MUSIC FROM SOUTH INDIA KERALA

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INTRODUCTION.

Kērāla, more commonly known as Malabar, is a narrow strip of land between the Western Ghāts and the Arabian Sea to the extreme South of the West Coast of India. It is said to have been created by Paraśurāma, or Rāma with the axe, one of the three Rāmas and the sixth Avatār of Viṣṇu. He was a Brāhmin (the 1st or priestly caste). Because of the continual annoyance and persecution the Brahmins had to suffer from the Kshatriyas (the 2nd or warrior caste), he created this new country. It is a land of hills and valleys, rice-fields, rivers, inland waterways, coconuts, teak forests, tea (formerly coffee) and rubber plantations (the last two of fairly recent origin), and along the coast, of marvellous sands of many shades of colour from pure white to deep red which are now a source of raw materials for modern industry.

The population, the most literate in India, is mainly Hindu, and all the music in this album is of the Hindus. There are also long established Jewish (from about A.D. 490) and Christian communities (from about the same time) and in North Malabar, an influential Muslim community that has also been long established (several centuries). The people are called Malayālis: they speak Malayāḷam, a rich language with a Dravidian syntax and a vocabulary that has drawn considerably on Sanskrit. The Hindus of Kērāla are amongst the most orthodox in India (hence the frequent reference to caste in the following notes) and they differ from almost every other section of Hindus in that they had until very recently, and still retain the strong tendency towards, a matrilinear system of succession. The most important body of Hindus is that of the Nāyars: though outside the Aryan caste system (but they themselves have every variation of caste), they are by their bearing and temperament Kshatriyas. Unlike the Nāyars, the Malabar Brāhmins, the Nambūḍiris, of whom the great Vedantic philosopher Śaṅkarachārya (8th century) was one, practice primogeniture in the male line but the younger sons marry amongst the Rvai Varmars (true Kshatriyas) and the high-caste Nāyars, who are thus of mixed Dravidian and Aryan descent, which also is the keynote of their culture, in many of its aspects.

Panchawādyam (lit. 5 instruments) is the name of a music played in the temples of Central and Northern Kērāla during their annual festivals. The musicians circumambulate the central shrine whilst they play. Though it is called "Five Instruments", there are invariably six different kinds: it is the Conch that is not accounted a musical instrument. The Conch is used only in religious ceremonies.

On Band 1, each instrument is heard separately, announced by someone of the country, in the following order:

1. Conch (Sankhu).

2. Idakka (pronounced Edakya), a small hourglass shaped drum whose membranes, at each end, are tied together with braces, pressure on which alters the pitch. (Fox Strangways says the pitch may be altered by a sixth: the example of perhaps the finest player in Kērāla given in Band 4 on this side shows that it can be a whole octave). It is allied to the Northern Damrū and like it is associated with Śiva. The left hand controls the pitch; it is struck either with the fingers of the right hand or by a small stick. Thin twine running across both faces gives it the slight buzzing effect.
3. **Kombu**, a semi-circular horn made of bronze.

4. **Maddalam**, a large double-ended finger drum, of which two are used in this particular performance.

5. **Timila**, a long hour-glass shaped double-ended, finger drum, whose laces being free between the two ends act as sympathetic strings, producing a harmonic which can be clearly heard towards the end of Band 2. It is struck at one end only. Two are used here.

6. **Ejatajam** (pronounced Ejatajam), a pair of medium-sized cymbals.
The beginning and end of a performance that lasted nearly 18 minutes is given. Pancharadhyaam often goes on for an hour or more. The players are Nārāyaṇa Marar and Party, from a Temple near Cochin.

NOTE: The photographs showing the players and their instruments are not of the players heard here but of another, larger group recorded two years previously.

Side 1 - Band 2: PANCHAWĀDYAM.

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Side 1, Band 3. ASHTAPADI

Ashtapadi (having eight lines), by which the famous Gīta Gīvinda of the 12th century poet Jayadeva is known in Kerala, is 'a mystical erotic poem describing the loves of Kṛṣṇa and the Gopī, especially of Kṛṣṇa and Radha, who is supposed to typify the human soul' (Monier-Williams, Sanskrit-English Dictionary). It might be called the Song of Songs of India. Whereas in other parts of South India it goes with dancing (Bharata Nātyam), in Kerala it has been sung by itself in temples since ancient times, giving rise to the style of singing known as Sopānam, probably from 'the flight of steps leading to the Śrīkōvil (sanctum sanctorum) of temples which was the place allotted for the ritual singing of Ashtapadis, (I am indebted for this information to an article by V. Madhavan Nair in Volume XL, Number 1, December 1957, of MARG, published in Bombay, to which the reader is referred in connection with Kathakali). This style of singing in slow tempo has passed into Kathakali, examples of which are given in this album. The language of Gīta Gīvinda is Sanskrit, and Jayadeva prescribes the rāgam or melody for each of his verses. In Kerala, the ragams traditionally used have different names. I am sorry that considerations of time make it impossible to present a whole verse, but the following small excerpt from the beginning of the twentieth will give a good idea of how it sounds, to the traditional accompaniment of an Idakka, which is described in the note on Band 1. Jayadeva orders it to be sung to the melody Vasanta (Spring), and the accompaniment Yati. Here it is sung according to the tradition of the country in four successive ragams, namely, Bhairavi, Gaura, Hindolam and Hamsanandi, of which only the first will be heard. For the sake of those who are unfamiliar with the Gīta Gīvinda, the full text of George Keyt's translation is printed (published in 1847 by Kutub, Bombay), while the accompanying Sanskrit text is from the edition of Christian Lassen, Bonn, 1836, reproduced by kind permission of the British Museum.

GīTA GīVINDA XI. 20.

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वसंतपदमन्तलारामो गायने ||
विचित्रित्यावधमरव चरणे रवितप्रमणान ||

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GīTA Govinda XI. 20.
GīTA GŌVINDA, verse 20.

Who made a song of coaxing words, bowing at
your feet in homage,
And gone now to the lovely clump of bamboos,
to the bed of passion,
O foolish woman, follow him who looks with
favour now,
O Rādhā, Madhu's slayer!

O you who bear the weight of heavy thighs and
heavy breasts, come hither
With tardy tread that shames the goose and with
your jewelled anklets tinkling,
O foolish woman, etc.

Listen to his lovely noise, infatuating, and your
yeaing
Where the flocks of cuckoos praise the reign of
him whose bow is flowers!
O foolish woman, etc.

O you with thighs like elephant trunks, these
creepers with their hands aflutter,
Their tendrils waving in the wind, appear to ask
you to the meeting!
O foolish woman, etc.

Consult your jar-shaped breast on which are
spotless streams of necklaces,
Which quivers undulating on the waves, the
surging force of passion!
O foolish woman, etc.

Your friends are all aware, you rogue, that you
are ready for love's conflict,
Go, your belt aloud with bells, shameless,
amorous, to the meeting!
O foolish woman, etc.

O you with arrows of Love for nails, leaning on
your friend, seductive,
Go to Hari, his ways are known, and know him by
his bracelets' tinkling!
O foolish woman, etc.

May this song of Jayadeva swell upon the necks
of people
Given to Hari, necks the beauty of their necklaces
surpassing.
O foolish woman, etc.

(Note: Govinda, Madhu and Hari are names of
Krishṇa).

Side 1, Band 4: IDAKKA

An example of solo playing.

Singer, T. R. Šankaran Nambūdīrī; Idakka,
P. M. Nārāyaṇa Marar, (not the same person
as in Band 1).

Side 1, Band 5: KĪRTANAM


A kīrtanam is strictly speaking a devotional
song of praise, but in a wider sense may be
any song of a spiritual nature, so long as it
also contains something for the heart. This
kīrtanam, sung by the well-known Malayāḷi
lady singer Parur P. V. Ponnamma, is by
the late P. Damōdaran Pillai. It is written
in the Tamil "abusive" style, in Malayāḷam.
First, there is an injunction to put aside ig-
norance, in the tradition of Vedanta, and it ends
by stating the need to take refuge at the lotus-
feet of a great Guru, or spiritual teacher.
Only a part is given; as sung, verses 8, 9, 14
& 18 are omitted. Every line ends with the
long vowel 'a': to allow of this, the word
printed in the margin is made to begin the
second line of the couplet.
The singer’s husband, Sri S. Balakrishna Pillai kindly made an English translation that conveys the general sense: to bring out the characteristic style would be impossible, and a commentary would be needed to make every word clear. This is hardly the place for a treatise on Advaita Vedanta! At the time of the recording, someone was felling coconuts and the crows were busily cawing, and I for one do not object. These are amongst the ever-present daytime sounds of Kerala.

**JĪVA BHĀVATTE NĪ TALLĖPA**

O poor man! Caste away thy wretched jīvahood (state of being identified with the body) and assume the glorious state of Sat-Chit-Ananda.

Throw away thy fear of the serpent in the rope and know that thou art by nature ever that uncaused Ananda (bliss).

Knowest that nothing exists except it be known (perceived or thought of), and that two thoughts can never exist at one time.

Knowest that to claim that thou art the doer, the enjoyer or the perceiver is only to superimpose something extraneous on thy true Self.

Knowest that thou art pure happiness and peace shining as the untroubled witness in all thy thoughts and feelings.

Thou art that unattached Tattwa (Reality) itself: seeest thou this by exercising discrimination and allowing thyself to become enlightened thereby.

Knowest that the three bodies (physical, subtle and causal) and the three states (waking, dreaming and dreamless sleep) merely appear and disappear in thee (the Witness).

Knowest that thou art that changeless Witness and ever unattached.

Doest thou discard name and form as unreality, and knowest that thy true nature is none other than pure consciousness.

Even name and form are ultimately nothing but thyself.

Who is it that is actually affected by bondage and liberation? Not thou! Thou art that changeless self-luminous peace.

Thou art thyself that eternal light, Thou art of the nature of pure consciousness.

Throw away thy wanton desires, and shine in the unmistakable glory of thyself.

The gross is only the denser form of the subtle and therefore throw away both as unreal.

Be under the lotus-feet of the self-luminous Guru ... and be happy!

From the special number of MARG (see Side 1, Band 3) on Kathakali: "Though Kathakali, as we know it today, is an art not more than three to four hundred years old, its actual roots can be traced to at least 1,500 years earlier. Kathakali marks the culmination of a long process of evolution during which the various histrionic arts of Kerala had their birth and developed and paved the way for the eventual emergence of this composite art. Kathakali also symbolises a blending of the Aryan and Dravidian cultures, for, in shaping its technique Kathakali assimilated various elements which it borrowed freely from the dances, dramas and ritual performances associated with these cultures relative to their place in ancient Kerala."
Alas! The drum beaten on one side with two slender curved dancers translate certain specific ideas into dances is provided by a rather peculiar collection noted that there are neither stringed instruments nor wind instruments in this collection. (Alas! see my note below about the present growing use of the reed-box. J. L.) The most prominent among them is the Chenda found only in Kerala - a large drum beaten on one side with two slender curved sticks (and also with the hands in quiet passages J. L.) and producing a loud reverberating sound which penetrates to long distances. The Maddalam, also believed to be indigenous to Kerala, is another type of large drum played on both sides with the hands. The Ponnani himself keeps rhythm on the Chengalam, a metal gong beaten with a short stick, while the Sinkidi plays a pair of metal cymbals called Ilatalam. Such an array of instruments clearly reveals one thing: the prominence given to Tāḷa (rhythm); and this is not surprising if we bear in mind the unmistakable sway Tāḷa yields in Kathakali. There is some provision for acting without the accompaniment of singing; these are occasions for the actors to call together all their powers of imagination and improvisation. On these occasions, the percussion instruments continue to play in unison creating a fascinating background of rhythmic sound.

From "The Orchestra", by V. Madhavan Nair.

"This vigorous rhythm has been preparing the people all around into the mood of expectancy for the dance...

"And as though the aid itself has carried the winged whispers to every ear, the people seem to know the particular drama which is to be acted, the chief actors, who they are, and what roles they are to play. (Which drama is to be played is not normally announced. J. L.).

"The story is well-known, and the only surprise lies in the transformation of the hearts of the audience into the belief that what is being shown once happened. (For many in the audience, the story is lived as now happening. It is told that many years ago, at the Aramula Temple, in a scene where Krishna pleads in vain for the return of a stolen kingdom, an old man in the audience gets up, saying to the hard-hearted King, "If you will not listen to Krishna, you will listen to me", and with his sword, kills him. Since then, this piece has never been performed at Aramula. J. L.).

"This change, wrought by the imagination, is the one element to which both actors and the audience contribute their shares: the dancers, with the abhinaya, and the spectators by their sympathetic reception or acceptance of the story in stylised movements. The actors and the audience are together in a manner which is unique.

"As the actors and audience are one, there is no proper theatre. The play takes place in the compound of a temple, or in a nearby courtyard.

"The stage is about sixteen feet square, a kind of pandal (a temporary thatched shed), decorated with fresh leaves and flowers. It is level, and covered by rough-mats, with the eager spectators crowding on to the dance area and the dancers often walking through the audience.

"The fire of the great brass lamp is the focal point, which half reveals and half hides the shadows from which the characters will emerge one by one."

From "The Play", by Rasika.
This is one of the most affecting of the stories. Arjuna goes into the Himalayan forest to practice austerities as a preparation for his meeting Siva, from whom he wishes to learn the art of archery. In the first scene, (Band 6), he is seen worshipping a little altar dedicated to Siva. The splendid gradual build-up of the rhythm at the beginning of a drama is well shown here. In the second scene, which follows on without interruption, as do the others, while he is hunting an animal, a hunter and his wife, of a very low caste, appear and both claim to have shot the animal first. They quarrel and finally Arjuna starts shooting arrows at the hunter, who appears to be getting the worst of the fight. Meantime, the hunter's wife, very much concerned and very tender, tries to calm both her husband and Arjuna. She tells her husband, who is none other than Siva and she Pārvatī, his consort, that he must not harm Arjuna, who has come to pay homage and learn from him, and Arjuna that he knows not whom he is opposing. Neither seems to take the smallest notice and finally Pārvatī exclaims: "May your arrows turn into flowers!", and Arjuna suddenly realises that he is making a pūja (the Hindu form of worship) to Siva himself. This poignant recognition is heard in Band 7, which closes the scene.

Singers: M. E. P. Pillai & Gōpinathan Nāyar.
Drummers: K. Dāmōdaran Pannikar & Vāsudēva Poduwal.
Actors, whose anklets can be heard jingling when they dance: Mankūlam Vīshnu Nambūdiri & Kudamā ljur Karunākaran Nāyar.

These are very famous dancers, and the other musicians are well-known too.

This is said to be a very ancient form of folk-music, having its origin in Najilnād (''the
land of the plough"), in the southernmost part of India, belonging until recently to Travancore but now merged in the Madras State, on account of its language, which is Tamil. (I hope in another album to give examples of Villupāṭṭu sung in Tamil, but since the present album is on the music of Kērāḷa, it seemed proper to give an example, which is quite traditional amongst the Travancorians of the South, in Malayāḷam, though it is never so good as Tamil Villupāṭṭu).

"The Villu is a bow, some 8 feet long, made either of a sturdy branch of a tree or of metal. The centre of the convex side of the bow is made to rest on the neck of a large-sized earthen pitcher (Kuḍam). The pitcher itself rests on a soft cushion or a circular disk-like thing with a concave cavity made of coconut fibre. Thus the bow when placed on the neck of the pitcher and held in delicate balance by the performer looks like a magnified (and very magnificent J.L.) crescent with its two ends looking upwards. There are numerous bronze bells hanging from the bow throughout its length. The chief vocalist of the party (its leader J.L.) will be seated to the right centre of the bow with two slender wooden rods called Viśukōli, one in each hand. At one end of each rod, just near where the artist grips it, are found two cymbals the concave face of each facing and touching the other; it makes a sort of cavity, containing beads or small-sized metal balls or stones inside. The artist, while singing, will so artfully raise and move his hands holding the rods as to express the mood, or the bhiīva, portrayed in the song, and skilfully strike against the bow string producing the talam, or time beat, synchronising with the stresses and the time beats in the song. This in turn will produce notes from the bells hanging from the bow. At the same time, the artist in charge of the big earthen pitcher (kuḍam) will raise simultaneous notes, by beating against the mouth of the pitcher with a cardboard-like plate, made for the purpose from a stiff and sturdy plantain sheath. The sweet sound emanating from the pitcher, owing to the pressure exerted on it both by the weight of the bow resting on its neck and the beats brought to bear on its mouth by the pitcher player, is perhaps more charming and melodious than that produced by any other percussion instrument.... The player, while he strikes against the mouth of the pitcher with his right hand, strikes at the same time on the body of the pitcher with a coin held in his left hand." In the party to be heard here, there is also a larger pitcher called ghaḍam, and invariably, an Udukku (this is the Tamil orthography for the Idakka heard on Side 1 of this record), a pair of wooden clappers called Katta (Kaṭṭai in Tamil), and a pair of small cymbals, Jālar in Malayalam (and Jallarai in Tamal). All these percussion players join in the chorus.

"Arrangements for the performance of Villupāṭṭu are usually made on the ground in front of a temple. The performance itself is arranged as a rule in connection with the annual temple festival.... The dais for the players will be set up in front of the temple to one side and the audience will be seated on the ground facing the Deity." (Quotations are from "Bow Song: A Folk Art of South Travancore", by K. P. S. Hameed, reprinted from Tamil Culture, Vol. V., No. 3 - July 1956).

The words are often based on stories from the sacred epics, the Māhābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa, when the language is Tamil. When the language is Malayāḷam, as it is here, the words are either in praise of a Deity or a national hero of olden times.

Side 2, Band 1. Villadichanpāṭṭu, the instruments, in the following order, announced by the leader:

1. Villu (bow); 2. Ghaḍam (large earthen pitcher); 3. Kuḍam (earthen pitcher on which the bow rests); 4. Udukku; 5. Jālar (cymbals); 6. Kaṭṭa (wooden clappers).

Side 2, Band 2. Vēḷu Tampi. (Tampi is the caste name of descendants of any Māhārajah of Travancore).

\[\text{Vēḷu Tampi:}\]
"Are we all living in the time of Maveli? Are we all living in the time of Maveli? Has God taken birth in the Nayar community in order to wipe away the tears of the country?

"When Sri Vēlū Tampi was ruling the country, there was no kind of suffering anywhere. All human hearts were filled with hopes and with love. The world as a whole was changed altogether. No untruthfulness and no deceiving anywhere. Unfaithfulness never walked with wide open eyes. No suffering and envy anywhere.

"Vēnaṭṭu (Travancore) was changed into a Satkarmaśāla (a hall where sacred rituals are done).

"There were no commanders who would extract wealth from the rich, no favourites for anyone. Nowhere in the country were there such kinds of dogs and jackals who would not for a moment have hesitated to kill another for the sake of some paltry sum of money.

"There was never an instance of temple worship falling into abeyance. There was no instance of the king being in want of something. The Nambūdiris (the Brāhmins of Kerala) who always roam about proclaiming the royal taxes, beating drums, were never seen anywhere in the country.

"If anyone was known to be a burglar, his head was cut off and his body hung in public places. If anyone was known to have spoken a lie, his tongue was cut out immediately. This is how Tampi ruled the country."

Note: The Nāyars form the main population of Kerala. They are of mixed Dravidian and Aryan origin. Their women, especially of the higher castes, used to be married to Nambūdiris, and often still are. They often have a kind of dumb resentment against the Brāhmins. (See the Preface to these notes). This song I take to be quite recent.

Vēlū Tampi. (Only a part is heard on the record).

These pretty girls (see photograph), all the daughters of prominent families in Government service, wear Sāris. Until very recently, the Sāri was not worn by Nāyar women: they wore, and the older women especially in the country still wear, a white cloth wound round the waist with a separate white cloth tied round the bust.

The Performers are members of the Kerala State Police villupāṭṭu Party.

(Tiruwādirakāli)

In this song, the wives of Prince Uttaran are singing the praises of their husband. As they sing, the girls dance in a circle with peculiar poses and movements, walking sometimes in one direction and sometimes in another. The lilt is typical of Kerala.

The Rāgam is Husēni and the Tāḻam (rhythm) Chaippu: The song is taken from the Kathakali drama called Uttarāswayamvaram.

Side 2, Band 4: KANIYĀN PAṬTU -- ASTROLOGERS' SONG.

The Kaniyāns are a low caste of village astrologers and umbrella makers. They have their own songs and accompany themselves on the ḍakka and the jālar (the small drum described under Side 1, Band 1, and cymbals). In this song, a part only of which is given, the father (see photograph), who sings the solo, and one of his sons, each sound an ḍakka, whilst another son sounds the cymbals. Both join in
the chorus. The Malayālis have in general no idea of singing in unison: here each of the singers adopts a convenient tonic and maintains it unconcernedly to the end! The tālam in this piece is called Chembada, one of the 7 modes of beating time in South India. The astrologer gives it in the adjoining Malayālam text as Paurāṇchembāda, meaning the rhythm used in reciting the Purāṇas, or ancient epics and histories.

They recount the story of the liberation or rescue of Kṛishṇa, after his birth. The background of the story is as follow: His mother's cousin, Kaśi, king of Mathura, 'had been informed by a prediction that one of her sons would kill him; he therefore kept Vāsudeva (Kṛishṇa's father) and his wife Dēvākhī in confinement; and slew their first six children; the seventh was Bālārāma who was saved by being abstracted from the womb of Dēvākhī and transferred to that of Rūhini (Vāsudeva's other wife); the eighth was Kṛishṇa who was born with black skin and a peculiar mark on his breast; his father managed to escape from Mathura, etc., etc.' At this time, Kaśi sent a female demon called Pūtana to offer 'her poisoned breast to Kṛishṇa who seized it and sucked away her life.' (Both quotations from Monier-Williams, Sanskrit-English Dictionary). This is the incident described here, hence the refrain, "Jaya, jaya" - "victory, victory".

Singers: K. Gōvindan
K. G. Janāpādanan
K. G. Gōpalākkipishnan

Side 2, Bands 5 & 6: VēLAN PRAVĀRITI
(Skt. Pravṛtti) - SORCERY.

The Vēlans are a low caste of Ādi-Dravidas (original Dravidians), the men exorcising evil spirits that cause disease, the women (Vēlātī) acting as midwives. This is the origin the Vēlans attribute to their art: Kūṭa, the dragon's tail or 9th planet (properly the descending node), is considered in Hindu astrology to be "the body of the demon Saśihkēya which was severed from the head or Rāhu by Viṣṇu at the churning of the ocean, but was rendered immortal by having tasted the Amṛīta (ambrosia). (Monier-Williams, Skt. - Eng. Dict.). The demon engaged in black magic against Viṣṇu, who greatly suffered. To cure him, Śiva and Pārvati descended in the
forms of a ViHan and a Velatti and sang these songs from the Mahabharata (the great epic poem) for forty-one days.

I give part of two songs, sung by Narayana and Păpu (short for Padmanaḥa), one of them playing for the other on their own special drum, which they called Bharatachara, probably for Bharatacharagam, meaning a wandering musician who recites the Mahabharata.

Band 5. Narayana.

Band 6. Păpu.

Side 2, Bands 7 & 8: Kuravarkali

The Kuravans are described in Gundert's Malayalam Dictionary (1872) as a wandering tribe of basket-makers, snake-catchers and Gipsies. Those recorded here, from Central Travancore, lead a settled but poverty-stricken life, being hired agricultural labourers. They are said to have come originally from Andhra, where the language is Telugu, via Tamilnad. Their appearance is typically tribal: wiry, curly hair, short stature and flattened noses. They sing in parallel harmony, probably not by accident, since on the two occasions I heard Kuravarkali in this village, there was only a slight difference of a semi-tone in the middle of the three on which they sing.


Gaṇapati, or "Gaṇeṣa, the god of wisdom and of obstacles (the son of Śiva and Pārvatī), or according to one legend of Pārvatī alone; though Gaṇeṣa causes obstacles he also removes them; hence he is invoked at the commencement of all undertakings and at the opening of all compositions... he is represented as a short fat man with a protuberant belly, frequently riding on a rat or attended by one, and to denote his sagacity has the head of an elephant, which however has only one tusk," (Monier-Williams, Skt. - Eng. Dict.). The singers stand during this song with hands together in worship.


The words of this well-known and ancient Tamil song, "Adu Pămbe" -- 'Dance, Snake!", call on the snake that is portrayed round Śiva's neck, to undulate and show itself. The language here is neither pure Tamil nor pure Malayalam but has something of both and the words are much simplified. The singers dance, going round in a circle with undulating snake-like movements; each one holds a small stick in each hand and beats them alternately against both of his neighbours' sticks. This is called Kölaḍi.

Leader and soloist: Chellappan.

Side 2, Bands 9, 10, 11 & 12. Sarpam Pāṭṭu (Serpent Song) or Puljava Pāṭṭu.

According to Gundert (1872), the Puljavans are a caste employed in medicine, using for that purpose mantram (incantation, sorcery) with kalam (depicting a human or other figure with panchavarnam (five colours) in grain, or as here, in sand, coloured white, black, red, orange and green, singing (puljavāpaṭṭu) at the snake-groves (frequent in Keraḷa), accompanied by the tap of the puljavakudam (earthen pitcher, see under description of instruments), their females acting
as midwives in the North. These songs belong to fertility rites. Their nature will emerge from the translations given below. Pullavans are called for when the wanted male child and also female child (for the Malayalis are still, in feeling if no more everywhere in law, matriarchal) has not been vouchsafed.

Band 9. The instruments. Traditionally, the instruments would consist only of Vīna (Prof. P. Sambamūrti calls it Vīna kunju and says that a snake-skin is used to cover it, but see notes on each instrument), Pullavakudam and perhaps Tālam (cymbals). However, I could not refuse to record the other instrumentalists who turned up for the specially arranged performance near Cochin without offending a number of good people. These foreign sounds do not in any way disturb, and I kept them at a distance from the microphone so that in effect only the two important instruments can be clearly heard. Even purists, amongst whom I am one in principle, cannot object and I for one find the result ravishing. The instruments are heard in the following order:

1. Jinjera, a tambourine; 2. Vīna, a bowed monochord that bears no resemblance to the classical Vīna. It is of about the same length as a violin, with a circular sound box, covered with the skin of an Iguana lizard (Lacerta Monitor, Udmuby). It is made of Jackwood; 3. Tālam, a pair of small cymbals; 4. Pullavakudam, an earthen pot whose base is removed and replaced by the skin of an Iguana, which is pasted on. Through its centre a small hole is made and a string attached to it by a knot. This string the player fixes to his left foot (he is seated cross-legged on the ground) and with his right hand, by means of pressure from a small wooden cylinder on the taut string, he can adjust the tension and so the pitch of the instrument, which make the Pullavakudam a friction drum; 5. Bulbul, lit. nightingale, a silly little zither with a keyboard, certainly of recent origin; 6. Morsing (as it is called in South India, but really the North Indian Morchang (lit. peacock-harp), a Jew's harp.

The chief singer is also the Vīna player, and he is joined in the chorus by his wife.

Band 10: "Oh excellent serpents, please tell me how I can beget good children, to carry on the family? There are 1000 serpents, some of you must know the answer.

"Kāśyappan (Kāśi is the ancient city of Benares), the king of all serpents, thus speaks to them all:

"When you lay eggs, don't break them!" So saying, Kāśyappan went away to perform tapas (to practice religious austerities).

I give the words of the next two songs, though there is no space to reproduce them in this album.

"Kadru and Vinuda were with Kāśyappan. From Kadru. Kasayappan had a thousand serpent children. As for Vinuda, she was barren. Then follows the name of some of Kadru's children. "Kāśyappan is the cause of this earth. Vāsuki (one of his sons, and one of the 8 serpent kings) is coiled round the earth. The king of serpents lives at Maqparāl (Nr. Māvēlikara, in Central Travancore, where there is a famous serpent temple) and the queen lives at Velurwāṭām. "The song gives a list of other places, in the South West of India, where the serpents have settled. "They are all Dharmadevas (Gods of Justice)."

Then follows the dancing song. Figures of
serpents are drawn in the different coloured sands or grains. Children seated in the audience will be asked to concentrate, each one on a particular figure. Then the children begin to tremble with their hands clasped in greeting and at that moment, they are told to get up. Then they enjoy the quiet singing and playing, sweeping the ground about them to the rhythm with coconut and areca-nut fronds. They then lie down and roll upon the figure of a serpent. Then the people ask the children for boons and the children give their blessing.

The words of this song merely give the children directions:

7 rounds in the pandal (temporary shed).
7 rounds with the kalam (figures).
7 times sweeping and then rolling.

Then they must dance, first taking one step forward, then two, then three while the women ullulate (Kurava or Veikurava).

Band 11. Here the song describes how the serpents are bowing to Mukhandan (Krishna), then to Arumukan (Subrahmaanya), and they are singing all the time. There is religious dancing with great leaps (tullal), drumming (kottu) and ullulation (kurava). There is the music of nagaaswarams (large oboes), a flagstaff with a flag, as outside temples (kqdimaram), a kuda (ritual umbrella) which has tassels (tazha), and all kinds of decoration. "And now let us go to Palazhi (the sea of milk) to view Vishnu who is sustaining all this world, Pauravi (Siva's wife) and Gaapati (Siva's son, the elephant god). There will be Siva himself and his bhutas (guardian spirits), all these will be seen. So they all went, thousands of serpents and all the people assembled to see this." (The whole scene conjures up an atmosphere for Indians which cannot be conveyed to those who have never lived and assimilated some at least of their outlook. These words convey a divine opulence, a divine intoxication that is quite irresistible.)

"Let all the families of serpents live until kalapantam (pralaya, the dissolusion of the world). May you all live long, dancing and enjoying.

Namaste (adoration to Thee), thrice repeated.

O Bhagavavan, Lord of Mannarsal, Namaste.

O Nagayakshi (Queen of the Serpents), may you

Swim in the pool (pozhika) and play hide and seek with us.

Bless us all and cause us to have prosperous children."

Note: There is a fade out and in in the middle of this song.

Principal Singers and Players. Vina, Pappan; Ku:dam, Gopalan; female singer, who is called the pinnatti (background), Pujjotti.

Band 12. ARPU (Skt. Arpa'tam) - DEDICATION or OFFERING.

This song comes always at both the beginning and the end of the ritual. It begins with the word, 'Kurava', the ullulation of women, made on happy occasions. Between the two Kuravas, the following is sung:

"And all this world, sustaining all this world, all these will be seen.

Band 13: VILLINMELE TEYYAMPAPA

All over the Central and Northern Kerala, during the Festival of Oatham, the Malayalam New Year, at the time of the 22nd constellation Aquila, at the New Moon in September, people of all ages and conditions play on the Vil, a little bow used as a percussion instrument and known in this connection as the Onavill. It is more usually children who play on it, and in that case, no special rhythm is used. But grown-ups often play it with precise rhythm, as in this recording where the style known as Teyyampaka is heard. Teyyampaka belongs properly to Chenda Melam, the art of drumming peculiar to Kerala, where
elaborate rhythms such as Panchāri, Panḍi and others, of which Teyyampaka is the most subtle, are employed. The basis of Cheppa Meλam is the drum called Cheppa, already heard in the Kathakali. I should have liked to offer examples of this Cheppa Meλam, but there is no possibility in this album. Instead, the same style will be heard to the charming sounds of the Vil.

In this connection, a well-known musicologist, my friend Peter Crossley-Holland was present when the recordings were made, and has kindly allowed me to publish his notes,

"The ensemble consisted of four Malayalis. (I may add that the two Nambūdris are Brāhmans and the two Poduwałas of high caste, half-Brāhmans, with a temple function, called Ambalavasis, J. L.). One held a flat pair of cymbals (Tālam) about 4 inches across and the other three began fitting together their musical bows. The arc of each bow was made of palm leaf and was about 4 feet long, 3/8 to 1/2 inch thick, and its width tapered from about 2-1/2 inch in the centre to about 1-1/4 inch at the ends. The ends each had an open notch to receive the 'string'. This latter was made of bamboo and 3/8 inch wide and slightly less thick. The ends of the bamboo expanded in spatulate manner, so that each spatula, placed on the far side of a notch, secured the 'string' to the arc.

"Before the two portions of the bow were fitted together the arc was flat, but in order to receive the shorter length of the bamboo the arc was bent into a bow shape and subjected to considerable tension.

"One of the vil-players (see No. 3 below) placed his instrument horizontally on a long box, steadying the centre part of the arc on the box with his left hand. In his right hand he held a wooden striker about 4 to 5 inches long and this, in general shape, was rather like a pencil except that the diameter suddenly decreased in the centre. The other vil-players had similar strikers but held their bows differently. Each folded his left arm across his chest, allowing fingers 3, 4 and 5 to rest on the right shoulder. Thumb and index finger held the top end of the arc: the centre passed across the folded arm at the triangle of the elbow; and the bottom end projected freely below the arm. The bow was thus supported by some pressure on the shoulder, and by passing over the arm. The striker, held in the right hand, struck the bow near its lower (left-hand end, players 1 and 2; right-hand end, player 3) producing a percussive twang of appreciable pitch.

"Player 1: note of high pitch; very active and complex figuration.
Player 2: semi-tone lower.
Player 3: an octave lower than Player 1.
Player 4: untuned (cymbals).

"The metrical framework was provided by Players 2, 3 & 4 and the periods were well marked throughout, as all players (including Player 1) emphasized the main beats. The accented notes of Player 4 were full and free clashes of the two cymbals whereas the other notes acquired a stranger timbre through the rims of the two cymbals being partly in contact during the process of striking. (Indian cymbals are always played in this way. J. L.) Against this background Player 1 took the creative initiative and varied his rhythm and figuration with great enterprise. His playing was very sonorous in effect, and he managed to vary his timbre in a fascinating way by all kinds of dexterities in the manner of striking his 'string'.

"One of the outstanding features of this kind of music was the interplay of semi-tones. On strong beats the two notes occurred together but when, immediately afterwards, Player 1 was heard alone, it always lifted the music up, both semi-tonally and, by some undefinable connection, psychologically as well. (In this performance, the semi-tone is a major interval; I have heard it on occasions with the semi-tone a minor interval. J. L.)

"The performance, which in this instance, lasted 13-1/2 minutes, but was quite usually more than double this length, began slowly and deliberately, then worked up, growing in subtlety and exhilaration. At the end there was a kind of gallop pressed to the limits of physical exertion and the effect was certainly stimulating to the listener."

I have had to reduce the length by fading out after the beginning and fading in towards the end.

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