COCHIN MURALS

BY

V. R. CHITRA and T. N. SRINIVASAN M.A.

TEXT

for Volumes I and II

PUBLISHED UNDER THE SPECIAL AUTHORITY
OF HIS HIGHNESS THE MAHARAJAH OF COCHIN

1940


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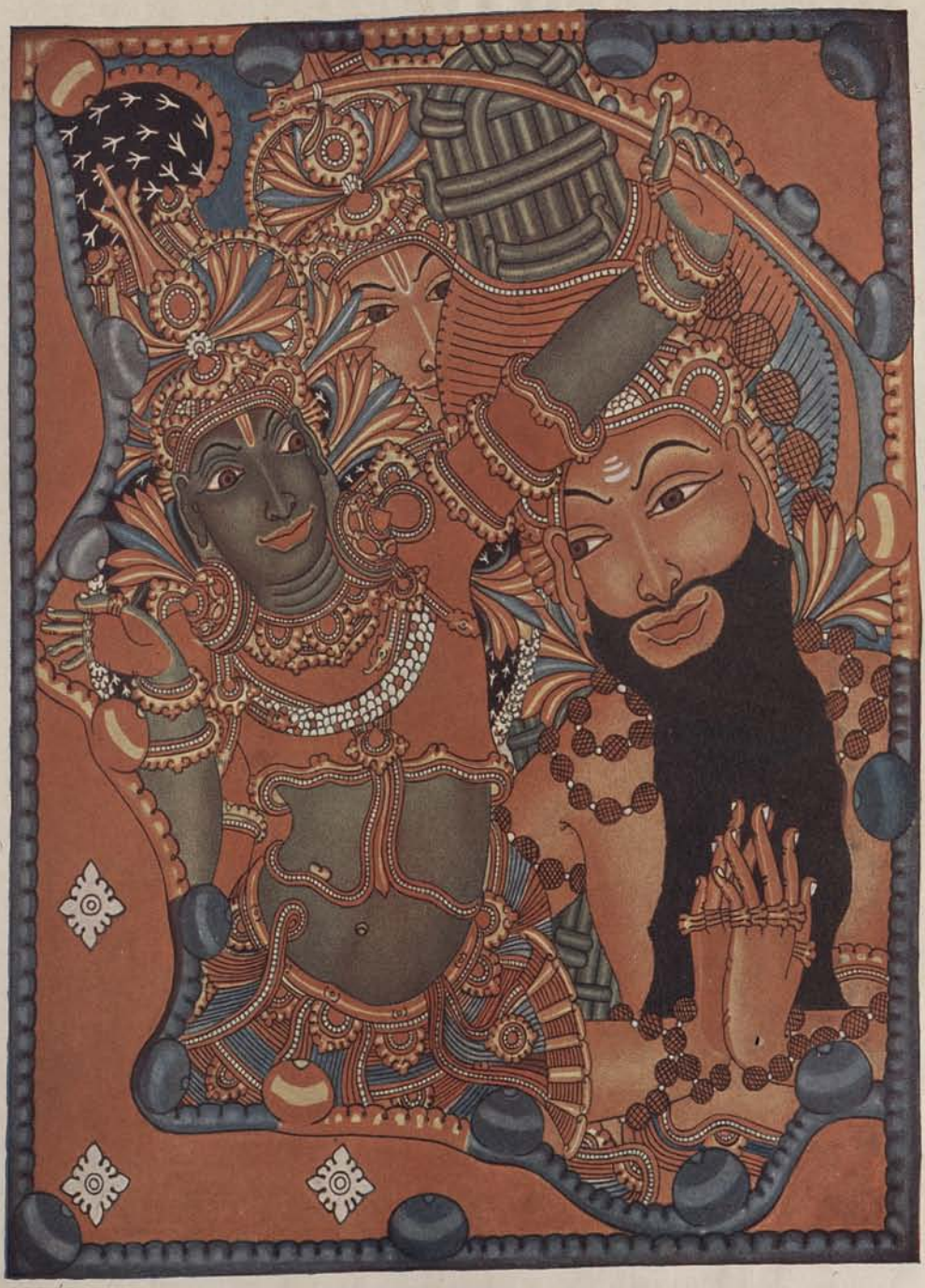

RAMA AND PARASURAMA

COCHIN MURALS

COLLOTYPE REPRODUCTIONS OF THE MURAL PAINTINGS OF COCHIN, BASED ON PHOTOGRAPHY

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PREFACE

TO discover anything worth preserving is to find out the need of one or more subsequent alternatives—either to organise the preservation of the discovered object in its own location or to create a new location for it. In the case of mural paintings which are worth preserving, there may be the double necessity of retaining the originals as long as possible and at the same time of housing authentic copies of them for the study of experts and the edification of the general public. Lovers of art, who are unable to see the actual paintings, can satisfy their longing by seeing faithful reproductions of the originals.

Of late, in various parts of India, archaeological discoveries have led to the realisation of the fact that treasures of art, vast in quantity and and superb in quality, have lain hidden for centuries, with the resultant incalculable loss of the knowledge of the past eras of history and an equal loss of inspiration to contemporaneous art expression. These discoveries, which have pushed the art history of India as far back as five thousand years ago, have led to a further and somewhat disturbing discovery. The index of achievement in the arts has, with occasional efforts at recovery, steadily fallen in the course of ages from various forms of perfection to almost universal mediocrity or worse. These treasures of art were, however known to the local inhabitants, as most of them were paintings done on temple-walls and other historic land-marks familiar to them ; though they never felt the necessity to have them broadcasted, so to say, to the world at large.

The Kerala region, on the western coast of India, has shared in this double discovery with the difference that its era of neglect has been much shorter than that of other regions. Occasional items have been found there going back to the nineth century A.D. ; but the mural

paintings now reproduced may be taken in the main to be the work of artists belonging to the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. Though comparatively recent in age, these murals have a special significance in that they belong to an exclusive school of artists, whose technique and workmanship is considerably different from what we know to be the characteristics of the other schools of Indian art. These paintings, though not of hoary antiquity, throw fresh light on the range of the characteristics of Indian painting. Besides, being uninfluenced by the Moghal, Rajput and other schools, they are singularly Hindu in conception and orthodox in style. Further, they facilitate, to a great extent, the interpreting of the singular customs and manners of the people of Kerala. They also form an authoritative background to understand their unique 'Kathakali'—the peculiar form of dance.

In placing this set of two volumes of Collotype reproductions of Cochin Murals before the public for the present, the authors desire first to humbly pay their respects to His Highness the Maharaja of Cochin, but for whose interest, it would have been impossible to make this venture. Primarily it started from the circumstance that His Highness desired to have faithful copies of these murals made, so that, if the originals perish, the copies at least could be preserved. For this purpose the services of one of us Mr. V. R. Chitra was engaged; and he with the co-operation of some local artists, was able to get very faithful copies of the pictures made on special boards imported for this purpose, in the colours used by the original masters and in the same technique. Later on, the idea of housing these faithful copies in a prominent place in the State, so that tourists and art lovers can have the benefit of seeing them occurred to the Dewan. He was responsible therefore for bringing into existence, the Art Gallery, now housed in a spcially-built spacious building at Trichur. When this was being done, the natural temptation to increase the value of these murals by presenting them in a book form took shape; and when Mr. Chitra went to Japan, he got into touch with Messrs. Benrido Printing Co., the foremost fine-art printers in the East, who are responsible for reproducing in original size (10' x 4') copies of the famous Buddhist frescoes in Horyoji monastery in Nara, Japan, which are believed to have been executed in fifth century A.D. Thus, it may be said that it was purely out of love and regard for Indian

Art, that they have undertaken to print these art plates rather than for any monetary consideration they may get from the work. All the plates again are printed on genuine hand-made paper, the Torinoko paper of Japan, the best and the finest hand-made paper ever made. Messrs. Benrido have printed the plates in Collotype, a process till now exclusively confined to important printers in Europe. We wish to mention here that the original scheme was to publish, as Volume I, that wonderful unfinished masterpiece now existing only as line drawing depicting 'Uma Parinayam' or the marriage of Siva. In fact, this would have materialised, but for the present political convulsion, which prevents the execution of the work by our printers in time to go along with the other two volumes. Our readers would be glad to know that this scene is a remarkable piece of nearly 30 feet in length and we have now made all the necessary arrangements to bring this panel, in a manner befitting its grandeur and hope to be able to place it for sale at an early date, as Volume III of this publication.

Our thanks are specially due to Sir R. K. Shanmukham Chettiar, K.C.I.E., Dewan of Cochin, who from the very beginning has given every encouragement and support for bringing this gigantic work to completion. Considering the rigid strictness which has been observed by the Government of Cochin in even permitting anybody to take photographic copies of these paintings, we must acknowledge our indebtedness to the enlightened and art-minded Dewan for encouraging the publication of a few of the original murals in the present form. No doubt these paintings cannot be regarded as discoveries; but as they have been made available for the first time to a wider circle of art lovers, we except that these paintings, just like new discoveries, would go a long way to fill some at least of the blanks in the history of Indian art. Our indebtedness to Professor V. Rangacharya, Retired Professor of Indian History, Presidency College, Madras, requires special mention as he was pleased to go through the manuscript of the text and give us very valuable suggestions. Further we are glad that he has contributed a most interesting article on the historical background of these arts to form part of this text. Mr. G. Venkatachalam, the well-known art critic of South India, has given a short note on some of the aesthetical aspects of Indian murals, and in his own inimitable way given a frank

opinion of the present condition of these murals. An authoritative account of the history of the Mattancherry Palace, with particular reference to the location of these murals, forms the subject matter of an article specially contributed for this book by the State Archaeologist, Mr. P. Anujan Achan. Last but not least important is the technical article from the pen of Mr. Jayantilal Parekh of Sri Aravindo Ashram, Pondichery, who was responsible for faithfully copying these mural paintings for the Art Gallery. We would be failing in our duty if we do not acknowledge our gratitude to Mr. K. N. Vembu, of Messrs. Devi Press Limited, Madras for printing this text, in, as short a time as possible.

Many others have assisted us in this task, and we take this opportunity to convey to one and all of them our most heartfelt thanks for helping us with their suggestions and healthy criticism, all of which put together have enabled us to make this compilation as exhaustive and we hope, as satisfactory to the art-loving public, as possible.

Madras.
November 1940.

V. R. CHITRA.
T. N. SRINIVASAN.

FOREWORD

MY first introduction to Indian art was at Ajanta. It was in these ancient caves of the Buddhist monks that my eyes were opened to the greatness of Indian art and the vastness of our cultural heritage. The rhythmic compositions of the frescoes and their robust humanity, frankness and freedom, left a deep impression on my mind. I realised that here was a great and immortal art.

Another aspect of Indian art which impressed me greatly is the art of the " Stapathis ", the traditional image-makers of South India. Some of the bronzes, especially those of the Chola period, are masterpieces of the art of the sculptor and I consider them as a unique contribution of South India.

When I came to Cochin in 1935 I was anxious to know the evidences of the cultural heritage of the people of Kerala. I knew that as the centre of the great Chera Kingdom of the past, Kerala was the home of valuable relics of Dravidian culture and art. The old dance-art of Kathakali has been attracting dancers from all over the world. The interesting art of the wood and ivory carvers and the temple architecture of Kerala have always interested students of art. My attention was drawn to the beautiful wall paintings in some of the temples and palaces.

Many of the frescoes were beginning to fade away. Some were inside the walls of temples which were not accessible to all persons. With a view to enable all lovers of art to know and appreciate these unique frescoes I took steps to have some of them copied. This was done by local artists helped and guided by two artists of the Santiniketan School. These are now housed in the Town Hall at Trichur and are

open to the public. They are attracting a good deal of public attention and the gallery is becoming increasingly popular.

The Cochin murals are in the best traditions of the Hindu temple art, religious, decorative and stylised. They are painted in rich warm colours and in the accepted tempera technique. The compositions are rather florid and the figures are all conventionally treated and profusely clothed and ornamented. They reflect some aspects of Hindu life and art—exuberant, over-ornate and too full of details. The Cochin murals are no doubt very different from the Ajanta frescoes which, though religious in sentiment, are more sensuous and virile and less mystical and symbolic. The beauty of Ajantan art is its truthfulness to life and nature, its glowing humanity, its healthy humour and, above all, its restraint and simplicity. The Hindu mind has a strange tendency to dwell in fanciful regions where creative expression is concerned and to evolve fantastic forms to represent some cosmic idea or illustrate a mythological event. The Cochin murals exhibit many of these characteristics.

Most of the wall paintings inside the temples are scenes from the Mahabaratha while the murals in the Mattancheri Palace are mostly incidents from the Ramayana. Some of these paintings are of a fragmentary character and some are large panels, narrative and continuous.

The scene depicting the marriage of Siva and Parvathi is undoubtedly one of the best of these murals. This is a long panel in which are grouped together not only the major gods of the Hindu Pantheon but also the lesser deities, rishis and worshippers. It is an animated scene and there is a lot of excitement in the crowd. Women are whispering to one another and happiness is writ large on their faces while the chief actors, Vishnu, Siva and Parvathi stand intensely agitated with significant smiles and the irrepressible Narada stands close by, evidently enjoying a musical joke.

Apart from their aesthetic value these murals are interesting records of the civilisation that produced them. They have a naive quality of their own and like the other folk arts of the land are extremely un-

sophisticated. It is intriguing to note that not only the details of costumes, crowns and ornaments but also the stylised smiles, attitudes and poses of the characters are still preserved in the Kathakali dance of to-day.

In view of the unique character of these murals it was decided to produce them in a form accessible to art lovers in general. This handsome publication is really the result of the enterprise of Mr. V. R. Chitra, late of the Madras School of Arts. With the permission of the Cochin Government he brought out this magnificent publication. The plates are beautifully printed and the get-up is superb in the best Japanese style. It is a venture of which any one can be proud.

The art world is richer by the discovery of these old paintings and by the timely publication of these portfolios and I heartily commend them to all lovers of art.

Diwan's House,
Ernakulam,
Dated 18th October 1940.

R. K. SHANMUKHAM CHETTY.

VOLUME I

PLATES I—III.

KRISHNA
SPORTING WITH GOPIS IN BRINDAVANA

THE early period of Krishna's life as a child and youth was spent in Brindavana, a village near Muttra. The most authoritative history of his life forms the subject matter of one of the Puranas—the Bhagavata, and minute details of this period of his life have not only served as a fountain source of a copious literature in the hands of numerous poets, but have exercised unlimited inspiration on the artists of India. The material of the original Purana has indeed been utilised in enriching the literature of every Indian language and beautifying the art of every Indian art or people. It can be safely said that there is not a single school of Indian painting, beginning from the earliest Gupta period to the present day, that has not portrayed one episode or other of Krishna's life, either by the chisel or the brush.

South India has contributed no mean share to the development of this cult; and differences of the sectarian schools of Vaishnavaism and Saivaism have not stood in the way of its progress and popularity. Hindus as a body revere Krishna. The numerous sculptural pieces found in South Indian temples consist, among others, of exquisite masterpieces depicting the various attitudes of Krishna, just as the icons of the purely South Indian Schools furnish remarkable masterpieces of the concretion of this deity. So, it is no wonder that the Kerala school of artists also should contribute their share in the representation of Krishna's history; and this picture, among others, is one which portrays rather a gay episode of his life.

In this mural painting, Krishna is seen frivoling with the Gopis—the cow maids of Brindavana,—in a pavilion situated in the midst of a forest, probably during the season of Vasanta, which corresponds to the months of April and May of the English calendar. Hindu astronomers have divided the year into six seasons; and as this particular season immediately succeeds the 'Sasiruthu', the two coldest months of the year, its beginning is usually welcomed as the period during which people can discard their warm clothing, take pleasant baths in the rivers and roam freely about in the forests, enjoying the scenary and adorning themselves with the multitudinous variety of sweetsmelling flowers which give beauty as well as sweet scent. Vasanta, in fact, is considered the best among the seasons; the favourite time for God of Love; and the artist, perhaps, had this in view, while portraying Krishna's sport with the Gopis.

In this picture, Krishna is represented as a fairly adult person and lying in the pavilion with the Gopis crowding around him in different attitudes and postures. One note-worthy feature about the figure of Krishna is that, whereas he is usually represented with two hands, he is here shown as possessing eight hands. Perhaps this is meant to portray his desire to satisfy the yearning of each of the Gopis simultaneously and without partiality; had he been represented with two hands, there would have been a natural ground for jealousy among his admirers. With two of his hands, he plays the flute; and with the other hands he is occupied in dalliance with his comrades. No less than sixteen Gopis are seen in the picture, and their facial expressions show their anxiety and eagerness to please Krishna in every possible form. In consonance with the season, evidently the artist has represented the floor of the pavilion as being covered with a bed of flowers over which Krishna is seen lying down on the lap of one of the Gopis.

The figure of Krishna is exquisitely drawn. He is crowned with a kirita made of flowers. He is adorned with strings of pearl and other ornaments, and he wears a pitambara. The figures of all the Gopis are very carefully drawn and every type of facial expression is shown with exquisite skill and faithfulness to nature, by the artist. Two portions of this picture are enlarged in Plates II and III, to show clearly the varying

expressions of their faces. In these enlargements, the facial cut of the Gopis is seen very clearly; and it is obvious that the peculiar contour of their face is different from what is seen in the figures of Ajanta and Bagh. The gentle curves are purely Hindu in conception, with no admixture of any other extraneous school of painting. Then again, the faces of those who are in actual contact with Krishna express the gratification of their ambition in lovely bashfulness. Equally well represented are two Gopis whose faces show a little dejection for their inability to get access to their Lord. In the left hand corner stand two of them, who appear as though they are plotting a device, by which they can reach the enthralling hero of their hearts.

To give a dignified background to this scene, the artist has portrayed in front, the Brindavana forest as abounding in deer, which also give themselves up to merry enjoyment. The study of animals displayed here is remarkable both from the anatomical and the artistic view-points. The black-spotted deer commonly found in Northern India is drawn well, and some of them are depicted in sports and gratifications very faithfully.

On top of the picture, the artist has also shown a bit of the roof of the pavilion, which he has taken as an opportunity to represent bird life; for we see here a few pigeons, two of which are in pairs. The birds are drawn with skill and especially the two of them at play, desire special notice.

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PLATE—IV.

SIVA & PARVATHI
ARDHANAREESWARA & DURGA

IT is commonly believed that Siva's abode in Kailas is ever frequented by Rishies and Devas and according to Siva-puranas, Siva, in the form of Dakshinamurthi is often said to be presiding over literary discussions, that took place there among the Rishies and Gods and he is ably assisted in this task by his wife Parvati and his two sons, Ganesha and Skandha.

In the mural painting, this forms the subject of the upper panel, where Siva is seated on an elaborately worked Simhasana with his Consort. The throne, of which the lower Simhasana portion and the back only are seen, is rich in details. The seat is supported by lions on either side and a canopy, the design of which is symmetric and intricate, forms a good background. Siva is exquisitely portrayed, and has a calm, dignified and majestic face. A sweet smile pervades and he bestows a loving glance to Parvati. His Jatamakuta is worked out carefully, with a nice little crescent-moon on top. Around his neck, are some ornaments and a chain of skulls, while a wreathing cobra descends down from his left neck. Siva is portrayed as having four hands, the upper ones carrying the Parasu—the axe and the mriga, the deer, the right lower one is gracefully posed in Abhaya pose, while the left hand goes round the waist of Parvati, with the hand pointed downwards in Varada pose. Siva, being seated with his right leg loosely hanging, has his left leg bent in such a way as to form the seat of Parvati. His dress consists of a nice tiger skin, the stripes of which the artist has very truthfully but strikingly painted, so as to give it a conspicuity in the picture.

Parvati is portrayed as a young and beautiful woman, with a coy and bashful face. She is seated on the left thigh of Siva, and wears a richly jewelled crown. Her pose suggests the tribhanga form, mentioned in Silpa Sastras, as one of the characteristic attitudes of female deities. She has two hands, the right one being invisible as it goes round Siva in embrace and the left hand delicately holding a Nilotpala flower. She is naturally enough, richly decorated with strings of pearls and other ornaments, and is also dressed with a thin finely-drawn saree.

To the right of Siva, is Ganesh on his usual mouse-vehicle. He is represented, according to customary fashion, with an elephant's face and with two hands, in one of which he is holding the broken portion of his own tusk, while with the other he supports the up-lifted face of his active little vehicle. On the opposite side is Skandha, the other son of Siva, seated on a beautifully-painted peacock. His right arm encircles the neck of his vehicle and has in his hand a small Trisula or trident. The left-hand rests on the hip. The artist has portrayed a serpent entwined round his waist. It is rather unusual to decorate Skandha with serpents. The foliage of the peacock is closed, and as it is standing in a fairly restless position, the artist has taken this opportunity to make his occupant sit rather tightly and so give him the opportunity to exhibit his artistic skill.

Around Siva are six Rishis, all with flowing beards and matted hair, of whom two are in the attitude of worship, having both their hands in anjali pose. The Rishis have no ornaments except strings of beads round their arms and necks, and probably, with one missing, they may represent the Sapta Rishis or seven sages who are supposed to be always in the company of Siva, in deciding the various issues that arise during their literary debates.'

Forming the lower portion of the picture, there are certain figures but they are not intact, and it is difficult to say definitely what they are meant to represent. However, to the extreme left, is a standing figure, which probably represents Ardhanareeswara—the form of Siva, which is half male and half female. The circumstances under which Siva took this form are interesting and, briefly stated, the mythological story is as follows :—

On a certain occasion, when Siva was seated with his consort Parvati on the top of the Kailasa mountain, the Devas and Rishis went there to pay their homage to him. All of them, except, the Rishi Bringi, went round both Siva and Parvati in their circumambulations, and also bowed to both. But Bringi had previously vowed to worship only one being that is Shiva : in conformity with his vow, he neglected to go round or bow down to Parvati. Parvati, growing angry with him, decided in her mind that all his flesh and blood should disappear from his body. Instantly, he was reduced to a skeleton, covered only with the skin. In this state, he was unable to support himself in an erect position. Seeing his pitiable plight, Siva gave him a third leg, to enable him to keep up his equilibrium ; and Bringi became so pleased with his Lord that, out of his joy, he danced vigorously with his three legs, and praised the Lord for His grace. The desire of Parvati to humble Bringi thus failed, and the failure caused great annoyance to her. She therefore went away from the scene, and devoted herself to penance. At the end of it, Siva was so pleased with his consort that He granted her wish of being united with his own body. Thus, the Ardhanareeswara form was assumed by Siva in order that Rishi Bringi could not go round Him alone to the exclusion of Parvati. But, undaunted by this impediment, Bringi assumed the shape of a beetle, and pierced a hole through the composite body of Siva and Parvati and thus accomplished his vow.

In the mural painting, the right half is Siva, while the left is Parvati; and accordingly each half is decorated to signify the male and the female aspects. In the kireeta portion, the right half is matted without any ornaments, while the left half is highly ornamented with gems and precious stones. The right ear has a large circular Kundala, while the left ear is ornamented with the customary feminine ear-jewels. Lower down on the left side, the deity has a prominent breast to signify the Pārvati aspect of the figure. Logically enough, this muhurta is painted with having only three hands, two on the right, carrying the common weapons of Siva, viz., the Trisula and the Parasu, while the single left-hand of Parvati gracefully holds a Nilotpala flower. In consonance with the upper portion, the lower limbs are also differentially dressed ; for the side belonging to Siva is uncovered but for the small strip of tiger skin wrapped above the thighs, while the Parvati-portion has a richly deco-

PLATE II.

GURUVAYOOR APPAN.

rated pitambara. The figure stands on a Padmapeetha and adjacent to the deity is the figure of a Rishi, in the attitude of prayer.

On the right side, is a seated figure of a Goddess on a lion. Probably it represents Durga in one of her common forms as Jayadurga, who, according to the Silparatna, should have three eyes and four arms, in which she should be shown as carrying the Sankha, the Chakra, the bow with arrows, and the crescent moon on her crown. Her vehicle is a lion, and she is considered to be one of the forms of the Navadurgas (the Nine Durgas), who are mentioned in the Agama-Sastras. The portrayal of this deity in the mural painting is according to convention ; but in addition to the three weapons mentioned in the Silparatna she also carries a sword. Besides her, are two individuals probably a Rishi and his consort, both with folded hands in Anjali pose.

It may be conjectured that the lower portion of this panel may be meant to represent Sakti—worship, often associated with the Siva cult, in which the feminine aspects of the Gods, who are known by special names—Navadurgas in case of Siva and Ashtalakshmis in case of Vishnu, form the principal objects of worship and adoration.

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PLATE—V.

VISHNU
AS ANANTHASAYANAMURTHI

VISHNU, as represented in this mural painting, is a faithful portrayal of that deity, as he appears in Sri Padmanabhaswami temple at Trivandrum, where he is considered to be the **de jure** ruler of the Travancore State, in consideration of which, this particular form of Vishnu is held in a supreme veneration by the people of the West Coast and all Royal Honours are shown to him.

According to strict religious canons, this aspect of Vishnu is supposed to represent the Yogasayanamurty form of this deity, which is one of his primeval forms—a form which assumes at the time of the Pralaya —world-deluge, when he is supposed to impose on himself a mystic form of sleep called Yoganidra, by which he, in order to create a fresh Universe, contemplates on the scheme, and mode that he should adopt in the purpose of re-creation. Padmanabhaswami, as the tutelary God of the Travancore State, is a subject, often appealing to artists. It can be asserted that the mural painting in the Mattancherry Palace is one of the best pictures of this deity.

The value of this picture is further enhanced by the fact that it is only in this aspect of Vishnu, that all the three important deities of the Hindu pantheon, viz., Brahma, Vishnu and Siva can be seen together. Moreover, in this particular picture, in addition to these deities, forming the foreground of the panel, there are the ten Avatars of Vishnu.

In the painting, Vishnu is drawn as a full-sized figure, and is made to recline almost horizontally on the serpent, Adisesha, with the head directed to the left of the observer. The reclining body has about one-fourth of it somewhat raised, while the remaining three-fourths repose flat upon the serpent bed. The five hoods of Sesha are raised up as a canopy over the head of the reclining figure. The graceful pose and refined expression of the principal image at once capture the gaze. The facial features are most elegant, with high intellectual fore-head, large meditative eyes indicating the mystic sleep, long nose, and smiling lips, all of which give an air of spirituality to the countenance. The head is crowned with a much jewelled kirita, set with the choicest gems. Round the neck, the jewellery is not profuse but select; of which the most important are the Kaustabhamani, the Yagnopavita, running from the left shoulder to the right side and the Udarabandha around the waist. Issuing from the navel of Vishnu, is seated Brahma, on his usual Padmasana, the lotus seat.

This figure of Vishnu has only two hands. The right one is stretched straight towards the pillow so as to reach a small Linga, placed at one extremity of the coils of Adisesha. The significance of this attitude is, according to the local Purana, that the Lord is in an attitude of blessing Siva. It says that Vishnu absolved Siva at Ananthasayanam (another name for Trivandrum) of some sin by which he was afflicted, and hence it is represented that he is holding his right hand over the Linga image of Siva in protection. The fore-arm of the Lord below the elbow is very beautifully drawn with the traditional jewels. The fingers also are long and slender, and the thumb and the first finger of the hand are bent in a very elegant manner. This hand rests on the thigh of one of his consorts, Sridevi or Lakshmi, who is seated near his head. The left hand is slightly uplifted with the elbow bent to form the Kataka pose, and also to enable him to inhale the sweet scent of a lotus flower which he is holding. Lying unused in front of Vishnu on the serpent bed, lies the sword of the God. It signifies the monarchical or protective prerogative attached to this particular deity. Both the legs are stretched out, and is covered by a very delicately drawn pitambara. To the extreme right of the picture are the two feet of the deity reposing on the lap of Bhoomi-devi—the Goddess Earth, his other Consort, who is seated at his feet.

The general expression of the deity is one of calm and limitless grace combined with an air of profound meditativeness.

The two consorts of Vishnu, Sridevi—the Lakshmi, and Boodevi —the Goddess of the Earth are well drawn, and the artist has attempted in this panel to portray them with the grace of an elderly matron instead of a young damsel in harmony with the spiritual significance of the subject. Their gaze is naturally directed towards their Lord and they are both seated on the coils of the serpent on either side of Him.

Forming the back-ground of this group, above the level of the figure of Vishnu, are painted many divinities and sages. Just behind Brahma is the figure of Narada, with matted hair and beard, playing on his veena. To the left of him, is Garuda—the vehicle of Vishnu, with a fearful face, in which are represented the significant features of the eagle, viz., round eyes and a long protruding lance-like tongue—a singular characteristic of Malabar art ; while his kirita is adorned with the hoods of a three-hooded serpent, and his two hands are folded in Anjali pose—in the attitude of worship. On either side of his arms, the two wings of the eagle are beautifully portrayed. This figure is painted only up to the knees, as the lower portions of the legs are hidden behind the figure of Vishnu. To the left of Narada, is the figure of Sukhabrahmam, a divine rishi who is usually represented as having the face of a parrot. Near the feet of Vishnu and just above them are seen the figures of the demons, Madhu and Kaitabha. It is not possible to clearly make out the other divine figures on the right side of Narada.

Sprouting out of the sea of milk, known as the Ksheerabdhi, on which Vishnu lies, are about a dozen lotus blooms, of which ten are occupied by the pictures of the ten Avatars of Vishnu. This is a very ingenious and in fact a novel method of representing the earthly incarnations, which Vishnu takes, as the Bhagavat Gita says, when virtue fails and vice predominates. The artist has utilized the environment to derive these Avatars from the primeval form of the deity, and also to assign to them a seat just below the reclining deity. The Dasavatars of Vishnu are usually portrayed by artists as individual pictures and are seldom made use of in the composition of other pictures. But here the artist harmo-

niously and pleasantly blends these in one and the same picture, thereby at once enhancing the aesthetic value of the piece and representing the incarnations as but the manifestations of the original deity in his Yogasayana posture. The Avatars represented from left to right of the observer are Matsya (the fish), Kurma (the tortoise), Varaha (the boar), Narasimha, (the man-lion), Vamana, (the dwarf), Parasurama, Ramachandra, (the hero of the epic Ramayana), Balarama (who can be easily recognised from his white complexion) Krishna, and lastly the horse-faced Kalki, the Avatar, that is yet to come at the end of this present age. All the figures except Vamana have kiritas on their head. The first four Avatars have four arms, while the remaining have only two. All the ten figures are very carefully drawn in accordance with the strict mythological canons, while the few lotus stems on the left side of the picture are left unoccupied.

PLATES VI—X.

KRISHNA
LIFTING THE GOVARDHANA HILL

THIS mural painting is one of the finest portraits of a well-known episode in the life of Krishna. It is from the incidents of the boyhood of Krishna that artists draw themes for their pictorial subjects ; for each of these childish pranks is more or less typical of the juvenile stage of life. It is only in the history of Krishna that each little act of childhood is pauranically represented in attractive forms ; and to every Hindu mother and father, child Krishna forms, a fascinating object of love and adoration.

This subject is described at length both in the Vishnu Purana and in the Bhagavata (Tenth Skandha) and briefly narrated, the story connected with this particular incident is as follows :—

Krishna, when returning to his native place in Brindavan, found all the cow-herds busily engaged in preparing for a sacrifice to be offered to Indra. Going to the elders, he asked them, as if out of curiosity, what the festival of Indra was, in which they took so much pleasure. Nanda, his foster-father, replied that Indra, being the soverign of the clouds and the waters, must be propitiated every year with a sacrifice ; otherwise, he said, the earth would become barren, the rains also would stop, and mankind would be steeped in misery. This reply infuriated Krishna, who asserted that as they were neither cultivators of the soil nor dealers in merchandise, there was no necessity to worship Indra in this connection. In fact, he said their divinities were only the forests and cows ; and if they wished that their animals should live happily and yield plenty, they should only pray to the spirits of the forests and mountains, the only proper divinities, who could bestow prosperity and happiness on them.

PLATE III.

KIRATAMURTI.

Krishna therefore suggested that it was improper to worship Indra, and induced his father to do the same sacrifice to the Govardhana mountain. Nanda and other cow-herds were pleased to approve of his suggestion. Accordingly that year, the inhabitants of Brindavan decided to worship the Govardhana mountain by presenting curds, milk and richly prepared food to it. After the offerings were made, the entire population, with their cows and bulls went round the hill, and spent a merry time. The ceremony being completed, the cow-herds returned to their respective homes.

Indra, being thus disappointed of his offerings, was exceedingly angry ; and calling the attendant clouds known as the Samvarttaka, he commanded them to afflict Brindavan with torrential and tempestuous rains. The clouds obeyed their master's command and came down in fearful storm and showers, with the object of destroying the cattle and the cow-herds. Soon, the whole earth became enveloped in impenetrable darkness and on all sides the heavy down-pour of rain covered the entire land with water. All the calves and the cow-herds pitiously implored Krishna to help them. Of course, the bad motive of Indra being known to Krishna, he said that he would defend them by lifting the spacious mountain of Govardhana from its stony base ; and, having lifted it, he asked all the herdsmen to come and take shelter under it. Krishna held the mountain aloft with his right hand for seven days, to the great joy and wonder of his people ; and Indra, being foiled in his purpose, commanded the clouds to cease and once more the heavens became clear. Then Krishna restored the great mountain Govardhana to its original site.

This topic is very well represented in this mural painting. Krishna is seen in the centre of the picture and he holds aloft the Govardhana mountain with his left hand, (instead of the right, as described in the Bhagavata), while with his right hand he is playing on Murali or flute. The face of Krishna shows the sweet childishness and he wears on his head a crown topped with peacock feathers. His body is a gracefully bent a little to the right—in the tribhanga posture, to indicate the heaviness of the weight he supports. Under the uplifted hill many cow-boys and their womenfolk are graphically shown as taking shelter, with their children and herds of cattle. One striking thing to be noted

here is the depiction of the cow-herds ; most of them are represented with the dress and ornaments characteristic of the West Coast. The womenfolk have not covered the upper portion of their body, and their sarees are tied round the waist in a very simple manner, and in some they cover the head. Moreover the ornaments, especially those worn on their ears and around the waist, are characteristic of the West Coast. Next to Krishna, on his left side, stands Balarama, whose fair complexion forms a contrast to the dark one of his brother. This portion is enlarged in Plate IX to show the facial expression of the cow-boys, which is indeed delicately and realistically drawn. Their faces show the anxiety, surprise and worry that they have to undergo as a result of the sudden storm, as well as the sense of relief due to the assurance that, whatever might have been the difficulties, their Lord and Saviour Krishna would certainly help them to surmount them. The lower portions of their body are hidden by the representation of cows and calves, and it is noteworthy to observe that the animal study is simply exquisite. To make this more clear, this portion is shown as an enlargement in the lower panel of Plate VII. To the right of Krishna stand the womenfolk of Brindavana in different and engaging attitudes. Here also the artist has exhibited remarkable skill and mastery, as is obvious from the scene in which a mother hurriedly and anxiously takes up her child, to protect it from the torrential rains. Equally remarkable is the study of an old woman, who being unable to walk, crawls under the hill to protect herself and is helped by another to reach the coveted shelter. Just below the right hand of Krishna is the marvellous painting of a child standing in the small space that it could get with folded hands in an attitude of protecting itself from the cold and rain. This portion is enlarged to form the upper panel of Plate VII, where minute details can more easily be observed.

Equally remarkable is the study of animal life on the Govardhana hill, which forms, in fact, the upper half of the mural painting. Remarkable studies of lions at play and also of a pair of antelopes form the subject matter of Plate X. In Plate VIII upper panel, is an enlargement of a small portion of the Govardhana hill where a hunter with a spear repulses the attack of a lion which as a line-drawing, may be regarded as a masterpiece.

PLATE—XI.

DEVI
WORSHIP

THIS Plate contains two distinct sections, the upper section representing Mahalakshmi and the lower Bhutamata.

The worship of Mahalakshmi is associated with the cult of Vishnu, whose devi She is. When the ocean of milk was churned for obtaining amrita,—the divine nectar, the goddess of wealth, Lakshmi, came out of that ocean among other valuable things. Lakshmi is here seated upon a white lotus. She has four arms. Her two lower hands are kept in the kataka pose holding in each of them a lotus with a long stalk, while in her upper left hand she holds a matulunga fruit and in the other a khetaka. She is adorned with a crown on her forehead, and ornaments around her neck and hands. On either side of her stand two sages dancing, while just in front of them are Siva, Vishnu and others Devas standing with hands held in anjali pose—the attitude of prayer.

According to the Silpasastra and other works on art, Lakshmi his only two arms ; but when she is worshipped in a temple she is represented as a four-armed deity. Amsumadbhedagama, describes Lakshmi as having the colour of golden yellow. According to this work, "she should wear golden ornaments set with rubies and other precious gems. In her ears there should be jewelled makarakundalas. The figure of Lakshmi has to be like that of a maiden who has just attained age and should be of very handsome appearance, with pretty eye-brows, eyes like the petals of a lotus, a full neck and a well developed breast. She

should wear a bodice and be adorned with various ornaments on the head. In her right hand, she should carry a lotus flower and in the left a bilva fruit ; she should be draped in beautiful clothing and her back should be broad and attractive ". In the Silpasastra, Lakshmi is described as holding in her left hand the lotus and in her right the bilva fruit. The Silpasastra mentions that the colour of Lakshmi should be white, while the Vishnudharmottara describes the goddess as having a dark complexion.

It may look rather strange that Lakshmi is here represented with a third eye on her forehead, which is the symbol of the Devis of the Saiva cult. This perhaps suggests that the Lakshmi represented here is the Supreme Mahalakshmi, described in the Devimahatmya, from whom the various cosmic gods and goddesses are said to have been evolved. This Supreme Mahalakshmi is described as " Gupta-rupi Devi," that is, the Devi who is unmanifested, who takes the three forms of Saraswati, Lakshmi and Mahakali representing the Sattvika, the Rajasa and the Tamasa attributes of prakrti. She is above all cults and she is regarded as the Supreme being by the Devi worshippers. In the painting reproduced here, Mahalakshmi is seen surrounded by Siva and Vishnu, and other gods and sages are worshipping her as the Supreme Goddess, the Mother of the Universe.

Bhutamata (lower section of the Plate) is one of the goddesses belonging to the cult of Siva. She is seated in the Sukhasana (easy) pose in the centre of the lotus seat. Her two hands display the varada and abhaya mudras. She wears a kireetamakuta on her head, and ornaments around her neck and hands. She has a third eye on her forehead—a symbol of the Siva cult to which she belongs. She is worshipped by the Devas including Vishnu and Indra, and by the Yakshas and the Gandharvas. Indra and Vishnu stand in front of the Simhasana to the left and right side respectively of Bhutamata. Indra is represented as Sahasraksha (thousand-eyed), with eyes all over his body. His two hands are held in the anjali pose and in the other two he holds pasa and akshamala respectively. Vishnu has his two front hands kept in the anjali pose, and holds in his back right hand, his favourite murali. It is not clear what he holds in the other hand.

According to strict iconographical canon, this deity should possess these features : " The general appearance of this goddess is black, and she has long eyes. The colour of her face is either white or red. She wears a linga on her person, and has only two hands in which she holds khadga and khetaka respectively. She is seated on a simhasana. Her head is decorated with ornaments of pearls. Bhutamata is worshipped by bhutas, pretas, pisachas, and by Indra, Yakshas, Gandharvas, etc., and her abode is under an asvattha tree ". The Bhutamata represented here is of a slightly different type. She does not wear the linga on her body, nor does she hold the khadga and khetaka in her hands. She has, however, a third eye on her forehead, and is worshipped by Vishnu, besides Indra and others. In other respects she possesses all the features described above.

PLATE—XII.

CORONATION OF RAMA

THE subject of this painting has always been a favourite with Indian artists. From the very beginning of the painting of Pauranic scenes in India to this day, almost every school of painting has attempted to portray the grand scene representing Rama's coronation ; and it is interesting to note that each painter has aimed at enhancing the artistic effect by introducting at least some new idea or change in the composition of the picture with a view to make it better. This present picture indicates how, as elsewhere in South India, the Malabar school of painting has glorified this episode.

In this particular mural painting, Rama is seated in the centre on a Simhasana or a lion throne, which is represented by the two lion-shaped legs of the throne. To give the idea of coronation, Rama is wearing on his head a costly kirita and his neck is adorned by many jewels. The conventional armlets and wristlets are very beautifully drawn and he is represented as seated crosslegged, with the left thrown over the right—a symbolical posture which connotes the authority and prestige of the crown. His facial expression is refined and dignified and indicates his exalted position. To his left, is seated Sita the ideal woman, whose extremely graceful form is made doubly graceful by her feeling—a feeling natural to one who had more than human sufferings to realise the present happiness, slightly bashful. Behind the pair are the three brothers of Rama—Lakshmana, Bharata, and Satrughna, of whom the latter two are holding an artistic pair of fans on either side of Rama. To the right of Rama, are the monkey-lord Sugriva and his counsellor Hanuman, with Vibhishana, the king of Lanka. Hanuman is shown as standing characteristically at a respectful distance from his master

PLATE IV.

LAKSHMANA DISFIGURING SURPANAKA.

with folded hands. To the left of Sita are represented six Rishis—perhaps six of the Saptarishis, who came down from heaven to bless Rama on the eve of his coronation. Forming the lower portion of the picture are a few monkeys, who are transported with joy for witnessing the grand spectacle of the coronation of the divine hero, for whom they had fought so whole-heartedly.

The artist has utilised the space above the pavilion in which the coronation of Rama is taking place, to portray some familiar scenes, which are typically characteristic of the Kerala region. To the left is seen a small but neatly-constructed house, in which the inmates are attending to their domestic duties. Just above the tower of the coronation pavilion, is seen another building. It has a long rectangular wall, in the centre of which is a small conical tower. This may represent a temple. Between these two buildings, a portion of a tree is seen, on the branches of which are seated two figures. These are the Gandharvas, who played divine music at the time of Rama's coronation.

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PLATES XIII, XIV & XV.

SIVA & PARVATI
IN KAILAS

IN contrast to Plate IV, which represents the same deities, this mural painting portrays Siva and Parvati in a more natural and realistic atmosphere and the details are worked out more elaborately. This representation of Siva and Parvati is usually known as "Uma Maheswaramurti", and it is one of the sixty-four Muhurthams or the representations, of Siva met with in the South Indian models of this deity. Two ancient sanskrit works, the Vishnudharmothara and the Rupamandana give elaborate descriptions of this Murti. The former says that, in this aspect, the figures of Siva and Uma, which should be drawn very beautifully, should be seated on a peeta embracing each other. Siva should have a Jatamakuta on his head, with the crescent moon stuck in it. He should have two arms, the right one of which should hold a Nilotpala flower, and the left one placed in embrace on the left shoulder of Uma. The Devi should have a handsome bust and hip and should have her right hand thrown in embrace on the right shoulder of Siva, while holding in her left hand a mirror. But in the other treatise, the Rupamandana, a slightly different description of Siva is given. It requires that He should have four arms; that in one of the right hands there should be a Trisula, and in the other a Matulunga fruit; and that one of the left arms should be thrown on the shoulder of Uma, and the other should have a snake. There should be, it further observes, in this group the Vrishabha or the bull of Siva, Ganesa, Subrahmanya and the lean emaciated figure of Rishi Bringi dancing—all arranged in an artistic composition.

But the figure of Uma Mahesvara as it appears in this mural painting does not conform to the descriptions given in either of the above works. Here Siva is seated on a Bhadrasana of white lotus, with Parvati on his left lap, while his right leg is made to rest on the ground. He has four arms, the upper right hand carries the Parasu or the axe, and the left the Mriga or the deer. He holds the lower right hand in the Abhaya pose, while the lower left clasps Parvati, in such a way that it passes between her body and her left hand. His face is very charmingly drawn, as can be seen from an enlargement of the same in Plate XIV lower panel. He has well-cut features, a broad forehead, a pair of lovely entrancing eyes, a long aquiline nose and smiling lips. The centre of the forehead is ornamented with the customary third eye and a pair of elaborately ornamented ear-rings adorn the ears. Unlike in the other picture (Plate IV), Siva is not decorated with Jatamakuta with a crescent moon, but is represented as wearing a very highly ornamented kirita. Perhaps this departure from the usual representation may be ascribed to the fact that, as Lord of Kailas and in the midst of his own worshippers and attendants, Siva puts off his role as a wandering mendicant, and decorates himself, to suit His environment with rich jewellery and garments. It is obvious that he is not dressed in the usual tiger skin garment as in the other mural painting, but with a Pithambara with a nice border. Moreover, the jewellery that he is wearing are not the usual chain of skulls and garland of serpents, but beautiful necklaces of strings of pearls and a garland of flowers.

In harmony with the decoration of Siva, Parvati also is very elegantly treated; and her pose is extremely graceful, and shows much artistic feeling. Not only is she very well drawn with a charming face, but the artist has portrayed her in such a way that her glance meets that of Siva, while her right hand is thrown over His right shoulder. She holds in her left hand the stem of Nilotpala flower, which has blossomed out for it is shown with its petals well spread out. To a certain extent, this picture may be considered as drawn in conformity with the Silparatna, another important Sanskrit treatise on art, which states that the left hand of the Devi should keep either a flower or be held in the Varada pose, or even might rest on the peetha on which she is seated. The Devi is required to be adorned with all ornaments, haras

(garlands) and Makuta and be further clad in silk garments. Standing on either side of the couple are a group of female attendants of Uma, with Chamaras in their hands. The mode of tying the head-dress and the method of its decoration and the manner in which the sarees are tied, are quite similar to what the residents of the West Coast do even to this day.

Among the male members in the group at the extreme left is seen Narada with a flowing pointed beard and playing on his veena. Next to him, stands a figure with fierce protruding eyes and grinning mouth ; it is perhaps Bhairava, the chieftain of Siva's army of demons. He is standing with his hands folded in anjali pose. There are a few more male attendants ; and to the left of Parvati is a diminutive figure engaged in earnest worship ; it may be one of the Ganas or attendants of Siva.

Below the Bhadrasana on either side, are seated Ganesa and Subrahmanya, the two children of Parvati on their respective vehicles—the mouse and the peacock. As studies of children, these two pictures are very remarkable and they have been enlarged in Plate XV, to show their minute details. These two interesting subjects are worthy of close study and the mode of their representation is of a very high order ; for though conforming to the mythological convention, they are very artistic as the restraint and austerity expressed by the principal figures are delightly balanced by these two. At the same time the seriousness and rhythm of the spiritual theme of the picture are not lost. Ganesa, the elder of the two sons is portrayed as a boy naked but disproportionately stout and stunted, seated on his favourite vehicle—the mouse. The animal itself is in a jolly mood, for it raises its snout up in a vertical form to support its master's hand, which is made to rest on it. Ganesa has a kirita on his usual elephant face. He has also a few ornaments round his neck. Forming his waist band is a circlet of small bells. He has only two hands, of which one is resting on the snout of the mouse while the other rests on the well-adorned covering on the back of the mouse, so that his body is slightly bent backwards to give a majestic air to the figure. On the other hand, Skandha is represented as a young and very beautiful child, thin and agile in form, seated on his favourite vehicle—

the peacock and fallen asleep on the wings of the bird. The pose of the child is very graceful and pleasing more than the ordinary portrayal of mythological personages. His sweet restfulness is suggestive of the qualities of purity and innocence, that are usually attributed to children. The peacock is rather disproportionately big for the size of its occupant. So much so, it has necessitated the child to clasp the animal by his right leg, so that he can keep up his balance and avoid falling down.

Below the pedestal, stand four children representing the Sanatkumaras. They are portrayed as naked children, with their hands uplifted in the attitude of prayer. On the right side is a full-size figure of Vrishabha, the bull of Siva crouched in a quite natural manner. Though it is only a study in line, the bull is very well drawn with good anatomical proportions. The background of the entire picture is beautifully decorated with floral designs, but it is difficult to exactly find out the botanical tree which it represents, as various kinds of flowers and leaves are represented on one and the same tree. Perhaps it represents some mythological tree like the Parijatha, for which it is hardly possible to give an earthly equivalent.

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PLATE—XVI.

VISHNU
AS VAIKUNTANATHA

AMONG the various forms of Vishnu described in the Sidhartha-samhita, Bhogasanamurti or Vaikuntanatha is one of the important aspects ; and it is the subject matter of this mural painting. It is believed that in Vaikunta, the abode of Vishnu, he is seated on the Simhasana formed by the serpent Adisesha. According to this authority, he should have four arms. In one of the two right hands the Chakra has to be held and in the other a Lotus, while, of the left hands, one has to carry the Sankha, and the other either made to rest on the hip, or upon the lap, or hold the Gada. In some forms His consorts are seated on either side.

In the mural painting now depicted, Vishnu is very magnificently portrayed as a remarkably well-built person, with an extremely charming face, crowned with a jewelled kirita. He is seated under the canopy formed by the five hoods of the serpent, Adisesha, whose body forms also the Simhasana of the deity, being coiled into three turns. Round the head of Vishnu, is a halo ; and he is richly jewelled with strings of pearls and other ornaments. A white flower stuck on each ear adds relief to the face, which has beautifully arched bows, elongated eyes and conspicuous Tilaka. In his four hands, He carries respectively, the Chakra (disc), the Sankha (conch), the Gada (mace) and the Padma (lotus). A garland of flowers, the Vanamala, is delicately drawn and it passes round the neck, and hangs loosely. He is also adorned with other ornaments like the Makarakundala, the Yagnopavita, and the

PLATE V.

RAMA'S RETURN TO AYODHYA IN THE AERIAL CHARIOT.

Udarabandha. Being seated on the folds of the serpent, Vishnu is depicted with the right leg crossed while the left one, where the border of the pithambara, the bangles and the toe-ring are beautifully worked out, is made to hang loosely.

To the right of Vishnu, the face of Garuda, His vehicle, is seen; and he can be identified by his sharp linear tongue and round protruding eyes. He is adorned with a delicately drawn tilaka and a kirita surmounted by the hood of a cobra. To the left of Vishnu, there is a Rishi with a long white beard and matted hair with uplifted hands in the attitude of prayer. Probably this represents Narada.

This figure is an exact painting of the image of Vishnu enshrined in the temple at Tripunittura, near Cochin and represents the replica of the deity, which is said to have been given to Arjuna who erected the Vishnu temple here. The local temple-chronicle records the story of the way, in which Arjuna came to possess this image.

While Krishna was at Dwaraka, a poor Brahmin who lost his first child soon after it was born, went straight to the Lord and complained of his merciless act of depriving his first-born child. His prayer was passed unnoticed. In this way eight of his children were born lifeless and, though on each occasion, the bereaved parent took the dead child to Dwaraka with the prayer to Krishna to restore it to life, his appeal remained unanswered. On the ninth occasion, the poor Brahmin met Arjuna on the way to the Lord's residence and narrated the tale of his sad plight. Arjuna, moved to pity, promised to save his next child and imposing upon himself the vow that, if he failed to do so, he would himself perish in the fire. This consoled the suppliant and when the next child was about to be born, he went to Arjuna and begged of him to fulfil his promise. Accordingly Arjuna came to the Brahmin's house and guarded it; but to their surprise, when the child was born, even its body was not to be found. This caused Arjuna immense grief and he immediately started in search of the child. Unable to find it anywhere, he went as a last resort, to his life-long friend Krishna; and on his advice both went to Vaikunta, the abode of Vishnu and praised Him. Vishnu was much pleased with them and instructed Yama, the God of

Death, to return all the ten children to the poor Brahmin. While Arjuna was leaving the place, after this successful mission, he requested Vishnu to give him permission to install His own image, on some sacred place on the earth for the worship of the people during Kaliyuga. Permission was graciously given ; and it is said that this image known locally as Santanagopalamurti was installed by Arjuna at Trippunittura.

Whatever may be the mythological significance of this image, the portrayal of Vishnu in this mural painting is superb. It is further noteworthy that this is one of the few single full-sized paintings that are found in the Mattancherry Palace, where every minute detail has been so delicately worked out, that the modern student of art can clearly study the motif of the original master.

PLATES XVII—XX.

SIVA
SPORTING WITH GANGA AND SURPRISED BY PARVATI

THIS is one of the finest master-pieces of the mural paintings representing Siva, now existing in the Mattancherry Palace. This represents Siva enjoying a tete-a-tete with Ganga in a lonely forest. He believes that he would not be disturbed, but to his utter disappointment, Parvati comes upon them riding on Nandi. When she sees her husband in company with another woman, she is naturally seized by indignation. In disgust she retraces her steps and quits the place. The artist has portrayed the scene in a remarkably exquisite manner.

The story is that King Sagara (an ancestor of Rama) had by his first wife Kesini, a son named Asamanjasa and sixty thousand others by his second wife Sumati. Asamanjasa was, from his childhood, a wicked man and his example affected the other children of Sagara and made them equally bad. The gods who could not bear the evil ways of the sons of Sagara, asked Rishi Kapila, one of the aspects of Vishnu, as to what would be the fate of all these wicked princes; to which the Rishi replied that in a short time, they would all perish. And the prophecy was fulfilled in this manner. Sagara arranged for a horse sacrifice, for which purpose he let loose a horse. It was stolen by Indra and hidden in the Patala-loka, (the nether world), near the hermitage of Kapila. Tracing the foot-prints of the horse, the sixty thousand sons of Sagara excavated the earth, till they reached the spot in the Patala-loka, where the horse was found. The princes, mistaking Kapila for

the thief, rushed on him to kill him. But the sage, by the power of his penance, reduced them to ashes. Having waited long for the return of his sons in vain, Sagara sent his grandson, Amsumat (son of Asamanjasa), to search for them. He traced his way into the Patala-loka and found the horse near Kapila. Being, unlike his uncles, a well-behaved boy, he implored Kapila to permit him to take away the horse. The rishi, pleased with his deportment, gave over the horse to him, informed him of the fate of his uncles and conferred upon him a boon to the effect that they would all go to heaven if their remains were purified by the touch of the holy waters of the divine Ganga. The sacrifice was then celebrated by Sagara. Later on, Bhagiratha, the grandson of Amsumat, performed severe austerities in order to bring down the celestial river. The latter was pleased with him and asked him who could resist the force of her fall on earth from heaven. She said that if none could do it, her might would cause the earth itself to be pierced. Bhagiratha replied that he would pray to Rudra, the all-powerfull Lord to bear the force of her descent. Accordingly he performed penance to Rudra for granting him the boon of receiving the Ganga on his head. Siva, being satisfied with his austerities, granted his prayer. At first Ganga thought that Siva would be unable to bear her descent and came down in great volume and with enormous force. Indignant at her haughty behaviour Siva, determined to humble her. Having received her on his mighty head, He made Ganga to wind through the infinite labyrinth of his matted locks for a long time and did not let her out. Being once again requested by Bhagiratha, Siva let her flow down and Bhagiratha then led the sacred river goddess to where his ancestor's ashes lay, and made them attain heaven.

The picture has for its background, the forest with wild animals and trees, being divided almost into two portions, of which the left-hand side depicts the bacchanalian scene of Siva and Ganga and the right-half is covered up by Parvati on the Nandi. The amorous sporting of Siva is very well portrayed by the artist. On an elegantly worked-out circular Asana, whose base is remarkably drawn with an intricate design of ornamentation and under the shadow of a spreading tree, Siva is seen with Ganga in an attitude of ecstatic love. The goddess is represented as a coy and shy woman who, apparantly conscious of the feeling that

she would create jealousy in the mind of Parvati, attempts to run away from being caught by Siva, but He catches hold of her.

Siva is here represented as having four hands, in two of which his usual symbols, the Parasu and the deer, are carried. The other two arms are in the attitude of caressing Ganga. The figure of Siva is very beautifully drawn. He is adorned with a long tapering kirita, on the top of which are depicted the crescent moon and the snake in harmonious company; while from his ears hang jewelled Kundalas and his chest is adorned with beautiful jewels. Ganga is also equally well depicted, and the painting portrays the exact moment, when Siva steals a kiss from her. Apart from the amorous attitude, one remarkable feature, that is worthy of note, is that, in their kissing, the nose, lips and lower jaws are so well delineated that a common dividing line serves to portray the contour of both the faces.

On the other side, Parvati is also very pleasingly drawn and since the artist's main intention is to portray her in an attitude of mental uneasiness arising out of jealously due to Siva's dalliance with another lady, her face exhibits her anguish and disgust; but the pose of her left hand is in Abhaya, thus clearly indicating that, though she could not bear to see the scene, yet her love towards her Lord has not diminished even though he has gone astray. With her right hand, she, so to say propels the unwilling bull to retrace its steps. The portrayal of the umbrella bearer by her side, has been done as a mere outline sketch, with minimum amount of labour and exertion. The bull, though drawn as a line drawing, has been done exceedingly well, with good anatomical proportions. The marginal decoration adds relief to the animal, which is itself adorned with bells and charmingly-designed coverings, and makes it stand boldly and spiritedly against the background of trees.

One note-worthy feature in this picture is the study of animals in the background, which represents the forest. In fact, all the denizens of the forest are represented and added to this we see most of them are in pairs sporting with each other. To a casual onlooker, the scene may appear vulgar; but the main object of the artist is to indicate the response of even the animal world to the general environment.

STUDY OF ANIMALS

ALL the above plates are portions of the original murals enlarged to bring out the details of animal study. In this selection, a variety of animals from wild beasts to domesticated cattle are represented and the main object in presenting these studies is to bring out clearly the efficiency of the Kerala artists in portraying animals. For instance, the drawing of the antelope in Plate XX, is only outline-brush drawing ; but with a few strokes of the brush the artist has brought into life a remarkable portraiture of the animal in movement, which can easily be compared to the famous Chinese paintings of similar subjects. These animals, in addition to their being perfect in anatomical dimensions are equally artistic, and further go into the pictures quite harmoniously. The lower panel in Plate XX is a small portion of a tree where a few monkeys are seen. Though this portion forms an inconspicuous part of the painting, the painter has devoted as much care and attention to this portion as to the main parts of the picture. Equally remarkable are the other studies especially the hunter repulsing the attack of a lion on the Govardhana mountain, which is enlarged to form the upper panel of Plate VIII. The ferocious nature of the animal and the spring which it usually takes before pouncing on its victim, are well brought out. In the lower panel of Plate VIII, there is rather a vulgar scene of a pair of wild elephants and bears enjoying themselves ; but from an artistic point of view the study is remarkable in that the artist has to give consistency with the general situation as explained in the description for Plate XIX. Equally remarkable is the study of cows and bulls, which form the subject matter of plates VII (lower panel) and XIX (lower panel).

It can be asserted that the artists responsible for painting these pictures, have endeavoured successfully in portraying various forms of animal study.

PLATE VI.

QUEEN—MOTHERS RECEIVING RAMA AND OTHERS.

VOLUME II

SCENES FROM THE RAMAYANA

INTRODUCTION

THE Ramayana, the life-history of Rama, is one of the most ancient epics of India, and with its companion epic, the Mahabharata is often compared to Homer's masterpieces, the Odyssey and the Iliad. Several famous writers of the East, as well as the West, have written comparative studies of these two sets of epics, but it would suffice for our purpose to examine the Ramayana, from an artist's point of view. This epic has always been the fountain source of inspiration, alike to the poet and the painter. No artist of renown has ever failed to perpetuate his memory without producing in his own medium of artistic expression, some incident or other from this epic, which has moved the Indian millions for many many centuries, and enjoys a popularity even to-day which is, by no means less intense than what it was in the hoary age of the hero himself.

So much so, there has been throughout the ages of history, a rivalry between contemporary schools of painting, as to which school has done the best to immortalise the epic by the brush. It would be worth mentioning that their enthusiasm assumed even such unusual forms, that in addition to the murals or other permanent media, they have executed minatures on hand-made paper and silk, to represent in painting this epic. This is mentioned only to illustrate that the interest in portraying mythological scenes did not wane by effiux of time, but, on the other hand, as each different school appeared, there were duplications of the same scenes, in different forms of art.

Malabar, a region still in the habit of observing the time-honoured religious traditions and esoteric superstitions, has displayed a new insight into the epic through the medium of these mural paintings. In studying these inimitable portraitures, it is to be borne in mind that the artist, even at the sacrifice of the rules of the craftsman, has always been inspired by the religious canons and principles. The artist has never trangressed the religious scruples, usually attached to this epic, and has happily combined art and religion ; for it has been ordained by such great religious preachers, like Sankara, Ramanuja and others, that this epic of Rama should be studied and regarded with the same religious veneration as the most sacred books of India, the four Vedas. Further, in this collection, only a few selected scenes of the paintings have been reproduced, as the scope of this publication does not permit the entire series to be included.

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PLATES I—III.

KING DASARATHA
PERFORMING THE YAGA AND THE BIRTH OF PRINCES

THE opening scene of the Ramayana is laid at Ayodhya, the ideal capital of the ancient Hindu state of Kosala, to judge from the elaborate descriptions given in the epic. King Dasaratha of the Ikshvaku or Solar line of rulers of the country, has three queens, besides seven hundred and fifty other women in his palace ; still not one of them bore him a son. Then he resolves to perform an Asvamedha, or sacrifice of a horse, to propitiate the Gods for a son. A horse is let loose for an entire year and then brought back. Then the actual sacrifice is done by the unsophisticated sage Rishyasringa, when Lord Vishnu appears to the King and promises that he would be born as his son. When the Yaga is over, Agni, the god of fire, comes out of the Homakunda and presents the King with a golden vessel containing the payasa (pudding), giving instructions as to how it should be taken. Accordingly, Dasaratha gives half of the payasa to Kausalya and the other half between Kaikeyi and Sumitra ; and, in due time, Kausalya gives birth to Rama ; Kaikeyi has Bharata and Sumitra has Lakshmana and Satrughna. Vishnu thus fulfills his promise to the Gods to become incarnate in order to destroy Ravana, the demon king of Lanka.

This part of the story forms the theme of the few scenes, that are depicted in these plates. On the left-top corner, King Dasaratha is seated with his queen Kausalya, on the throne, and in front of him stands Sumantra, his minister. The king is represented as an aged

person with a flowing beard. His right hand is in the attitude of imparting instructions—perhaps he is directing the arrangements to be made for the performance of the Yaga, which he has resolved to do for obtaining children.

On the left bottom corner, the actual sacrifice is depicted ; for on the extreme left of the picture, is the sage Rishyasringa performing the Homa (sacrifice). He can be identified by the peculiar antelope face, that he is alleged to have according to the epic. Just above the figure of this sage, stands Dasaratha ; for Vishnu has appeared to him to tell him that he would be born as his son. From the fire, Agni can be seen coming out, holding over his head the sacred vessel filled with the divine payasa. The figure of Vishnu is drawn in the conventional method, (as described in Part I), with four hands, in three of which He has the Sankha, the Chakra, and the Gada.

The story then proceeds to the distribution of the payasa by King Dasaratha to his three principal queens. This is depicted on the right lower half, and this scene is enlarged in Plate III, so that much of the details can be well seen. The three queens take the payasa from the king, according to the directions of his family preceptor, Sage Vasishtha, who stands by. The upper portion of the right side shows the actual birth of the princes, which is enlarged in Plate II. This scene is peculiar in depicting a local custom in Malabar, in connection with child-birth. In that region, the pregnant mother, when her labour-pains start, is made to sit up supported by two or three servants, and in that position, the native midwives help her. This is well represented. The newly-born children are shown lying on small mattresses near the respective mothers.

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PLATE VII.

MOTHER AND CHILDREN.

RAMA'S DEPARTURE TO THE FOREST

IN the first section of the epic, the boyhood of Rama is described with the most interesting minuteness. Then takes place the departure of Rama and Lakshmana in the company of the sage Viswamitra, for the protection of his sacrifice, which terminates in the happy marriage of Rama with Sita, daughter of Janaka, king of Vidharba, and also the marriage of his other three brothers. On their way back to Ayodhya, they are met by Parasurama, an Avatar of Vishnu and the Brahmin destroyer of the Kshatriyas, who challenged Rama to either bend the bow of Vishnu, which he had with him or give him battle. The heroic Rama, smilingly, takes the mighty bow and bends it well, to the astonishment of the Parasurama, The infuriated Parasurama, after all, knows that Rama is also an incarnation of Vishnu and so blessing him, goes away. This episode form the subject of the coloured frontispiece of the text, where Parasurama is seen to the left of Rama with his hands folded.

After their return to Ayodhya, King Dasaratha resolves to crown Rama, his eldest son, as Yuvaraja or heir-apparent. Then begins the palace intrigues, which is described in such moving language by the sage Valmiki, the author of the epic. Kaikeyi, the favourite queen of Dasaratha, is poisoned in her mind by a spiteful female servant ; and in her newly-awakened jealousy, she insists on the king's crowning her own son, Bharata. Thus it comes about that, after a long struggle, Dasaratha has to yield and Rama has to go into exile for fourteen years. So Rama, with Sita and Lakshmana, bid farewell to the king and the

three queens and depart to the forests, amid the lamentations of the whole city of Ayodhya. They pass through Sringivera, which was the residence of the hunter-chief, Guha, with whose aid, they cross the Ganges, in his boat ; from there they wander southwards, till they come to Chitrakuta, where they stay for some time. Overwhelmed with grief, Dasaratha dies and messengers are at once sent to Bharata, who was absent at his uncle's capital, Kekaya, to return and assume the soverign authority. But he refuses and heaping bitter reproaches on his mother, declares his loyal attachment to Rama as his king, and then starts for Chitrakuta, to persuade his brother to return to Ayodhya. Rama has in the meanwhile, encountered the great demon, Viradha, and slain him.

These two plates refer to some of these episodes. In Plate IV, in the left bottom corner, Dasaratha is seen seated with only two of his queens. His facial expression indicates that he is unable to bear the grief of his sons' departure, though the two queens and also his minister, who is shown as standing by, try to console him. The scene of his actual death is missing here and it may be due to the fact, that it is not auspicious to reproduce such scenes.

On the right lower half, is represented the scene, where Rama and others cross the river Ganges, in the boat of Guha, the local chieftain. This portion is also enlarged to form the subject matter of Plate V, where the details are more clearly seen. A strip of the river is shown at the bottom, with characteristic fishes, etc. The surface of the water is crenulate, to show that by the movement of the boat, the tranquillity of the surface has been disturbed. It is quite natural that the boat itself, resembles the common vallam of the Malabar region. Excepting for the figure of Rama and Guha, the other details are effaced beyond recognition. Rama is represented with the customary bow and arrow, and as seated at the helm of the boat, while Guha occupies the rear end, with an oar in his hand.

Forming the upper portion of Plate IV, is the slaying of Viradha, a demon who attacked Rama, while he was at Chitrakuta. Viradha is represented with frightful eyes and huge face, holding in his right hand,

a huge iron dart, with which he wants to kill the brothers and take away Sita. Rama kills him and we see from the body of the dying demon, a heavenly being rising out with folded hands. The Ramayana says that Viradha was in his previous life, a Vidhyadhara, who was cursed to be born as a Rakshasa ; and when he prayed for atonement, he was assured salvation through Rama. This is well depicted here. To the extreme right, the meeting of Rama and Bharata is incompletely seen.

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PLATE—VI

BHARATA
BESEECHING RAMA TO RETURN

THE result of the interview between Bharata and Rama is that Rama refuses to return, till the expiration of the period of his vow. Bharata, as firmly, refuses to ascend the throne ; and at length it was arranged that Bharata should return with Rama's Paduka (sandals) and reign as his vicegerent.

This mural painting is not as clear as the other ones ; it is due to the fact that an oil lamp has been burning here for a very long time (" for here passed away one of the Maharajahs of Cochin in 1706, and as a mark of respect, a light is permanently kept there "), and the lamp-soot has deposited itself to such an extent, that it has obliterated the details of this particularly charming scene. Here, Rama is seen as seated on a stone mound. On the extreme right of the picture, stands Sita ; while in front him, are his three brothers with their family priest, Vasishtha. Bharata, entreats him to come back ; but Rama, true to his word, refuses the offer. The brothers are shown with folded hands, to show that they are praying Rama to reconsider his decision.

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PLATES VII—XI.

RAMA
IN THE DANDAKA FOREST

IN Plate VII, the story of Rama's life in the Dandakaranya is continued. In the left bottom corner, his life in Panchavati is depicted. It is enlarged in Plate XI, where more details can be seen. Rama is shown as seated in front of his hermitage on a stony platform with Sita on his lap. Lakshmana, as was ever his duty, (being the avatar of Adi-sesha), is represented as standing just away from the couple, guarding them from the Rakshasa and also giving them the opportunity to be together. Here the wealth of details with which the principal figures of the epic are decorated, can be easily seen. Rama is adorned with a Jata and innumerable ornaments.

Their forest life is disturbed by Surpanaka, sister of Ravana. As is well known, she pressingly expresses her desire to marry Rama, but she is disfigured by Lakshmana. This scene, which is lacking in the present plates, is however, reproduced in colours in Plate IV of the text, as it was executed for the State Art Gallery at Trichur. In the panel, Surpanaka is seen actually bleeding, as the result of the disfigurement and her facial expression fully brings out her agony and feeling of humiliation.

To wreak her vengeance, she induces Ravana to carry away Sita and make her his wife. To draw away Rama from Sita, Ravana sends his uncle, Maricha, in the form of a golden deer, which, when seen by Sita, naturally tempts her and she presses Rama to get it for her. So Rama goes in chase of the deer, which beguiled him far away from his

cottage and when is eventually killed, its identity is known. This killing of Maricha is shown in the left lower half, where the lower portion of the golden deer is seen and where the arrow of Rama has pierced, the neck of the Rakshasa is shown. The transformation of the deer into the demon is realistically portrayed ; the flowing beard, the protruding tongue, the prominent eyes and the finely-worked jata of the Rakshasa are imposingly drawn. Induced by Sita to search for Rama, whose voice the falling demon imitated in order to deceive her, Lakshmana goes away, leaving Sita alone. Then Ravana, in the guise of a sanyasi comes to the hermitage and begs for alms. This is shown in the left upper half of Plate VII and is enlarged in Plate IX. The guise of the mendicant, with beads round the neck and arms, a single danda or stick in the left hand and a begging-bowl in the right palm go well to the make-up of the demon-king's disguise. Sita, unaware of his true form, is standing near him, offering alms.

When she puts alms into the bowl, Ravana snatches her by force and carries her away. On the way, he is stopped by Jatayu, the king of vultures, who tries his level best to prevent him from proceeding further. But in the fight that ensues, Ravana mortally wounds the bird. This fight is shown in Plate X. Unfortunately, the upper portion of this panel has been mercilessly white-washed and so the head of Ravana is missing.

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PLATE VIII.

NARASIMHA AVATAR.

PLATES XII—XIV.

RAMA AND SUGRIVA

AFTER Sita had been carried away by Ravana, Rama and Lakshmana wander about in search of her, and, while on the banks of the lake Pumpa, Sabari, an aged huntress meets them. She directs them to go to Sugriva, the exiled chief of the monkeys of Kishkindha and also entertains Rama with the fruits, she had all along collected for him. Rama then proceeds further south and makes friendship with Sugriva, for whose sake, he slays his brother Vali, who had dethroned him and driven him out of his kingdom. Rama then reinstates Sugriva on the throne. These episodes are depicted in Plate XII. In the right bottom corner, there is the scene of Sabari meeting Rama, which is also enlarged in Plate XIV. Sabari's picture presents an interesting aboriginal study. She is very dark in complexion and appears with a hunch, perhaps because of her age. Her attitude of worshipful adoration to Rama, whose figure is splendidly worked out, is singularly appealing. Her matted hair is worked up into the form of a crown, adorned with peacock feathers. Around her arms, neck and ankles, are ornaments made of cowries and she is shown as wearing a nicely-designed saree. Equally well-painted is the picture of Lakshmana, who stands to the left of Rama. His face is strickingly attractive.

On the left bottom corner of the panel, is seen the representation of Rama's treaty with Sugriva and this enlarged to form the subject matter of Plate XIII. Rama and Sugriva are seated and taking the right hand of each other, they pledge their mutual friendship with Agni, the god of fire, in front of them as witness. Rama binds himself to get for Sugriva his lost kingdom, while Sugriva undertakes to search for and

restore Sita. Lakshmana is seated behind Rama and by the side of Sugriva, are Hanuman with a white beard and the other monkeys. This scene is very well portrayed and the facial expressions of Rama as well as the monkeys show both simplicity and faithfulness.

Sugriva suspects the genuineness of Rama's intent and also his ability to fight with Vali ; so to test his strength, he requests him to perform some feat of arms, which could satisfy him. Rama perforates the seven sal trees with a single arrow, which passes right through the trunks of all the trees and comes out on the other side. This creates confidence in Sugriva and this scene is painted above that of " Rama's meeting with Sabari." The seven sal trees are very clearly shown ; and even the space marked by the passage of the arrow is nicely drawn. Rama stands at the left extremity, with bow in his hands.

Forming the upper portion of this panel, is the scene where Vali is killed by Rama. While Sugriva and Vali are engaged in wrestling, Rama hiding himself behind a sal tree, sends an arrow, which piercing through the heart of Vali, mortally wounds him. On his death, Sugriva is restored to his kingdom and he undertakes to search for Sita and help Rama to recover her.

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PLATES XV—XVI.

FIGHT
BETWEEN RAMA AND RAVANA

THE army of the monkeys crosses the ocean by the 'setu', built by them and then takes place the tremendous battle between Rama and Ravana, which is represented in these two plates. The fight between them is painted in the customary fashion peculiar to South India, where the principal fighters are usually shown in considerably bigger size than the lesser personalities, that take part in such fights. Hence in these pictures, the figures of Rama on one side and of Ravana on the other, are represented in more conspicuous proportions. Ravana is represented with ten heads and twenty hands, each of which is holding some venomous weapon. Both Rama and Ravana hold huge bows bent almost hemispherically, ready to dart the arrows. The whole background is filled with arrows and below, on the ground, lie scattered the heads and the mutilated bodies of the slain Rakshasas. The striking thing to be noted here is the facial expression of the fighters, which shows their anger and fury, in a very telling manner.

FIGHT
BETWEEN RAMA AND KUMBHAKARNA

KUMBHAKARNA, Ravana's brother, who at the beginning advised his brother, in vain, to send back Sita, so that he could avoid the impending catastrophe, decides all the same to fight loyally on behalf of his brother and king ; and in the encounter he has with Rama, he is killed. As Kumbhakarna is, as the result of Brahma's ' boon ', the victim of limitless sleep, he has to be roused for the battle.

Plate XIX shows his being awakened. An elephant, white in colour, is made to pull him up from his deep slumber, while the Rakshasa attendants stand at a respectable distance, to give him the sumptuous food and drink, he would be in need of at the moment of his getting up. Kumbhakarna, after being roused from sleep, goes out to fight with Rama ; and in Plate XVII, he is shown in the thick of the battle, with a huge trident in his hand and fatally pierced by a multiplicity of arrows from Rama's hands. The fury of the battle is graphically shown by the innumerable number of the severed heads of the monkeys and the demons, that lie strewn on the ground.

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PLATE XVIII.

HANUMAN'S VICTORY OVER SURASA

THIS Plate refers to an incident earlier than Rama's entry into Lanka and the battle with Ravana. It depicts the famous victory of Hanuman, while he was crossing the sea on his journey to Lanka to find out Sita's whereabouts. Surasa, a Rakshasa protector of Lanka, could increase or diminish her form according to her needs. Hanuman, in order to baffle her, goes on increasing his size larger and larger and likewise, Surasa also simultaneously widens her mouth, with the hope that she can devour Hanuman, when the latter tries to enter her mouth. But all of a sudden, Hanuman resumes an exceedingly diminutive stature and before she could realise the change, he enters her mouth and with lightning rapidity, comes out of her left ear. This scene is very ably portrayed in this plate and Hanuman is actually seen coming out of the left ear of the demon. The lower portion of his limbs are still between her mouth ; the huge grotesque face of the demon with her formidable teeth is drawn with much skill.

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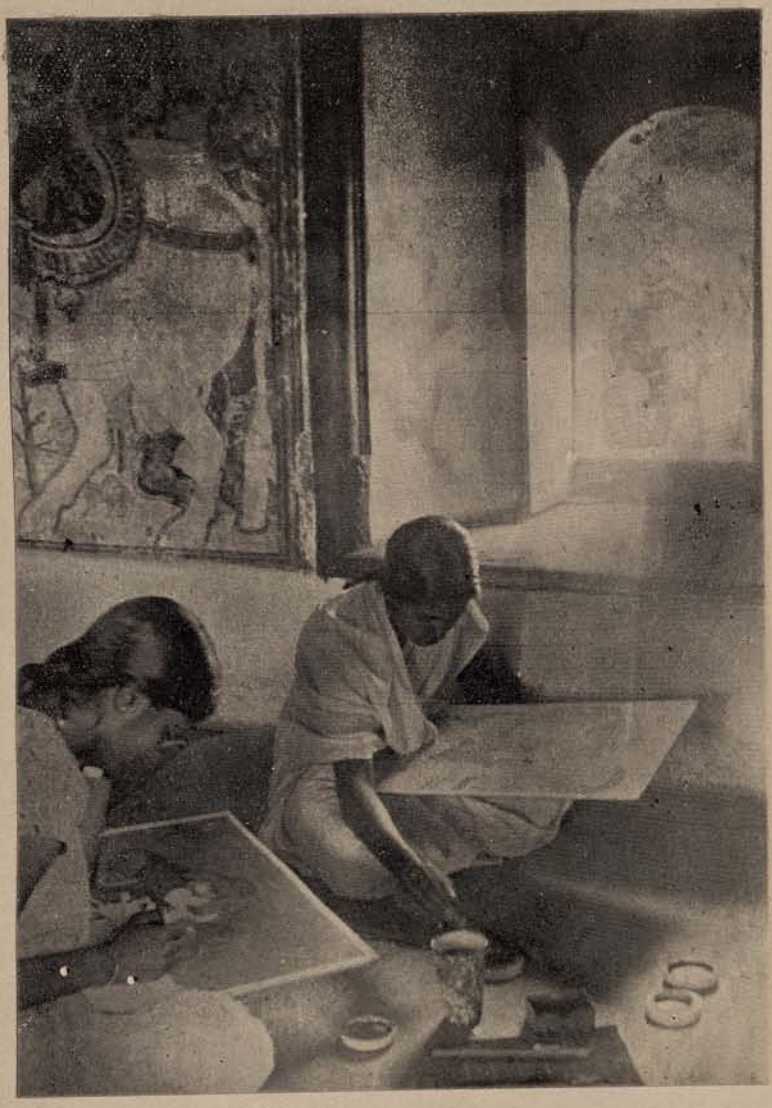
PLATE XX.

ORDEAL OF SITA

AFTER the death of Ravana and the coronation of his brother Vibhishana, as king of Lanka, Sita is brought in a palanquin to the presence of Rama. But Rama, pretending to be jealous of her honour for the world's sake, tells her that he cannot take her back, since she had lived in the Rakshasa's capital for a fairly long time. This legitimately enrages her, who to satisfy all about her purity, enters the fire. Agni, the lord of fire, himself burnt by Sita's chastity, lifts her up and hands her over to Rama. In the picture, Rama is shown seated near the fire, with Lakshmana standing on the other side with Sugriva, Vibhishana and Hanuman gathered round them. Sita is represented twice, to signify both her entry into the fire and her emerging out of it unhurt.

PLATE IX.



ARTISTS AT WORK
At
THE MATTANCHERI PALACE.

NOTES ON THE REMAINING PLATES IN THE TEXT

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RAMA'S RETURN AND HIS RECEPTION AT AYODHYA.

(Plates 5 and 6 of the Text)

THE scene depicting the return of Rama, Sita and Lakshmana to Ayodhya in the Pushpaka-vimana or aerial chariot is given separately in these plates. As on the day of the death of Ravana, the period of Rama's exile ended and as Bharat had vowed to sacrifice his life in case there was even a moment's delay, Rama flies to Ayodhya in the Pushpaka. These plates are reproduced from the copies of the original panels, made for the Art Gallery, Trichur. In Plate V, is the upper portion of the original panel, in which Rama, Sita and Lakshmana are seated inside the aerial chariot, while behind them are Rama's allies. On the right side the picture, the artist has portrayed some men and women waiting to receive them ; it is noteworthy that the artist has painted them as typical Namboodris ; for the mode of dress and the manner in which they have dressed their hair are quite typical of that community.

In Plate VI, the lower panel of the mural is portrayed. Rama is seen dressed in regal garments, surrounded by his three brothers. To signify his assumption of the throne, he carries the royal sword in his hands. Standing behind him, is Sita dressed exceedingly well with costly ornaments and garments. The three queen-mothers are performing 'arati' before Rama, in the usual Kerala form of waving small plates with lighted lamps in them.

This finishes the story of the Ramayana, after which Rama is crowned as king of Ayodhya and this Coronation scene is already referred to, in connection with Plate XII of Volume I.

GURUVAYOOR APPAN.

(Plate 2)

THIS painting represents the image of Vishnu, enshrined in the famous temple at Guruvayoor, an important place of pilgrimage in Malabar. This panel, though simple, is a very faithful representation of the deity. He is depicted in a standing posture, having four arms, in which he is carrying the usual symbols, the Sankha, the Chakra, the Gada and the lotus. He is decorated with the customary jewels and is shown as standing on the Padmasana—in the middle of a lotus flower. Behind him, is the ornamental Prabhavali, with an intricate floral design, which forms an effective background. On either side of the principal figure are strings of blossomed lotus, a flower particularly sacred to Vishnu.

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KIRATAMURTI.

(Plate 3)

THIS is one of the incarnations of Siva, who assumed the form of a Kirata (hunter), in order to appear before Arjuna, when the latter did penance for the acquisition of the Pasupatastra, which was necessary for the annihilation of the Kauravas. The story of this incident is a very popular theme for folk-ballads in Kerala.

Kiratamurti, as represented in this mural painting, is a figure standing perfectly erect, in the samabhanga pose. He is adorned with ornaments and wears nice garments. His breast is covered with an armour and he wears an Yagnopavita (sacred thread). He holds a dagger in his right hand and carries a bow and arrow in his left hand. Being in the guise of a hunter, he has a grizzly beard and flowing tresses of hair, with the head crowned with a kireta of peacock feathers. Behind the deity, is an elaborately-worked Prabhavali, forming an effective background.

MOTHER AND CHILDREN.

(Plate 7)

THIS is an actual-size colour reproduction of a portion of the panel entitled "Krishna lifting the Govardana Hill", which forms the Plate VI in volume I. This is reproduced to show the actual colour effect of the original painting.

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NARASIMHA AVATAR.

(Plate 8)

THIS is a line drawing of this deity, who is represented in the Dasavatar panel, which forms the lower portion of the mural, entitled "Vishnu as Ananthasayanamurti" (Plate V of Volume I). This reproduction will graphically show the details of a small portion of the picture.

ARTICLES

THE COCHIN MURALS—
THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

—Prof. V. RANGACHARYA, M.A.

IT is with delight that I have responded to the invitation of the Editors of this publication on the Cochin Murals to furnish a detailed account of the historical background in which they saw the light and the artistic atmosphere in which they were born. One thing which is conspicuous in regard to them is that the earliest of them—for they belong to different chronological layers, beginning from the middle of the 16th century and coming down to the early decades of the 19th—were the works of a distinct school which has left numerous gems of art not only in Cochin but in Travancore and other parts of Malabar. The Cochin paintings are found at Cochin, Trichur, Tiruvanchikulam, and other places; and they could have come into existence only as the result of the generosity, the cultural taste, and the piety of the Maharajas who reigned in those troublous days when they were engaged in far-reaching dealings with the Portuguese and the Dutch, on the one hand, and in incessant rivalries with the Zamorin and the other indigenous chiefs on the other. Those were the days when the Empire of Vijayanagar, if not always powerful over South India, was at least powerful enough to create common traditions, throughout the region, not only of political ideals and institutions, but of religion, literature, social convention, and art. The Empire of Vijayanagar was having a process of decay and disintegration in the three quarters of a century when it was ruled at first from Penukonda and then from Chandragiri and Vellore; but during those times the kingdoms of Tanjore, Madura, Mysore, Gingi, etc., arose, and there was widespread intermigration of colonists and communities in the different parts of South India. The Nayakkan kingdom of Madura (1559-1737) had close connection with Malabar,

and its Palayams extended to the Anaimalai region where they were in touch with the Zamorins and Cochin on the one hand, and further south with Travancore and its chiefs on the other. The cultural touch between these and Malabar was not very intimate, owing to geographical factors ; but it did exist, particularly as the result of the large-hearted royal patronage of literateurs, teachers and artists from the plains. The artistic conventions of Vijayanagar and its offshoots—Tanjore and Madura in particular—came to be known in Cochin as elsewhere in the west coast, and contributed to the rise of the local schools. To this must be added the advent of Europeans—first the Portuguese and then the Dutch ; and they contributed considerably to town-planning, and to a less extent to religious and secular architecture, painting, and other arts. The influences and counter-influences of all these furnished the background for the arts of Malabar, but they were transformed by the local genius into a rich and independent school.

The Religious Traditions of the Cochin Royal Family.

One fundamental fact to be remembered in connection with the development of the Cochin arts is that it was inspired by the religious convictions and practices of the royal family, as well as the families of the more intellectual classes and clans. The spirit of cosmopolitanism was the distinguishing feature of the Perumpadappu Rajas from early times. The most outstanding fact about them is that, while their names have been usually the Vaishnava ones of Godavarma and Ramavarma, their religion has been equally Saivite and Vaishnavite. The Saivite feature is seen, amongst other things, in the worship of the Pazhyannur Bhagavati as the patron-deity of the family. Her shrine is in the very centre of the Mattancheri palace, where the Rajas have been usually 'crowned'. The important palace festival, again, is the Ganapati Homam in July-August. And within the palace precincts are temples dedicated to Vishnu and Siva. At Ernakulam (Rishi-nagakulam), again, which however came into the hands of the Cochin kings finally in the 17th century from its local pentarchy of Kaimals, we see the same cosmopolitan feature. The chief of its several temples is dedicated to Siva, wherein Ganapati, Naga, etc., are worshipped ; but there are temples dedicated to other deities. At the very seat of royalty, Trip-

punithura, there is the Balakrishna temple ; but at Chottanikkara, three miles off, there are shrines dedicated to Vana-durga, Ganapati, Subramanya, Siva and Sasta. Its Kumbham (February-March) festival is in no way less largely attended than the three festivals at Trippunithura, and its fame as the home of hysteria-cure is quite typical of the Malabar popular cult. The temple of Subrahmanya at Elankunnapuzha (with its very curious legend), the Veliyittaparambil temple at Narakkal (which was apparently so called because because the Lord revealed the innocence or guilt of criminals by the ordeal of red-hot iron or molten lead), the Siva temple at Chennamangalam, the home of the Paliath Achchans, the famous temples at Tiruvanchikulam with their curious Saktaic and animistic elements, the temple at Kaladi (the birthplace of Sankara) which has a Krishna temple by its side, and similar institutions show the composite religious faith of the Cochin royal family. And this cosmopolitanism is reflected in the arts of iconography, sculpture, painting, music and dancing.

The Influence of Literature.

Equally important with the religious traditions are the literary traditions, as contributory factors for the growth of art. The brilliant output in the Sanskrit and Malayalam literatures, both in general and technical aspects, was the intellectual inspirer of the Malabar art—architectural, sculptural and mural—as of the art of the Tamil, Telugu and Kannada areas. The Manasastra, the Silpasastra and Chitra were variegated forms of the same spirit due to literature. The Padinettarakavigal—the 18½ poets—The Payyur Bhattattiris, the 'Maharishi' Achchan (who has been described as a Kalidasa in poetry, a Kalpakavrksha in gifts, and a Siva in might), his son Paramesvara Pattiri Mimamsa-chakravarti (the author of the Sutrarthasangraha), and above all Uddanda Sastri of Tondamandalam, all these created the intellectual environment for the Malabar arts, in the 15th century. The last of these typified a character, by no means uncommon in the age of Vijayanagar, of a cultural unifier. Born on the far-off banks of the Palar, Uddanda distinguished himself in the courts of the Telugu, Kannada, Kalinga and Tamil lands, before he settled at Chennamangalam, and won the encomium of the Malabar kings by his Kokilasandesam, his Alankaric

works, and his Mallikamarutam. The career of this Bhavabhuti, as Kavitilakam Ullur calls him, shows how one spirit bound all parts of South India, in spite of political and linguistic rivalries. Then there was Kakkasseri Bhattattiri, the rival of Uddanda and the author of the Vasumati-vikramam ; Punam Nambudiri, the famous composer in Malayalam of the Ramayana-champu which gives a clue to the times in referring to the arrival of people with Portuguese hats for Rama's coronation ; Narayana Nambudiri of Kutallur Mana who wrote the Subhadra-harana ; Vasudeva Nambudiri Sahityamalla who wrote commentries on the Vraddhasalabhanjika and Anargharaghava ; his teacher Karunakara Marar who wrote the Kavichintamani, a commentary on the Vrttaratnakara ; and above all Chenna Nambudiri whose Tantrasamuchchaya provided the standard authority on the technique of the visual arts, spiritual and secular, in Malabar.

The tradition of these eminent luminaries was carried on in the 16th century by a number of devotional writers. The earliest perhaps of these was Meppattur Narayana Bhattattiri (C. 1559-1665). His Mahabharata-champu, which is in the Prabandhic style, inspired the Pathaka story-tellers of Malabar, and made the name of Krishna a household word. His great classic, the Narayanaiyam (1589), again, in propitiation of Lord Krishna of Guruvayur, had an equal influence in the Malabar world. One almost thinks that the avatars etc., of Vishnu in the Cochin murals are based on his descriptions. The Santana-gopalam and the Gnanappana of his rival, Puntanam Nambudiri, whose career in his devotion to Krishna reminds us of the later Tyagayya, had an equal influence. Even more powerful was Tunjattu Ramanuja Eluttachchan, whose Adhyatma Ramayanam, Bharatam and Bhagavatam are priceless possessions in every Malayala household. They are in what is generally known as Kilippattu style.

The Early Iconographical Sculptures of Cochin.

The rich iconography of the early mediaeval Cochin was a fertile source of the painter's art. This is obvious from a comparison of the sculptural works, particularly in wood, available in the temples of the 15th and 16th centuries, and the scenes of the murals. The Sri Rama-

svami temple of Kadanallur, for example, which formed a centre of Vedic learning, and a Vatteluttu inscription in which gives the date M.E. 702 (A.D. 1527), is rich in the scenes depicting the coronation of Rama and in icons like those of Vishnu, Nrisimha, Siva, Brahma, Dakshinamurti, the Dvarapalas, etc., not to speak of the figures of devotees. The Ariyannur Hrikanyaka temple, again, has finely-chiselled brackets and the figures of the Dvarapalas and the ten avatars. Similarly, the rare Dhyani-Buddha-like image of Sasta and the seven incarnations of Bhagavati in the Chaitya-like Palliyanaka temple at Peruvasseri, the Chatur-mukhalinga Brahma in the Kunnatali temple at Chennamangalam, the icons of the famous Kizhtali temple at Cranganore, the peculiar Sankaranarayana image in the rock-cut temple of Irunilasikodu (near Mullurkara station), and above all, the beautiful pillar works and sculptures of the Trippunithura temple—which include Lakshmi, Gopalakrishna, Garuda, the Vyalamukhas, etc.,—all these, and many similar works, indicate how iconography formed the background of the visual arts of dance and painting. The Nagas, Yakshis, Sastas, the village goddesses, etc., formed another set of inspirers, peculiar to Malabar. Not only did these provide the themes for the mural arts, but also the inexhaustible scenes taken from the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Bhagavata, the Devi-Mahatmya, the Kumarasambhava, etc., Being the work of local artists, or artists deeply acquainted with local life of all types, they naturally throw much light on the anatomy and appearance of the people, their domestic and public life, their women and their place in society, the types of vessels used by them, their dress, ornaments, musical instruments, secular and religious festivals, amusements, physical tournaments, royal processions,—in fact everything connected with Malabar and its folk.

The picture which we can form in our mind's eye as the result of the above facts enables us to visualise clearly what Albuquerque says in regard to a royal procession at Quilon, of which he was an eye-witness early in the 16th century. The king was attended, he says, "by an innumerable concourse of people, all marshalled in procession, according to their several degrees, the whole closing with the king, seated cross-legged on an ivory chair, and carried by four Brahmins. The king was dressed in silk embroidered, with an upper robe of gold muslin ; he wore

rings of considerable value, and had on his head a crimson velvet cap highly ornamented with jewels and long chains of pearls and brilliants hanging from the top of the cap, with his hair flowing loose upon his shoulders. There were a number of elephants, and Persian horses followed by the train, which made an elegant appearance. A number of various war-like instruments joined in the procession, playing as they passed". This panoramic scene is exactly what we see in the murals.

The Influence of 'Vijayanagar'.

The Malabar arts were, like the arts of the rest of South India, subject to influences from Vijayanagar and its offshoots; but the degree of influence varied in different departments. In architecture Malabar had practically its own way. Though in some places—for example, Trivandram, and Suchindram—the Vijayanagar characteristics of imposing buildings, pillared halls, striking gopuras, mandapas, galleries, etc., are conspicuous, Malabar generally clung to its small circular central shrines, wood works in the entrances and ceilings, and sculptures on pillars, besides its own peculiar architecture, a resemblance to which we see only in area as rich in wood as Nepal. What stone is in the plains wood has been in Malabar; and architecture, accordingly, has differed fundamentally. In sculpture the Malabar wood carvings were not inferior to the stone ones of the plains; but the iconographical details, the decorative modes, the relative positions of the icons in popular cults, differed fundamentally, though there were some agreements at bottom. On the other hand, painting has had an unlimited vista in Malabar. It has left undying examples from the Tirunandikara and Tiruvattar murals of the 9th century to the copious out-put of Ravivarma in the 19th. The Vijayanagar schools of Madura, Tanjore and Mysore were not without some influences for the reason that the same artists were sometimes employed, that men were got for the purpose from the plains, and that there were common intellectual and spiritual inspirations at the bottom of both. The paintings of the Vijayanagar period have been found in secular as well as religious buildings. Abdur Razzak describes the figures of animals in front of opulent residences and professional courtesans. Paes describes the pictures in the royal palace at Vijayanagar, and shows how there were there the royal portraits; the figures

of women with bows and arrows ; dancers in the dance-halls ; exercise pictures in the exercise halls ; and so on. He further observes that there were portraits illustrative of the lives and costumes of different nationalities, Indian and European, from princes to the beggars in the street. Nor is this surprising when we remember that Jesuit painters occasionally visited the Hindu capital and presented pictures to the Rayas. In 1602, for example, a lay brother from San Thome presented scenes from Christ's life to Venkata II at Chandragiri. The Jesuit fathers, De Sa and Ricaos, similarly distinguished themselves. In 1607 the Italian lay brother, Bantholomew Fontebona, painted the figures of St. Loyola and Xavier for Venkata ; and the Raya, who himself sat for portraiture, hung them in the Vellore palace. These however were very few and insignificant as compared with the indigenous works like the Vira Saiva pictures of the Tontada Siddhalingesvara temple at Edeyur in Kunigal Taluk, Mysore, the Saiva Purana scenes of the Tirunallesvara temple at Hariyur, the Jain frescoes at Tirupparuttikkunram, the Ramayana scenes from the Hazara Ramasvami temple at Hampi and the Ramaswami temple at Kumbhakonam, and the Mahabharata scenes from Sompalli, Lepakshi, etc. Madura, Ramesvaram, Tanjore and other places have also revealed numerous examples of mural arts, besides the paintings on thousands of relief figures, stuccos and plaster figures. Such a rich source of inspiration could hardly be missed in Malabar ; but the adaptations from the plains were so much modified and naturalised that they became Malabar's own.

The Portuguese Connection and its Effects.

Much nearer and more potential was the influence, felt by Cochin, of the long Portuguese connection. Ever since, in 1503, Unni Keralavarma Koil Tirumalpad, the Perumpadappu and Matabhupati of the time, welcomed the Portuguese in order to save himself from the aggressions of the Zamorin and his tools, and gave them the site of a fort, and ever since Francisco de Almeyda, the first Portuguese Viceroy, brought, as the symbol of this friendship, a gold jewel-embedded crown to bestow on the Maharaja in the name of the King of Portugal, Cochin was considerably influenced both by the acts of commission and omission on the part of the Portuguese, both by their merits and defects, for the

long space of a century and a half, at the end of which she only changed 'masters' from the Portuguese to the Dutch. Throughout this period there was the phenomenal growth of Cochin. It came to be, as European writers assert, second only to Goa and equal to some of the best cities in Europe. It came to have many handsome houses, churches and monasteries in the European fashion. The houses were built in the midst of walled gardens, and provided with ample court-yards. The Catholic cathedral with its lofty steeple and colonnades, the churches of the Franciscan and Dominican Friars with rare pieces of workmanship in stone and pillars, the Jesuit College with its lofty steeple and three storeys, were features in a new style of town-planning, accompanied by new methods of religious and secular architecture, and new modes of sculpture, painting and other arts. The Jewish settlement at Cochin as the result of their expulsion from Cranganore, and the Konkani mercantile organizations, gave rise not only to problems of racial harmony, religious policy, etc., but brought about a higher standard of life and the enjoyment of many new luxuries which gave rise to the then general public notion that China was the region for earning and Cochin for spending. But while there was so much of prosperity, there was a darker side for the picture. The Portuguese policy and behaviour gave rise to incidents which had a highly disturbing effect on the minds of the Maharajas and their advisers. The Portuguese were most intolerant in their religious policy. They persecuted the Syrian Christians, and drove them, by their insistence on a dead uniformity of government dogma and ritual, to make a solemn vow before 'the Poonen's Cross' in the market-place of Cochin and in the very sight of the royal family, to be separate from the Catholic church. The Portuguese had no scruples to occasionally rob temples and insult the religious prejudices of the people. Apart from the indirect means of educative propaganda, characterised by resort to hidden truths, social prevarications and pseudo-Brahmanical disguises, supported by a distorted literature and similar methods, they aimed at direct conversions of the ruling houses, nobles and the common people. The very first of the Cochin rulers with whom they came in contact was urged by Albuquerque to give up his ancestral faith and embrace Christianity, though in vain. The Vettat ruler of Tanur was practically wrested from his own people in religious beliefs and institutions though he was too shrewd, as events eventually proved,

to go over to the heretics. All these measures, together with the mutual wrangles of the Christian sects, the tyranny of the Inquisition, and the seemingly endless ferment among them, must have taught the rulers of Cochin the immense superiority of their own faith in toleration, in the capacity to rouse Bhakti, and in everything held dear by man ; and the Nambudiris, the literateurs, the religious teachers of the period, who wandered from place to place, did not fail to take advantage of this and to strengthern the hold of the traditional religion, which after all, afforded endless scope for internal variations and separate convictions, over the ruling houses. It was in this way that the Puranas, the Agamas, the plastic arts, came to be utilized for the cause of Dharma. Here in we have the clue to the psychology which gave rise to the iconography and the mural arts of Malabar. They were the products of an aggressive pride in the faiths and truths taught by their country's long traditions.

A fine example of the way in which even purely political incidents in this period led to the strengthening of the attachment of the Cochin Court and people to their ancestral faith and thereby created that mentality which favoured the development of the artistic modes of fortifying it, is afforded by the institution of the Attachchamayam festival at Trippunithura. The Portuguese interferred with the customary mode of royal succession in 1510. During this year Raja Godavarma who had become a recluse in 1505 died. The prince who ought to have legitimately succeeded to the crown and who belonged to the senior or Mutta Tavazhi was then with the hostile Zamorin. The Portuguese therefore proposed that the old custom should be given up, and that Ramavarma, who had been Regent on account of his age but who otherwise had no claim to the throne, must be raised to it. The people were against breaking the convention, and the regent himself agreed with them. But the Portuguese insistance on his accession after defeating the Mutta Tavazhi prince who had marched to Vaipin with the Zamorin's help, together with the pressure of the feudatory chiefs, made him eventually agree, and he was crowned. The choice of Ramavarma (1510-37) of the Elaya Tavazhi branch naturally created grievance among the senior members of the other branches. Ramavarma seems to have resolved on a happy compromise to pacify

them. He resolved to give official recognition to their social status, to make up for their loss in contributing to the royal succession. So "the eldest member of all the other branches taken together, if senior to the reigning prince of the Elaya Thavazhi branch, was allowed to assume the title of Muppu (chief) of Perumpadappu, the reigning prince being known as the Maharaja of Cochin". The chief was the social and religious head, while the Maharaja was the political head. The Attachchamayam festival at Trippunithura seems to have been connected with this arrangement. The importance of the local Santanagopala temple in the centre of the town of Trippunithura, which enshrines the alleged image brought by Arjuna from the world of Vishnu after recovering the ten deceased children of a devotee, received a new emphasis with this perpetuation of the Crown in the line of Elaya Thavazhi. Trippunithura, of course, was an ancient place as the inscription of Kodai Ravi in the temple shows; but it is almost obvious that Ramavarma (1510-37) instituted or elaborated the festival in propitiation of the deity, the God par excellence of children, for the divine approval of the fixity of succession in the Elaya Tavazhi line at the expense of the legitimate one.

The Mattancheri Palace.

Vira Keralavarma (1537-61), Ramavarma's successor, was on the whole friendly in his relations with the Portuguese. But the imprudence of a Portuguese officer led, in 1550, to the plunder of a temple near the palace. This naturally caused the Raja's indignation; and the Portuguese, in order to pacify him, built the Mattancheri palace about 1555, and presented it to him. When the palace was later on repaired by the Dutch it came to be known, rather inaccurately, as the Dutch palace. The fact that it was the construction of Europeans has gone to invest it with certain European elements as in the arches and in its being more substantial than what the Maharajas had been accustomed to. But it was suited to the indigenous needs and modes of life; and this was due to the royal orthodoxy. The location of the Pazhayannur Bhagavati temple in the central courtyard and of the two temples to Vishnu and Siva in the palace premises indicates this as well as the composite faith of the royal family. It can hardly be doubted that the wooden ceiling of the coronation hall in the upper storey was a con-

temporary work ; but the glory of the palace—or rather one of its glories—lies in the Ramayana scenes depicted in the long room to the west of the coronation hall, known as the Palliyarai. Painted above the wooden mouldings on the wall, these 45 scenes, which cover more than 300 square feet, and which have escaped spoliation by plastering and smoke of the oil lamp except in a small portion, present the story of the Ramayana from Dasaratha's sacrifice to Rama's return from Lanka. These pictures, twenty of which have been reproduced in Volume II of this work, have been attributed to 'about 1600 A.D.' and to 'the 17th century' rather vaguely. It is improbable however that the palace was kept barren for half a century after its construction. It is more plausible to hold that the pictures were begun by that Vira Keralavarma (1537-61) in whose last years it was built, immediately after he took possession of it. Endowed apparently with an artistic mind, pressed by the proselytising zeal of his troublesome European allies, strengthened in his orthodoxy by his Nambudiri and other advisers, Vira kerala obviously loved to surround himself with Pauranic scenes of beauty and piety ; and what was begun by him was continued by his successors, —Godavarma (1561-?) ; Vira keralavarma (1605-35) ; and Godavarma (1635-45). We know practically nothing of these Maharajas, and of their successors Vira Rayavarma (1645-50) ; and Ramavarma of the Chaziyur line (1650-56) ; but the reign of the last was followed by serious convulsions as the result of which the Portuguese were over thrown by the Dutch and the succession was restored to the Mutta Tavazhi prince Vira keralavarma, after a period of 150 years, in 1662.

An important point to be considered at this stage is whether the Portuguese had any direct influence on the development of the mural art at Mattancheri and elsewhere. We have a number of churches with Portuguese murals. The biblical scenes of the Jacobite church of Mulanturutti, three miles to the south-east of Trippunithura, the traditions of which go back to about A.D. 1250, are it is believed, not earlier than the 16th century. Naturally enough, the Portuguese built many handsome and spacious buildings of the European type for their churches, monasteries, convents and seminaries. The Franciscan church at Cochin—afterwards converted into a Protestant one by the Dutch—the Santa Cruz Cathedral (built in 1577) in the same place,

the Elturutti convent at Aranuthukara, the St., Theresa convent and churches at Ernakulam, the Church and College in Vaipin Island, the Kanjur church at Vellarapalli (dedicated to St. Sebastian and associated by tradition later on with Saktan Tampuran), and similar institutions at Kunnankulam, Vallarpadam, Ollur and Trichur, introduced new religious ideals into the country, and architectural designs suited to their needs. Often they grew at the expense of Hinduism. At Perumannur, the suburb of Ernakulam, the church was built on the site of a Nayar Tarawad in the Nadumittam of which a cross is said to have miraculously sprung up. The church on Malayattur Hill was the result of a Christian acquisition of a Hindu temple where a granite cross made its sudden appearance by the side of the idol! At Vallarpadam a Nayar lady and child were saved by the mercy of Virgin Mary, and so their picture came to be drawn by the side of the divine portrait. Such circumstances naturally led to the adoption by the Portuguese of the indigenous features of the architectural art. The facades, verandahs and roofs of a number of them are exactly like those of the Hindu temple, though with the addition of belfries, crosses, figures and other Christian symbols. In regard to the murals however, the Christian institutions came to have fine portraitures of the Virgin and Christian saints and scenes, which, in their simplicity and modes of expression, belonged to a different world altogether as compared with the rich and elaborately-designed Hindu murals. But their technique seems to have been indigenous. They seem to have been turned out by Indian artists under European instruction in regard to design. The exact relationship between the two schools is yet to be studied, which is possible only with a systematic publication of the Christian pictures in Santa Cruz, Vallarpadam and other places.

The Dutch Period.

The Dutch were in close relationship with Cochin from 1663 to 1795. A succession of nine Maharajas ruled during this period. The reigns of the first three of these were signalised by wars with the Zamorin for the recovery of the northern districts which had been in their possession, by succession wars and other sources of weakness, but Ramavarma who ruled from 1698 to 1722 was a capable and extremely cunning opportunist, who successfully manaeuvred to employ the reluc-

tant Dutch to recover the lost districts in the two wars of 1710 and 1716; but the village of Perumpadappu and its neighbourhood in Vanneri, which was the birthplace of the royal house, and in which the coronation of the old Rajas had used to take place, was still in non-Cochin hands, and it was a sore disappointment for Ramavarma that he could not get them. He took a solemn oath that he would never wear his crown unless he was crowned at Chitrakutam at Perumpadappu, and as this has taken place neither in his time nor in the times of his successors, the Cochin royal house has never worn the crown during the Attachchamayam and other state festivals. It should be remembered that the Dutch were guilty of gross outrages against the Portuguese. They had destroyed most of their religious houses, closed their educational institutions, and even renamed their streets. Such conduct seems to have angered Ramavarma, strong as he was, even more than his weak predecessors; and so, while he was unpopular with them, he reciprocated this sentiment, and openly showed his partiality to the indigenous Chettis and his spiritual advisers, the Pattars and the Nambudris. The lessons of the Gita and its philosophy of toleration deeply impressed him.

The Palace Renovations.

The Dutch, however, were not outwardly in hostile terms. On the other hand, they were formally in friendly terms with the royal house, and to a considerable extent their services were for the good of the state. One of their positively friendly acts, for instance, was the rebuilding or repairing of the palace. We do not know what part of the palace was built afresh, and what part was repaired or extended. It is probable that the repairs were so extensive as to lead to the palace being known after them; but the main building was, as has been already said, a work of the Portuguese period. Whatever might have been the case, Ramavarma's prejudice did nor bring about any detachment on his part from his Dutch allies; and he took full advantage, apparently, of their services in reconstructing the palace, to carry out a fresh series of mural paintings, in order to express his deep sympathy with his national cult.

The Second set of Murals.

And thus came into existence, about A.D. 1700, of the murals in the Kovinithalam or staircase room to the right of the coronation hall in the southeast end of the palace. In this room, which is 18 feet by 17, and which has a finely-worked ceiling, there were executed the six pictures on 'Mahalakshmi and Bhutamata;' Kiratamurti; the coronation of Sri Rama; Vishnu in yogasayana; Umamahesvaramurti; and Vishnu as Bhogasanamurti as in the famous temple at Guruvayur. All of them were not, of course, executed at once. The latest of them goes to 1800, but as a whole they belong to the 18th century.

Some Contemporary Works.

That this period was characterised by similar activity elsewhere is proved by the discoveries at Pallimanna on the Vadakkancheri River and at Trichur; and the future may bring other places to the knowledge of the student of history. At Pallimanna, the local Siva temple which, we understand from an inscription of two verses there, was built in A.D. 1691, has on its walls a number of pictures, which indicate, by the presence of Tamil features in them, contact with the plains further east. Similarly, the murals in the famous Vadakkunathan temple at Trichur, which depict incidents from the battle of Kurukshetra, in addition to the portraiture of Nataraja, Dakshinamurti and Ganesa, were repaired, as an inscription shows, in A.D. 1731 by Kannan, 'the Nayar disciple' of the Nambudri, Netra, who hailed from what is now British Malabar.

The Literature of the Age.

The spirit which animated the execution of the murals in the Staircase room of the Mattancheri palace is but the echo of the spirit which brought into existence, in this period, of new works of literature and new forms of art. About the time when the Dutch established themselves at the expense of the Portuguese in Cochin, the Zamorin House produced the two poets, Manavikrama and Manaveda, the latter of whom wrote the Purvabharatachampu in 1643, and the Krishna-nataka

in 1652. Their contemporary, Vellangallur Narayana Nambudiri, Yogin and devotee of Guruvayur Appan, completed one at least of Meppattur's incomplete works, and wrote, amongst others, the Nrisimha-champu, the Vaidehisangama, the Srimasotsavachampu, the Tamovada, etc., besides the commentaries on the Kumarasambhava and Raghuvamsa under the titles of Vivarana and Padarthadipika. One is almost tempted to think that the murals giving the immortal reproductions of the Kumarasambhava scenes, the Bhogasanamurti of Guruvayur Appan, and the coronation of Sri Rama in the Mattancheri palace were turned out with his spirit if not with his personal knowledge and under his personal 'inspiration.' Rudra of the fame of the Sisipalavadhachampu and the commentary Bhaktapriya on the Narayaniyam, Poet Chidambarakavi who, like Uddandasatri in an earlier period, hailed from the Tamil land, the orthodox author of the Keralotpatti whoever he was, and Katancheri Nambudri of the Mamakam Kilippattu fame which gives a fine account of the national festival of Malabar, all these lived just in the time of the Ramavarma who ruled from 1698 to 1722, or a few years earlier or later. The spirit which saw the visualization of the exploits of Devi, the Kirata-murti, and Guruvayur Appan in the Mattancheri palace, was exactly the spirit which had inspired these writers, who spent most of their lives either under the patronage of the Zamorins or their Perumpadappu rivals.

Developments in Dance and Drama.

What has been said in regard to literature is true also in regard to the allied art of dramatization in different forms in this period. The Chakkiyar-kuttu, the popular dance drama of the 16th and 17th centuries, with its Pauranic narration, abhinaya accompaniment, and humorous touches, was developed and elaborated in the fourfold forms of the simple Kathaprasangam, the more complex Kudiyattam, the Mantraka and the Mattavilasa. To these came to be added the Ashtapadi-attam and the more general Krishnan-attam, dramatising the Gitagovinda and carrying the art of dramatization from the limited circle of the Chakkiyars to all, and from the limited ambalams of temples to general 'theatres'. Side by side with this development there was, in the beginning of the 18th century, the invention of the singularly charming method of dance-

drama known as Ottan-tullal. The inexhaustible store of the Pauranic stories was put in folksongs appropriate for recitation and gesture-expression ; and in the hands of that superior genius, Kunjan Nambiyar, reached its perfection in the period 1705-1760. Alike in the themes of the murals, the rhythms of their movements, and the elaboration of their technique, we find the marvellous transmutation of these modes of dance-drama into silent but none the less eloquent pictorial representations.

Note-worthy Features in the Murals of the Age.

The pictures above mentioned can be studied in the light of these facts. The first of them, which forms Plate XIII in Vol. I, and the second, which forms Plate III of the Text, reveal very interesting features which show that the Malabar school was quite different in its iconological conceptions and other features from the other schools of South India. The third picture, which forms Plate XII of Vol. I, is a remarkably striking piece of art which is far more appealing than similar scenes elsewhere in South India. It seems to me to be the best available visual picture of the idea expressed in the famous verse :—

वैदेहीसहितं सुरद्रुमतले हैमे महामण्डपे
मध्ये पुष्पकमासने मणिमये वीरासने सुस्थितम् ।
अग्रे वाचयति प्रभञ्जनसुते तत्त्वं मुनिभ्यः परं
व्याख्यान्तं भरतादिभिः परिवृतं रामं भजे श्यामलं ॥

The picture of Uma-Mahesvara (Vol. I, Plates XIII-XVI) is singularly valuable for the light which it throws on the dress, the modes of dressing the women's tresses, the ornaments, the complexions and facial features, and above all the iconic peculiarities of the Malabar school. The picture of Vishnu as Yogasayin (Vol. I, Plate V.) shows, similarly, that the Malabar artist differed from those of the East in representing details like the hoods of Adisesha, the protection to Siva in the form of Linga, the symmetry of the contrasting figures of Narada and Garuda, and the contrast of the ten dynamic avatars as against the static Yogasayana of the Lord. The last picture, which forms Plate

XVI of Vol. I, under the caption Vaikunthanatha, can be contrasted with the similar image at Namakkal (Salem District), in order to understand the more picturesque and daring fancy of the Malabar artist. In dealing with the posture and position of Garuda, the beauty of the folds of the Pitambara, and in the manner of representing the weapons of the Lord and the hoods of the serpent, we find radically different fancies. It has been suggested that the later Mughal, or rather 'Rajput School' of paintings, had some influence on Malabar art as on the arts of other parts of South India. But it is difficult to see wherein this influence has been felt, except perhaps in the manner in which the Sari of some of the women is made to cover the head as in North India. All other features have been there from earlier times, indicating their unmistakably indigenous character.

The Later Dutch Period.

Nothing need be said about Ramavarma's three weak successors : Ramavarma (1722-31) who died at Irunjalakuda ; Ramavarma (1731-46) whose benevolent disposition was made to look distinctly weak by the rise of Travancore under Martandavarman the Great (1729-58) in the south, and by the Zamorin's hostilities in the north, the Dutch showing their opportunism or incapacity to help him ; and Vira Kerala-varma (1746-50). In the time of Ramavarma (1750-95), the successor of the last, the State almost reached the verge of extinction on account of the social war in connection with the dignity or title of Perumpadappu Muppu in 1752, and the Zamorin's aggressions in the north, to save himself from which he had to enter into treaty with Travancore for the construction of the famous defence lines. A new danger also arose from Hyder Ali, in 1766, to whom Maharaja Virakerala (1775-90) had to agree to pay tribute in 1776. From 1769 to 1790 Prince Rama-varma, the later Saktan Tampuran, was in power ; but he could not put an end to the aggressions of Mysore or Travancore. Even the Dutch gave him trouble. They claimed civil and criminal jurisdiction over the Christians and encouraged their turbulence and financial defaulting ; and Ramavarma had to threaten to besiege them in 1791. Hence his settlement of the Syrian Christians in Trichur and Trippunithura, and hence his ardent nationalism.

The British Advent.

In the reign of the famous Ramavarman Saktan Tampuran (1790-1805), the Dutch were ousted from their position in Cochin, and the English took their place (1795). Ramavarma at first welcomed the new power, but was driven by the corruption and aggressiveness of the Company's officers to adopt a bitter and suspicious attitude. He however died in 1805, advising his successor not to alienate the English at any cost. Ramavarma (1805-8), his successor, was a kind-hearted and intellectual man, but lacking in vigour. He could not prevent Palayat Achan, the Minister, from joining Velu Tampi of Travancore and declaring war with the English in 1808 ; but it proved a blessing in disguise as it led to the help of Sir Thomas Munro in administration and the inauguration of a new era of better relationship with the British.

The Third period of the Murals.

The political convulsions of the last decade of the 18th century, the initial cordiality with the British victors over the Dutch, and the bitter reaction caused by the British conduct, seem to have given rise to a religious aggressiveness which vented itself in new expressions of the mural art. It has been held that three of the Cochin Palace murals must be placed at about A.D. 1800, namely the Vaikunthanatha image in the room north of the staircase room ; the Kumarasambhava scenes in the lower room below the Kovinithalam ; and the five large panels of pauranic scenes in the long bed chamber in the lower floor, occupied by the royal ladies. The first of these pictures has been already referred to. The second form a set of unique pieces of art for the reason that they are in mere outlines, and were apparently interrupted from completion. Probably the interruption was due to the fact that there was a wave of pro-Vaishnavite influence in the Cochin court in the days of that Rama Varma (1808-38) who succeeded the Raja who died after the breakout of the war with the English in 1808. The new king was, like his predecessor, primarily interested in religious and philosophic studies, in mastering Sanskrit literature and composing Malayalam dramas. He further became an ardent patron of the Madhva cult owing to the influence of the Sodia math of Udippi. This militant

Vasishnavaism was adhered to by the royal family till 1864. It is probable that the Kumarasmbhava series were planned and outlined in the time of Saktan Tampuran, and that, after his death in 1805, the troubles and pro-Vaishnavite leanings of his successors led to their being left incomplete.

The Gouri—Kalyana Scenes.

Whatever might have been the circumstances under which these scenes were interrupted, there can hardly be a doubt that, artistically, they are gems beyond price. Nearly a century and a half has gone by since they were drawn ; and even between their discovery in 1926 and the first publication of their tracings on paper in 1934-5, they have suffered terrible deformity. But even in their lamentable neglect they exercise, by the vitality and reality of the successive scenes, a clutch on the minds of beauty-lovers. The interview of the seven sages with Siva in order to persuade him to marry Uma, the toilet preparations of the bride in the midst of her companions, the marriage procession, the array of the gods and their vehicles, the presentation of Parvati by Vishnu, and the music party of Narada, provide occasions for a long and stately picture of contemporary social life. They form an ideal, though not carried out in full, of incomparable loveliness. We study Malabar life at close quarters, and we see it as it was built on the best pattern. As the whole series are to be published, together with a text, as Vol. III of this series, it is unnecessary to dilate further on them. It is enough to state that the artists have admirably succeeded in not only presenting beauty and taste but in carrying spiritual joy. Feeling disinterested ananda themselves, they impart it to others.

The Krishna and 'Mohini' Scenes.

The pictures in the ladies' chamber, which cover more than 150 square feet, form two distinct sets, the former of which give a zestful study of Krishna as the prince of revels. In the picture which depicts him in the midst of the Gopis, and which forms Plates I-III of Vol. I, we get at once the curious impression that Krishna is there in all his bulk, and yet not individualistically ! We see at once the fulness of the

Gopis' life as well as, in the expression of their individual experience, the emptiness of the longing and disappointed souls. It is a technical masterpiece where the inherent difficulty of representing the universality of the individual divine figure has been overcome with singular skill. It forms an ideal lyric of pictorial art. The sensuous rhythms of the figures of the God of Love and the lovelorn cowherdesses are entrancing. They are the self-expression of a folk saturated with love, beauty, and taste. They reproduce deliciously the strains of music in that supreme work of genius and songs, the Gitagovinda. Curiously enough, while the emotion in the art is paramount, the idealism is not less conspicuous. The picture of Krishna as Govardhanadhari (Plates VI-X) is a striking in its contrast. The Lord as Protector has a figure indicating correctly the weight he carries. The ease with which he does it is reflected in playing on the flute. The white figure of the wonder-struck Balarama, the contrasts in the features and dresses of the women, the details of individual behaviour in the crowd—the anxious mother, the timid children, the helpless old woman, the happy cows, the screne life of the wild beasts—all these remind us of the great Pallava sculptural masterpiece at Mahabalipuram. The details are different, as the medium, in every respect ; and yet there is the same vitality, the same idealism in both. We have here a picture of the rich Malabar life and its arcadian charm. It is quite fit that the editors have devoted as many as five plates (VI-X) to the reproduction of the different scenes of this Malabar nature-world.

The second set of pictures in the ladies' chamber deal with Siva as the lover par excellence. They deal with Siva as the ideal representative of conjugal felicity, as Ardhanarisvara (Plate XIII), in Kailasa, and then represent Him, as in dalliance with 'Ganga' or 'Mohini,' when he is uncomfortably surprised by Parvati riding on a bull (Plate XVII). As many as six plates are devoted to the display of special scenes from these two incomparable pictures. The iconographical features of the divine figures (Plates XIV-XV), and the different animal studies (Plates XVIII-XX), do not only give a full idea of the artist's capacity to depict different scenes from life, from the human as well as animal worlds, but carry the lesson of the unity of the universe. We have here a full representation of Malabar's love of God and God's gifts. We have

here a superb conception of the interdependence of the physical and spiritual planes. Devotion personalises the divinity, and transplant the images resulting from it from the transcendental to the mundane world. A unity of conception links the divine exploits and the earthly experiences. The image of Siva only expresses cosmic life. The world is but a reflection of the divine Lila. This is the supreme lesson we derive from these pictures.

Contemporary Arts and Literature.

As in the previous period, the pictures are but reflections of the arts of sculpture, pantomine and poetry. The varieties of the Krishna and Raman plays were enriched by the more limited but all the same more agreeable style of the Mohiniyattam which was confined, unlike the Kathakali, to female actors, and which was developed under the same circumstances—as the Kuravanji was in the Tanjore court of Sarabhoji. Belonging to the lasya variety, with love for its theme, gesture for its vocabulary, popular tunes on the indigenous instruments for its media, it is a singularly graceful and attractive though conventionalised art. More technically developed was the Kathakali, with its elaborate features of symbolism and silent pantomime, its extraordinary technique, its puranic themes, its wealth of poses and gestures, its intricate language of eyes and expressions, and its elaborate dress and make-up. It carries the art of translating icons and pictures into silent but all the same eloquent 'movies' to an extent unknown in any other art. The murals are the exact counterparts of the Kathakali in the themes, the gestures, the mudras and other technical features. In the recently-discovered Padmanabhapuram paintings of the late 17th and 18th centuries, and in the post-Padmanabhapura pictures of the Krishnapuram palace in Travancore we find this ideal translation. The Mahabharata and Siva-tandava scenes at Trichur, the Puranic representations at Chemmantatta, and the unpublished murals at Tiruvanchikulam, Triprayar and Peruvanam in the Cochin State, indicate the same features. And the vitality of the visual arts is reflected in the contemporary growth of an extensive literature. Maharajas like Ramavarma (1805-8) of Cochin and Balaramavarma (1798-1811) and Svati Tirunal (1829-47) of Travancore, stood at the forefront of the literary luminaries of

the age, and provided a copious literature of background for the arts.

Conclusion.

The great lesson that we draw from this rapid sketch of the historical factors which have gone to shape the character and determine the progress of the Cochin Mural Art is that it has, like all Indian arts, for its basic inspiration, the realisation of the Purusharthas. It is therefore the same in the different forms of poetry, music, dance, painting, sculpture, and architecture. The sense of beauty is common ; but the modes of expression are different. The poet's word, the musicians' rhythm, the painter's brush, and the sculptor's chisel, are all media for the same art-concepts. What the poet describes in words, the painter reproduces in line and colour. Similarly, folk dances and plays are rendered into murals by the interpretative genius. There is simple transmutation from the one to the other. They are the children of the same feeling, the same love, and the same faith. And the artist does this by clinging to convention. He does not take liberties with tradition. He has his own school for representing figures, features, limbs, gestures, and poses ; but he is both symbolic and realistic ; both suggestive and creative ; both emotional and philosophic ; both secular and spiritual. But the dedication of the cult of beauty to the divine stands at the bottom of all. Herein lies the claim of Malabar art to a unique place in history.

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THE HISTORY OF THE MATTANCHERI PALACE

BY

P. ANUJAN ACHAN.

(Government Archaeologist, Cochin).

THE history of the Mattancheri Palace, beginning from the middle of the 16th century to the revolt of 1808 A.D. is full of interesting incidents. The palace was built by the Portuguese and presented to the Raja of Cochin about the year 1555. Since that time, for a period of nearly two centuries, it was the seat of the Cochin Rajas, and was therefore associated with many vicissitudes of fortune. Although now left unoccupied, the palace is looked upon with veneration by many, for some of the important functions connected with the coronation of the Maharajas of Cochin are performed here on the day of their assumption to the throne.

Raja Virakerala Varma (1537-1561) was the ruler of Cochin, to whom the Portuguese are said to have made a present of this stately building. It stands on the eastern foreshore of the island of Cochin, facing the Harbour reclamation, commanding a magnificent view from the back-waters. It is perhaps one of the earliest structures built by the Europeans in India in the orthodox style. The palace is a quadrangular building divided into long and spacious halls, and has two storeys. It has an extensive compound surrounded by high masonry walls with two entrances from the east and the west respectively. In the central court-yard of the palace is enshrined the tutelary deity of the royal family—Pazhayannur Bhagavati. Within the palace compound there are two other shrines dedicated to Gods Vishnu and Siva, respectively. Close to the palace on the western side there is a large tank

for bathing. The upper storey of the palace contains the coronation hall, three large bed chambers and other rooms, while the lower storey is divided into several small chambers with a spacious dining hall and a kitchen on one side. Attached to the eastern wing of the palace at the southern end, is a long portico, the lower portion of which was specially set apart for the ladies. It is provided with a separate staircase from the upper floor, and has a secret opening to the courtyard outside. The walls of this hall are decorated with large-sized paintings. Paintings are depicted on the walls of one of the halls in the upper storey and of three other chambers.

There is another small portico attached to the southern wing of the palace, which is connected with a broad open staircase from outside, through which visitors are generally allowed entrance into the coronation hall. The walls of this hall are devoid of any decorations, but its wooden ceiling is of the rarest type, containing the finest floral designs ever found. To the west of the coronation hall, is one of the bed chambers, **Palliyara,** which we shall call :

Room No. 1.

where we have the earliest set of murals. It is a spacious hall, measuring 31 ft. by 17 ft., provided with four door-ways and a large window opening to the west, admitting plenty of light and air inside. This room is looked upon with special respect, for here passed away one of the Maharajas of Cochin (in August 1760), and as a mark of respect to his memory, a light is permanently kept there. Unlike the coronation hall, it has a low ceiling, simple and unpretentious, the height of the wall being only 8 ft. 9 in. All round the wall, at a height of 3 ft. 4 in., is fixed a wooden moulding about 9 in. broad ; and the pictures are painted over the wall space between the moulding and the wooden ceiling above. The paintings depict the story of the Ramayana, beginning from the birth of Rama to Sita's return to Ayodhya from her captivity. They are completed in 40 to 45 scenes, all of which are fairly well preserved, with the exception of three or four that have been slightly obliterated, either because of the re-fixing of the plaster on the walls, or due to the continued burning of the oil lamp close to the corner of the

room. There is also a scene on Gopikanritta on the eastern wall ; and three smaller size paintings above the doorways, representing Maha-Ganapati-Homa and other topics of local interest.

Room No. 2.

To the south of the coronation hall is the second room in which there is a set of six large-sized paintings. This room is known as Kovanithalam or the staircase room, which leads one to the bed-chamber in the lower storey, which was occupied by the ladies of the royal family. It has a floor-space of 18 ft. by 17 ft., and has a beautifully designed wooden ceiling. It has three doorways and a window opening to the south. At the south-eastern corner of the room is fixed the narrow staircase leading to the down floor. This room contains paintings representings : 1. Mahalakshmi and Bhutamata, 2. Kiratamurti, 3. The coronation of Sri Rama, 4. Siva and Parvati, Ardhanareeswara and other goddesses, 5. Vishnu as Anantasayanamurti, and 6. Guruvayur Appan.

Room No. 3.

This room is of the same size as of room No. 2, and it lies to the north of the latter. On the western wall of it, is a large painting of "Vishnu as Vaikuntanatha"—a true representation of the beautiful image enshrined in the Trippunithura temple. It is a large-sized panel, and the only one painted in this chamber.

Room No. 4.

The fourth room is the one immediately below room No. 2, which is reached through the narrow staircase already referred to. It is provided with a low ceiling—simple and unattractive, a large window opening to the southern courtyard, and a doorway leading to the lower bed-chamber. The only inviting feature of this room is a set of unfinished, yet the most impressive, paintings covering nearly half the total length of the walls, portraying in outlines only the story of the marriage of Uma and Siva, as described in the Kumarasambhava of Kalidasa.

Room No. 5.

The fifth and last room where we have the murals, is the spacious hall lying to the east of Room No. 4, which has a floor space of 32 ft. by 17 ft. This room formed the lower bed-chamber, and was occupied by the ladies of the royal household. The walls of this room contain five large sized paintings, featuring (1) Krishna lying flat on a couch playing flute, surrounded by gopies, (2) Krishna lifting up the Govardhan, (3) Siva and Parvati on the Kailasa, (4) Parvati coming riding on the Bull while her husband Siva was engaged with Ganga, and (5) Vishnu as Mohini playing ball when Siva comes on the bull. A portion of the last painting has been damaged, while the rest are in good condition.

Date of the Paintings.

One of the striking features of the Murals in the Mattancheri Palace is the freedom employed by the artists in choosing their themes and presenting the subject that could be portrayed to the best of their capacity. All the paintings distributed in the five rooms of the Palace are not of the same period. The pictures of the last three rooms are of a later type, and they were painted about 1800 A.D. The paintings of the 2nd room were painted about the year 1700, while the paintings in Room No. 1 were executed about 1600 A.D.

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SOME AESTHETICAL ASPECTS OF INDIAN MURALS

BY

G. VENKATACHALAM.

DISCOVERING Murals! Like "going places" for the rich, "discovering murals" has become a pleasant pastime for the dilettante in this country. Everybody is discovering frescoes everywhere these days; all are becoming archaeologists or art-critics over-night; and obliging newspapers broadcast these "finds" as if an another Harappa or Mohenjodaro had been discovered!

Mural paintings have always been there in India, especially on the walls of temples, ever since the Hindus learnt to build, and there they have remained in all sorts of decaying and perishing conditions, all these decades and centuries, seen by few and neglected by most. To the pilgrims they were pictorial reminders of their half-remembered puranas or forgotten epics; but to the modern art pundits they have suddenly become a fascinating field for endless "discoveries", which the world must know through their writings!

The discovery of "Cochin Murals" had not any of this romantic atmosphere, and it was not announced to the world as an epoch-making find and a landmark in Indian art. It was a much more simple and sober affair, and was taken for granted. None sought their way to fame by any such startling announcements.

It is inevitable that these mural paintings, with their archaic forms and unconventional attitudes, their peculiar art-idioms and mannerisms, should interest some and puzzle others, especially outside India, and it

was, therefore, thought that a few general observations on the aesthetical and idealogical aspects of Indian painting might be of help to such of those, who are not acquainted with the life and art of this ancient land.

Indian art differs from Western art in its ideals as well as in its expression and technique. Western art is essentially realistic and representational, secular and scientific, while Indian art is suggestive and symbolic, religious and idealistic, where intuition and imagination play a greater part than the mere skill of hands and command over technique. This difference is to be seen not only in matters of medium, such as the Indian preference for water-colour and for murals and miniatures, or of mannerisms, such as the slender waist, heavy busts, elongated eyes and tapering fingers, but in the ideals and functions of art and its relation to life.

Indian art is the multicoloured expression of the rich and variegated creative consciousness of the Indian people and their sensitive reactions to environment. Indian art is not an achievement of any single individual or groups of individuals or even of a particular epoch, but the sum total of Indian racial experience expressed in terms of colour, form, sound and beauty.

The basic idea of both Indian life and art is the concept of the ONE LIFE behind all manifestation, and that Life " elaborating itself through the rich and wonderful multiplicity and variety of form in nature and humanity ". This Hindu idea runs through in all aspects of Indian art, and since Indian art is symbolic, great cosmic truths are portrayed in concrete forms that are extremely suggestive to the Hindu mind. An artist's aim is not only to illustrate and illumine life but to symbolise eternal varities through the medium of his creation.

Indian painting, in its most realistic phases, is essentially " a mental summary of visual perception " rather than a faithful reproduction of an object from a certain point in space. The physical perspective, therefore, is generally disregarded. The perspective of the academic type, as is taught and practised in Western art, is too rigid for the

purpose of artistic design. It obstructs the flight of vision and interferes with the Indian notion of mental and imaginative visualisations. The perspective in Indian art is more mental and psychological and, therefore, freer and unfettered.

To an Indian artist the world, both animate and inanimate, is but an expression of the Divine, and consequently he is able to sense the unity in life and nature, naturally and directly, and we feel this unity and harmony in his compositions. The ensembling of gods, human beings, birds, animals, plants and flowers into a decorative scheme of a flowing frieze or a moving panorama in his works is but this inner urge within him for sensing the unity in diversity. The philosophical idea of rebirth gives him the inner rhythm of ebb and flow of life, which is one of the most striking features in the great creative works of art in India.

Indian art is linear, not massive and structural. Depth, as represented in Western art, is merely an illusion, and with inherited feeling the Indian artist avoids this third dimension. To him only length and width exist on the plane of a wall or paper. In all his compositions, whether a large scale mural or a tiny miniature, you will notice the details of the scene worked out most naturally, with a feeling for reality, but the central figures themselves are often painted without depth.

It is the secret of Indian art that it reveals the life through form, the object through the subject, the meaning through suggestion. The ancient artists of China, Japan and India knew only too well this apparent paradox in art. The Chinese landscape painters, the Zen sculptors of Japan and the Indian mural decorators knew the secret of exaggerating or abstracting intentionally nature's forms to suit their intentions and purpose. They never took nature or life too literally. Oriental artists believe in economy of lines because their object is to suggest rather than to illustrate anything fully. To them there is more beauty in a bursting bud than in a full-blown flower.

The Indian painter prefers water-colour or tempera to oils because he finds it more suitable to his genius. He loves its fine delicate tints

and his subtle mind and sensitive fingers love to play with tender shades of reds, greens and blues. Neither does he fight shy of bright luminous colours when it comes to painting decorative murals.

The colours often indicate the mood, and emotions are suggested, with much delicacy, by gestures, poses and movements of the body and limbs. The proportions are based on a canon more ancient than the Greek standard of beauty and more in keeping with the conventions of ancient Shastras.

Forms, when idealised, need not be of the familiar or natural type, and the Indian artist chooses his ideal forms from all the kingdoms of nature, and this gives him his richer "artistic anatomy" and more intriguing ideas to clothe his abstractions. Human form limits art and, therefore, the endless beauty of decorative designs in Indian art. Impersonality, devotion and dedication, these characterise Indian art and artists.

The Cochin Murals share, in an abundant measure, most of these characteristics. They are traditional in form and style and religious in content and feeling. They are painted in the accepted technique of Hindu murals and are over-ornate and too full of details. These, undoubtedly, distract one's attention from their true merits but, by no means, diminish their intrinsic artistic qualities.

"The figures", let me quote from what I have written elsewhere on Kerala Frescoes, "are drawn with power and precision, and in spite of the elaborate ornamentations and minute filigreeings, they stand out distinctly and do not get lost in the decorative details. The drawings, the grouping and the colouring are all conventionally treated, and in spite of their rigid forms they are intensely vital and alive. The figures seem stiff, but the flowing lines of the draperies and the general rhythm of their composition give them a suggestion of movement. The faces are expressive with wistful eyes and winsome smiles.

"But there is this difference between the Buddhist frescoes of Ajanta and the Hindu murals of Kerala. The former is realistic and

natural, less decorative and more graceful in their aesthetical appeal, like the sculptural masterpieces of the Gupta or Pallava times, while the Kerala murals, like the mediaeval sculptures of Halebid and Belur are iconographic, stylistic, exuberant and capricious.

" In these Kerala paintings, as in Ajanta frescoes, one gets glimpses of the cultural life of the people of that period ; and as pictorical records of the costumes, ornaments and other articles of art and utility these murals are valuable. It is interesting to note how some of them are still preserved in the dance-drama native to this part of the country ; and even the languorous look and the subdued smiles, the strange attitudes and poses that one observes in Kathakali actors to-day seem to have been copied from these paintings ".

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THE TECHNIQUE OF MURAL PAINTINGS

BY

JAYANTILAL T. PAREKH.

THE interest in mural painting in modern time is growing and its due place amongst arts is also being recognised. Many experiments are being tried to decorate private and public buildings, and the techniques of old masters and past ages are being carefully studied for purposes of reclamation. New methods are often invented, though in most cases they are based on traditional processes. It is not however always possible to have an exact knowledge of the old methods, because evidences available are too scanty and the students have to be merely satisfied with the admiration of the ancient techniques, which could stand well against the onslaught of time. It need scarcely be said that the knowledge of these methods is necessary to help us in our efforts to revive old art.

The techniques of mural paintings differ not only from place to place and from people to people, but also from time to time in the same country. This is quite natural, because it mainly depends on the materials found in the vicinity of the worker and on the capacity of the worker to make use of them. These techniques, though many, may be classified generally under four main divisions, as (1) tempera, (2) fresco, (3) encaustic and (4) oil painting. Brief descriptions of these are given below :

Tempera painting : The Italian term "a tempera" means "with a mixture." The painting is called tempera, in which the colours are used with a binding material which is soluble in water like gum, glue,

etc. Artificial emulsions are also made by mixing boiling wax with potash and distilled water and also by mixing drying oils with water through the intermediary medium of gum or yolk of the egg. The wall paintings of ancient Egypt, Babylon, Greece, India, Ceylon, China and Japan were done in tempera, though the binding material in each case was different. Under suitable conditions the paintings last for many centuries.

Fresco painting : The process of painting where the colours are laid down without any binding material and while the lime plaster is still wet, is called by the Italian term painting " a fresco ", (i.e., painting on the fresh), colours applied do not sink in the wet plaster but through chemical action hold to the surface in a sort of crystalline skin of calcium carbonate. The earliest record of this kind of painting is found in a treatise on architecture by the Roman architect Vitruvius, who flourished in the first century B.C. It was under this process that the frescoes of Pompey and other places were painted. In India, fresco technique has been practised from about the 16th century by a number of mason-artists in and around Jaipur State in Northern India. It is said that the earliest paintings executed in this technique were at Fathepur-Sikri, which was built by Akbar the great, for which he brought skilled artisans from Persia and other places. This kind of work, though now disappearing, was known in South India for even as late as the eighteenth century ; Fresco painting has been done in the famous temple of Meenakshi at Madura and other places.

At this point it should be mentioned that a number of art-historians and critics have called Ajanta paintings true frescoes. It may be said that these claims are groundless ; for they have not sufficiently proved the real nature of the process by which the paintings have been executed. The most important thing to be noted is that the plaster over which the paintings at Ajanta, Bagh, and other places are executed is made of earth, cow-dung, chopped straw and other fibrous material and perhaps also some other ingredients from which a strong and durable ground could be obtained. Over this, one or more coats of chalk or kaolin given and on that surface paintings were executed. We do not know how is it possible to call the paintings which are done on a mud wall

'frescoes': It is doubtful if it is possible to paint on such a ground, when it is wet.

Encaustic painting: This is an ancient process of painting where in the wax colours are driven in with the help of heat applied to the ground. This technique is not used for the walls, but only for florid decorations.

Oil painting: This is a process where colours are mixed with drying oils and are applied on a prepared ground which contains dry lime. Though it come into prominence in Italy during the Renaisance period, it was not practised afterwards for wall paintings.

With this we shall describe the technique in which most of the important paintings found in the palaces and temples of Travancore and Cochin were painted.

We have studied the technique by very closely observing both finished and unfinished paintings. We also got particulars about colours and binding material we have got from a local artist who had received them from an old traditional painter. But though we have tried our best to find out traditional painters from whom we could learn the whole process, we failed. We have also not found any text dealing with this subject, except the one, which was published recently in the 'Indian Historical Quarterly', which is in Sanskrit with Malayalam commentary. We think that old manuscripts dealing with the subject must be available in this region which has preserved so many traditions. We hope that with the new interest in Kerala (Malabar Coast) painting, efforts will be made to discover and publish them.

We do not claim infallibility for our description of the technique, neither does it entirely rest on the authority of any old text or the mode of the traditional living artist, though ordinarily there is nothing in it which can be doubted.

There seem to have been employed two methods in doing the earlier and later paintings, though the general process reained the

same. The colours and binding material seem to have changed in later paintings.

Preparation of ground : All the paintings in the temples and palaces of Cochin and Travancore States which we had the opportunity of studying have been done on walls built of laterite stones and plastered over with lime and sand. We do not know how this plaster was made but it is very likely that it was prepared more or less in the manner described in the old Sanskrit text which appeared in the Historical Quarterly. The following is a free English translation of it :

> " Now I shall describe the method of plastering the walls (Sudhalepa), on which pictures are to be painted. Chunam (Sudha) is the powder obtained by burning conch, mother of pearl or shell. Take the powder and drench it with a solution of molasses and a decoction of ¼th the quantity of small peas (Mudga). Add quarter part sand with unripe plaintain fruits, boiled and beaten well into pulp. Put this mixture into wooden dug-outs, wherein it should be kept for two months, mixing the same daily. At the end of two months, take the mixture in small quantities and, placing the same on a granite slab, sprinkle solution of molasses on it and grind it into paste soft as butter.
>
> " Level the plaster by means of trowel of convenient size, made of copper, pewter, iron or wood. Care should be taken that the surface does nowhere protrude or fall in. When levelling is over the surface should be rubbed with cold water by means of the trunk brush. Whitewash the surface when it gets dry ".

The plaster over which the existing paintings have been done does not seem to have been made soft by grinding, as is mentioned in the text. The thickness of the plaster varies from one-fourth of an inch to more than half an inch. It is applied well and the surface is quite smooth. In some only we have found that over the plaster wall thus prepared one or more thin washes of lime are given : in other cases the paintings are done directly on plastered wall.

Preparation of colours : The following colours are said to have been used for the older paintings :—

Yellow—cadmium sulphide.
Red-Vermillion—Mercuric sulphide.
Green,
Indigo,
Black,
White.

This yellow is known in Northern India as Harital and in Malabar as Menewala ; and the Red as Hingul and Chaeliyam respectively.

These colours were ground fine and for long, with water from tender cocoanuts and a binding material made of a kind of red seeds with a black eye mark on it (abrus precatorius). The binding material is made by first removing the egg like shell of the seeds and keeping the inside yellow matter looking like small peas in water for over a night and then grinding it into soft paste. If this paste dries, it becomes useless ; so it is prepared fresh every day. This binding material is generally used by goldsmiths.

The red and yellow colours we have mentioned are found in the older works only ; because in the later works they seem to be red and yellow ochres. The green also, in later paintings*, seems to be different. The binding material in them was perhaps gum-arabic, or some other material of weaker capacity, because the colours with a little friction in these paintings come out. The Cadmium and Vermillion of the earlier paintings are very bright, while the yellow and red ochres of later paintings are dull comparatively. But the colours in many of the older paintings have changed and have become somewhat dark. When we compare them with some examples of paintings from Vadak-

*When we talk of the later paintings we especially mean the paintings in the two lower chambers of the Mattencherry Palace, Cochin which were meant to be apartments for ladies and also some of the paintings in the room above this.

kunathan Temple, Trichur round a small shrine which have still remained bright and fresh, we can understand what gold-like-brilliance the original paintings must have had when they were painted. In many of the temples, as in Vadakkunathan temple, they have become dark and in many cases almost black on account of the smoke of the oil lamps.

The most interesting thing about the older paintings is that they are insoluble in water. We tried to clean some of the paintings with oil and methylated spirit, but they did not dissolve and come out. We do not know how the paintings have got fixed so well. The binding material used was no doubt very strong but it is very likely that there was also some kind of chemical action. This fact does not tempt us to conclude that they must have been true frescoes because these colours cannot stand the decomposing action of lime. It is also not possible to do compositions so vast and full of details, in a day on the wet ground.

Blue or Indigo, as such, is not found to have been used except as light shade in one or two cases where the figures are white. There are two varieties of green, yellowish-green and bluish-green.

The black colour, we are told, was prepared by mixing with water a little alum, and placing in it for over a night a piece of rusting iron and piece of Hartaki (Terminalia chebula). By this process, it may be pointed out, black ink has always been prepared all over India.

Process of painting : When the ground as described above is perfectly dry and ready, the artist begins his first sketch with a very light yellow colour. He draws this sketch freely and changes the lines of the drawing till he is satisfied with it. After this he draws over this his final drawing, with red colour. The spaces of this final drawing are filled with colours. When the distribution of flat colours is over, the forms are shaded with a fine brush by stippling process, the marks of which are quite visible, to show the roundness of the forms. Yellow colour is shaded with red and green colour with black. When the work is finished, all the forms are lined with black colour and so the original red line disappears. After this the small spaces of white which could not be left wall-white are scratched out, with some sharp instrument

and the whiteness of the wall is shown. Nowhere has the use of white as colour been found. We have also not been able to trace any proof of the application of any kind of Varnish or fixative over this.

In the later paintings, because of the European and Mogul or Rajput influences the forms are shaded so well that it is not easy to find out the marks of stippling.

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