

The Paryaya Tradition among the Mādhvas of Udupi

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Keywords: Paryaya, Udupi, swami, Mādhvas, ritual, Sri Krishna temple, Matha

Պարյայա ավանդույթը Ուդուպիի մադհվաների կրոնական համայնքում

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Անփոփում: Պարյայան համարվում է առանցքային համակարգերից (ավանդույթ) մեկը Ուդուպիի և ամբողջ Հնդկաստանում ապրող *մադհվաների* (բրահմանական համայնքներ) կրոնական կյանքում: Պարյայան մի համակարգ է, համաձայն որի Ուդուպիի ութ վանական կենտրոնների (*մաթհ*) հոգևոր առաջնորդները (*սվամի*), երկու տարին մեկ ստանձնում են երկու տարի ժամկետով Շրի Կրիշնայի տաճարում Կրիշնա աստծու պաշտանմունքի ծեսեր կատարելու պարտականությունը: «Պարյայա» սանսկրիտում բառացիորեն նշանակում է «փոփոխություն կամ փոխանցում»: Մաթհը, որը իրականացնում է երկրպագությունը և կազմակերպչական պարտականությունները, կոչվում է «պարյայա մաթհ», իսկ այն ղեկավարող հոգևոր առաջնորդը «պարյայա սվամի»: Դեռ միջնադարյան շրջանում Մադհվաչարիայի կողմից ձևավորված ավանդույթը մինչ օրս շարունակվում է իր հետևորդների կողմից: Պարիայայի տոնակատարությունը մեծ իրադարձություն է ժամանակակից Հնդկաստանում և այն պահպանում է իր բուն ձևը, սակայն վերջին տասնամյակների ընթացքում այն հավելվել է որոշ ժամանակակից տարրերով և հատկանիշներով: Այս աշխատանքում ներկայացվում է Պարյայա համակարգի դերը, ծիսկարգային առանձնահատկությունները և ժամանակակից դրսևորումները Ուդուպիի *մադհվաների* կրոնական համայնքում: Աշխատանքը հիմնված է նաև հեղինակի դաշտային աշխատանքի նյութերի վրա:

Վճռորոշ բառեր՝ Պարյայա, Ուդուպի, սվամի, մադհվաներ, ծես, Շրի Կրիշնայի տաճար, մաթհ

Традиция Парья у мадхвов Удупи

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Аннотация: Парья - одна из ключевых традиций в религиозной жизни *мадхавов*, общины брахманов, живущих в разных частях Индии с центром в Удупи. Парья представляет собой традицию, согласно которой, главы восьми матхов (монастырских центров) Удупи поочередно сменяя друг друга каждые два года, берут на себя ответственность за ритуальную часть (служение божеству Кришне) в храме Шри Кришны. «Парья» на санскрите буквально означает «изменение или передавание». Матх, выполняющий религиозные и организационные обязанности в данный период, называется «*парья матх*», а религиозный лидер матха - «*парья свами*». Традиция уходит корнями в средние века: она была установлена Мадхвачарьей и сохраняется по сей день его учениками. Празднование Парья - крупное религиозное событие в современной Индии. Фестиваль сохраняет аутентичную форму, но в последние десятилетия в него привносятся некоторые современные элементы и атрибуты. В данной работе представлены роль и статус системы Парья в религиозной общине *мадхавов* Удупи, особенности ритуальной части, а также некоторые новые элементы. Статья основана в том числе на полевом материале автора.

Ключевые слова: Парья, мадхавы, Удупи, матх, свами, ритуал, храм Шри Кришны.

The *Paryaya* (Sanskrit, lit. “change or tradition”) is a religious ritual performed in *Sri Krishna Matha* (Krishna Temple) of the city of Udupi. It is considered as one of the key elements in the religious life of the *Mādhvas* – the Hindu brahmin communities in India who follow the Dvaita philosophy of Madhvacharya (see below). As a special worship system, the *Paryaya* has been preserved since the medieval period and, particularly from the time, when Madhvācārya

ordained his eight disciples to perform rituals of worshipping Sri Krishna at Udupi’s Matha. The article discusses the role and status of the *Paryaya* among the *Mādhvas* of Udupi, as well as the features of the connected rituals.

The system of the *Paryaya* presupposes that eight *swamiji* (high priests) of Udupi, alternately, take turns to worship Lord Krishna, managing and organizing the temple for a fixed period of time [4, p. 107]. *The Matha* which is in charge of the

relevant worship rituals is called “paryaya matha” [2, pp. 253-254].

The tradition dates back to the medieval period, particularly to the time, when Madhvācārya, the founder of the Tattvavāda philosophy and the school of Dvaita Vedanta (on Madhvācārya and his philosophy see [6]), ordained eight monks among his disciples, to worship Krishna at his *Udupi's Matha*. Those eight monks became the precursors of the *Ashtha Matha* (The Eight Mathas or monasteries), which are now following the *Paryaya* tradition. The mentioned *Ashtha Mathas of Udupi* are *Pejavara, Palimaru, Adamaru, Puttige, Sode, Kaniyooru, Shirur, and Krishnapura*. As a conservative system of worship, which's each detail has its significant connotation, the *Paryaya* emphasizes the prestige of its organizers [5, p. 192].

Up to the period of Vadiraja Thirtha (1480-1600) the ritual was performed every two months. Each *swamiji* used to perform the rite every sixteen months. Vadiraja Swami (the high priest of the Sode Matha) changed the system of *Paryaya*. He established the biennial tradition for the *Paryaya*, which exists till the present time. The *swamiji* who is in charge of worship and administration of *Shri Krishna Matha* (Krishna temple) is called “*paryaya swamiji*”. Four to five months before *the Paryaya* ritual, the *swamiji* starts his pilgrimage to various holy places, such as *Rameshwaram* in Tamil Nadu and *Tirupati* in Andhra Pradesh. This process is called “*Paryaya purva sancharaya*” (“the pilgrimage before *the Paryaya*”) [4, pp. 33-36].

The *Paryaya* remains one of the fundamental aspects of the religious life of the Mādhyas, who for centuries have followed the prescribed rites in detail. Moreover, during the existence of the *Paryaya* tradition, it has become essential for most of the Hindus.

Nowadays one can observe the *Paryaya* in its most perfect and complete form among the Mādhyas community of Udupi.

All the *Paryaya* rituals are endowed with spiritual symbolism.

The main preliminary rituals before the *Paryaya* festival are: *Baale Muhurtha, Akki Muhurtha, Kattige Muhurtha, Bhatta Muhurtha*.

The Baale Muhurtha (see pic. 1) occurs on an auspicious day about a year before the *Paryaya* festival (see pic. 2). On this day, the cultivation of plantains and the *tulsi* (see pic. 3) - holy basil (*Ocimum tenuiflorum*) - officially begins. The *paryaya swamiji* uses the *tulsi* leaves for the daily rituals of the *Krishna Matha*, and plantain leaves, for the festivals, as well as for feeding pilgrims and guests. Therefore, each *swamiji* should start growing these plants in the gardens belonging to his Matha, so that by the *Paryaya* period the Matha would be

ready for the festival in all aspects. To make this process a public event, the function of *Baale Muhurtha* is performed.



pic. 1, *Bale Muhurtha*



pic. 2, the *Paryaya* festival



pic. 3, *tulsi* in Chandramouleshwara temple

On that auspicious day, which is determined by *Matha purohitis*⁵⁴ first, pray to the nine planets (see pic. 4). The Matha's workers then bring the tulsi seedlings and plantains for planting. The procession of these devotees of the Matha, heads towards the Krishna Matha, led by *purohitis* and the *Divan of Matha*. The participants pray first at the *Chandreshwar* temple and then, at *Anantheshwar*. Then they enter the *Krishna* temple and pray in front of the shrine of Sri Krishna, offering their donations with the following prayer: "Please, bless us so that there should be no lack of tulsi for your worship and of plantain leaves, for the mass feeding". They also bow down to the idols of Sri Mukhyaprana⁵⁵ and Sri Madhvācārya, and after that, they return to their Mathas [1, pp. 108-109].

During the two months of celebrating *Baale Mukhurtha*, they perform the ritual of the *Akki Muhurtha*. Since in the *Paryaya* period, thousands of people must be fed daily, they save the rice harvest from the previous years. After the prayer to the nine planets, the procession starts from the *Mutt* (Matha). A *mudi* (package of rice packed in a bowl made of dried paddy straws) is decorated, covered with a silken cloth and kept in a palanquin. The *Mutt* (Matha) workers follow the palanquin with similar *mudis* on their heads. The principal participants of this process are the *purohitis*, scholars and *Divan of the Matha*. They pray at the temples of *Chandreshwara* and *Anantheshwara*, which are located near *Sri Krishna* temple. After the prayer, they all return to their Mathas. The *swamiji* completes this ritual by himself, remaining in his Matha. Other high priests of *Ashtha-mathas* are invited to the *Krishna Matha* and receive honours [1, pp. 109-110].

The *Kattige Muhurtha* is celebrated about six months before the beginning of the *Paryaya*. Artistic storage of firewood is a specialty of Udupi. Firewood is piled up in the shape of a beautiful chariot. This chariot is visible in the North-East corner of the *Madhva Sarovara* (a tank behind the temple). Skilled artisans pile up the firewood and arrange it in the shape of a chariot fifty feet height. The construction of the chariot is completed several days before the *Paryaya*, and the rest of firewood is used for cooking during the feasts. There is also another ritual, when the firewood ceremonially

places on the top of the chariot, what symbolises and marks the completion of the chariot's construction [1, p. 110].

The *Bhatta Muhurth*, aimed at collecting paddy, occurs nearly seven or eight weeks before the *Paryaya*. It should be noted that the principal purpose of these rituals is making provision for traditional *Anna Dana* (mass feeding, see pic. 5). That is why Lord Krishna of Udupi is known as *Anna Brahma* - "the Lord of Food". The day of the ritual, the administration of the *Paryaya* has the possibility to enter the *Badagu Mailge*, which is actually the store house particularly intended for the *Paryaya*. The bag of paddy is placed on a platform here and the priests worship it. The *Divan* of the *Paryaya Matha* offers fruits and honorarium to scholars. [1, p. 111].

After the preliminary rituals, *Mādhvas* perform a large number of ceremonies and customs, which includes the *Paryaya* festival (also known as *Paryaya Mahotsava*) and *Paryaya* ceremony.

Approximately four to five months before the *Paryaya* ceremony, the high priest, who is supposed to become the next *paryaya swamiji*, goes on a pilgrimage tour to various holy places and cities all over India. The *paryaya swamiji* visits the following holy centers: *Dvaraka*, *Mathura-Vrindavan*, *Haridvar*, *Hrshikesh*, *Baddrinath*, *Prayagaya*, *Kashi*, *Gaya*, *Puri*, *Tirupati*. The pilgrimage tour must be in clockwise direction. During the pilgrimage the *swamiji* was invited by different *Madhva* organizations, associations and local community groups [2, p. 259-260].

Ten to fifteen days before the holiday, *paryaya swamiji* completes its journey and enters triumphantly into the town Udupi. The entire city is decorated with newly painted buildings and special electric lighting to welcome the *swamiji*. The following ceremony is known as *Pura Pravasha*. Few days before *Paryaya*, devotees bring rice, jaggeri (a natural product of sugarcane), legumes, vegetables, coconuts for mass feeding during the festival time and for donating them to the *swamijis*. Their products are brought in decorated trucks, carts; people bring loads on their heads, all in a procession. The celebrations pass through the various streets of Udupi. During the ceremony two *swamijis* - the one who transfers responsibility and the other who take over the responsibility for *Paryaya* donate rice and vegetables to other Mathas in Udupi. All the products are taken out in a procession and sent to the food storages of various temples. This tradition is known as "Olipe" requires that all the all pilgrims attending the *Paryaya* would be particularly welcomed, well fed and cared for. The day before a *paryaya swamiji* goes in procession to different *Mutts* and personally invites

⁵⁴ *Purohita*, in the [Indian religious](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Brahman-caste#ref914213) context, means family priest, (see the relevant article in Encyclopaedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Brahman-caste#ref914213>, accessed on 20.05.2021)

⁵⁵ *Mukhyaprana* (Vayu) in *Madhva's* system is rooted in the *Chandogya*, *Bṛhadaranyaka* and *Isavasya Upanisads*. *Mukhya Prana* according to *Chan. Up.* is the immaculate deity impervious to the evil influence of the *Asuras* and hence the best medium (*Adhithana*) for unsullied meditation on *Brahman* [5, pp. 609-610]

swamijis to the *Paryaya* festivals. The day following the *Makar Sankranti*⁵⁶ is celebrated as *Churnotsava* (another ritual of the Festival [8]). The third day after *Makar Sankranti* is reserved for the *swamiji* leaving his position, who is supposed to perform his last special *puja* (worship ritual) and celebrate the last festival of his *Paryaya* in *Krishna Mutt*. The fourth day is the day of changing of the *Paryaya* guard. Usually, festivals are held annually according to the following schedule: January 14 – *Sankramana*, January 15 - *Churnotsawa*, January 16 – the day of rest, January 17- the festival hosted by the leaving *swamiji*, January 18 – the festival day [1, p. 112-115].

In present time, the *Mādhvas* of Udupi celebrate the *Paryaya* and all the associated rituals in the conservative authentic form. During my fieldwork, I noticed that the *Mādhvas* celebrate their traditional religious festivals in a very festive manner: the city is overcrowded, although Udupi, being an eminent religious and cultural center, is always full of pilgrims. One can observe the presence of the Vedic culture and traditions everywhere in Udupi. *The Paryaya* festival is an essential part of the city's cultural life. The Festival's significance can be noticed in different levels, particularly in various kinds of activities promoting religious aspects of life.

In the middle of January, Udupi becomes the religious center not only for Karnataka: the *Mādhvas*' celebrations with their special spiritual environment attracts the *Vaishnavas* and the followers of other schools from all over India.

In fact, the *Paryaya* festival days is the most active period of the city's life, it's all hotels, restaurants, guesthouses and markets being full of the *Festival's* guests. The devotees and tourists are offered a special programme including sightseeing, visits to the sacred places of Udupi, etc. [9].

The *swamiji*, who is supposed to head the *Krishna Mutt*, travels *Dandatirtha* - the place where *Sri Madhvācārya* studied in his childhood. On the day of *Paryaya*, around 3:00 am, the *Swamiji* gets up, bathes in the sacred pond and goes to Udupi. At about 4:00 in the morning he reaches the outskirts of Udupi, where a large crowd of the devotees welcomes him to *Jodukatta* (place in Udupi). The *Swamiji* who will transfer the worship duty to the next one, stays back at the *Krishna Mutt*, to welcome the new *paryaya swamiji* there. The *swamijis* who came to greet the *paryaya swamiji* is dressed in a silk shawl and silk headdress. Then, all of them sit down on the palanquins. The idol of the deity of the would-be *Paryaya Mutt* is placed in a

golden palanquin, and it is supposed to lead the *swamijis*. The vehicles carry the idols of gods of *Mutt* and pictures of saints. In the end of the procession comes the idol of the *Mutt* (*Matha*) in an ornate golden palanquin. [1, pp. 116-118].



pic. 4, nine planets in Sri Krishna temple



pic. 5, Anna Dana

During the *Paryaya* festival, people dressed in colorful theatrical dresses, walk the main streets of Udupi (see pic. 6). Young people perform traditional dances and sing folk songs, present modern arts performances [11]. In 2020, during the celebration, they exhibited a big image of *Vishweshwara Tirtha*, who was the *swamiji* of *Sri Pejavarada Adhokshaja Matha* [10]. This was the symbol of his metaphysical presence at the ceremony and emphasized the importance of spiritual continuity and the guru's role among the *Mādhvas*.

These newly incorporated elements of the *Festival* represent an interesting phenomenon, which, in our opinion, should by no means be qualified as transformation of the *Paryaya* tradition. These new elements are rather ornamental, they are supposed to give modern features to the celebration and aimed at attracting more people.

⁵⁶ *Makar Sankranti* is a festival held across India, under a variety of names, dedicated to sun deity *Surya* [3, pp 547-548].

Last year, during the *Paryaya* festival, the city was swarming with devotees and guests from different parts of India. The main roads along which the procession was passing, were decorated with arches, garlands and banners. Most of the buildings were illuminated (see pic. 7). The atmosphere was really festive. Vidyadheesha Tirtha Swami of *Palimar Mutt* was transferring the responsibilities for *Sri Krishna Temple* to Ishapriya Tirtha Swami, the young high priest of the *Adamar Mutt* (Matha) [7].



pic. 6, Festival celebration



pic. 7, lights in Udupi during the celebration

During the *Paryaya* ceremony the new *Paryaya Swamiji* enters the Krishna Mutt, places his box containing the idols of his Mutt (Matha) in the *Tirtha Mantapa* and offers the *arati* (a ritual, part of a *puja*, in which light is offered to a deity) to the Sri Krishna. Then the *swamijis* enter the *sanctum sanctorum* (the sacred place, lit. “the holy of holies”), pray before the idol of Mukhyaprana and prostrate before the idols of Sri Krishna, Mukhyaprana and Garuda⁵⁷ at the *Chandra Shala*

⁵⁷ *Garuda*, in the Hindu mythology, the bird (a kite or an eagle) and the *vahana* (mount) of god *Vishnu*, (see the relevant article in Encyclopaedia Britannica, www.britannica.com/topic/Garuda) (accessed on 10.05.2021)

hall. Then the ritual of transferring the responsibilities takes place in the room called *Simhasana*. Only a few officials of the Mutt take part in this ritual. The new *Paryaya Swamiji* places the box of idols in the sacred seat in the inner room of *Simhasana* and offers the *arati* to these idols. Then the departing *paryaya swamiji* sits down on the Madhvācārya's seat, offers a seat by his side to the new *paryaya swamiji* and honors him by offering sandalwood paste and other honorable items. The departing *swamiji* gets up from the seat of Madhvācārya, holds the hands of the new *paryaya swamiji* and makes him take a seat [1, pp 118-119].

After that, he hands over an old jug (*akshaya patre*) to his successor, the jug is believed to have been preserved since the time of Madhvācārya. With this ritual, *Krishna Matha* acquires a new *paryaya swamiji* (4, pp. 33-39).

From there, the *swamijis* proceed towards the Badagu Malige building, where the new *swamiji* honours the other *swamijis* by offering them sandal paste and other items of honour. In the time of Vadiraja (15th - 16th century), the *Paryaya* congregation used to occur in this place only, and hence, now they keep this tradition. The last part of the *Paryaya* ceremony is a big congregation known as *Durbar Sabha* held at the *rajangana*. Around 7-00 a.m., all the *swamijis* come in procession to the auditorium, which can accommodate approximately twenty thousand people. After chanting the Vedic hymns by scholars, the *swamijis* bless the devotees. The leaving *swamiji* bids farewell to all and the new *paryaya swamiji* presents his planned projects for the improvements of facilities at the *Krishna Mutt* (Matha). Many official representatives congratulate the new *paryaya swamiji* on this occasion [1, pp. 119-120].

The *Paryaya* as a system related to religious worship has been preserved from the medieval period till nowadays without particular changes. It still has an important meaning for the Mādhyas as representatives of the Vaishnava community, since the *Paryaya* is approached as tradition, through which they obtain spiritual qualities. There can be little doubt that in the future, the *Paryaya* will preserve its niche and remain among the most significant traditions in the religious community of the Mādhyas, despite all the rapid changes in the Indian society.

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Сдана/Հանձնվել է՝ 18.05.2021

Рецензирована/Գրախոսվել է՝ 20.05.2021

Принята/Ընդունվել է՝ 25.05.2021