thus this thesis.

On the personal level there are many who helped and nurtured me as individual. First and foremost I should thank my mother who probably never understood what I am doing and still encouraged me. I like to express my gratitude to my eldest brother Krishnakumar who taught me theatre. Raju Iyer and Nalini Iyer in-laws supported me and my wife Monal whenever we hit a rough patch in life. I am totally indebted to

their affection and love. Monal stood by me through the last two decades as a friend, critic, mentor and companion. She pardoned the follies in life as well as in academics and guided me in the right directions.

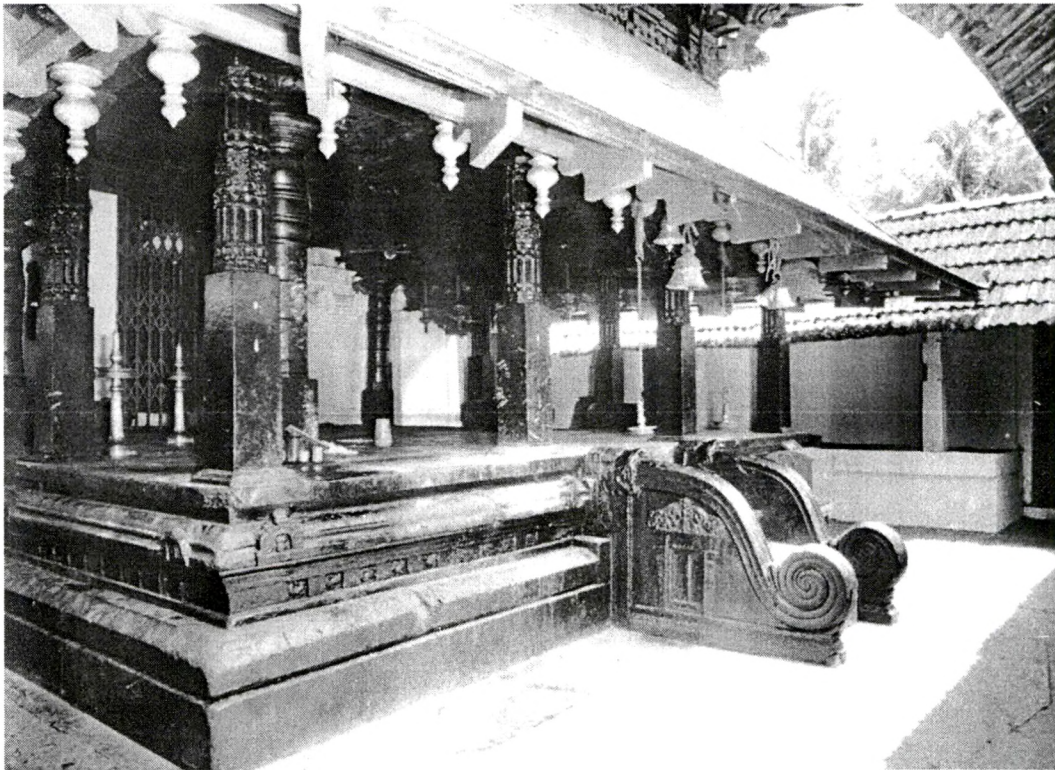
For the present thesis I would like to thank my guide Dr. Deepak Kannal, who has been constantly encouraging and shown absolute confidence in my work. Dr. Shailendra Kushwaha, Dean, Faculty of Fine Arts and Head of the Department of Art History and Aesthetics, who remained as an affectionate senior colleague and mentor ever since I joined the department as post graduate student. He taught me the art of photography, which is crucial for a person working in the field of visual arts. I am indebted to his encouragements and support. Other colleagues in department like Nitesh Patel, Rita Sodha, Aparna Roy Baliga, Vrushali Dhage, Sunanda Satish and Gita Parmar created a congenial atmosphere for academic research in the department; I wish to express my gratitude to all of them. Another person who joined the department along with me was Ravi Kadam *aka* Ravi Bhai. He has been a constant supporting assuming the roles of a Bank ATM, organizer in many events in the department, printer, courier or anything and everything an academician needs in career and personal life. If I thank him he would respond with his characteristic smile and say “Kya Jayaram Bhai... *isme kya* thanks”?

Jayaram Poduval



CASTE SEGREGATION IN KERALA TEMPLES -

A CASE STUDY OF NAMASKARA MANDAPA



JAYARAM PODUVAL