

A HISTORICAL STUDY OF GENDER PERFORMANCES OF KALARIPAYATTU; A MARTIAL ART OF KERALA

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BY
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that, the thesis entitled ”**A Historical Study of Gender Performances of Kalaripayattu; A Martial Art of Kerala**” submitted by Ashitha M bearing Regd. No 09CWPG01 in partial fulfillment of the requirements of award of Doctor of Philosophy in Women’s Studies is a bonafide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance which is a plagiarism free thesis.

The thesis has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this University or any other University or Institution for award of any degree or diploma.

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DECLARATION

I Ashitha M hereby declare that, this thesis entitled "**A Historical Study of Gender Performances of Kalaripayattu; A Martial Art of Kerala**" submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of Professor Rekha Pande is a bonafide research work which is also free from plagiarism. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this University or any other University or Institution for award of any degree or diploma. I hereby agree that my thesis can be deposited in Shodganga/INFLIBNET.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

This study aims to explore the construction of body and gender in the Kerala society by looking at the historical and the contemporary gender dimensions of the practice of '*Kalaripayattu*', a form of Martial Arts in Kerala. *Kalaripayattu* is a form of combat; a sport, a dance, ritualistic body performance and an art form. *Kalaripayattu* is not only a martial art but it reflects the nature of various phases of Kerala society.

According to Zarrilli (1998), *Kalaripayattu* can be interpreted as overlapping, at times in competing ways. It can be broadly defined as “an ancient martial art encapsulating Kerala’s cultural, mythico-historical heritage, a traditional psycho-physiological discipline which cultivates mental, physical and spiritual benefits, a practical fighting arts, a system of physical training beneficial to sports people, dancers and actors” (Zarilli, 1998, 10). This definition proves the significance of *Kalaripayattu* in various aspects of the life of the people in the Kerala society.

Thomas and Swinth opined that “Martial art generally develops around zones and sites of conflict and antagonism, and their spread or dissemination was linked to the cultural and social diasporas that spread out from these historical sites” (Green A Thomas and Joseph R Swinth, 2010, 435). Martial arts are strictly linked to military, margins of territory and migration historically. As a martial art “*Kalaripayattu*” is also not an exemption from this. The history of *Kalaripayattu* goes back to the medieval period. It has been considered to be a divine art by the structures, concepts, customs and practices of both *Kalari* and *Kalaripayattu*. Historically speaking, *Kalaripayattu* was part of the traditional power structure in the medieval Kerala

society. Origin and development of *Kalaripayattu* in medieval Kerala society is closely linked to the feudal martial hierarchy. In medieval Kerala, *Kalaripayattu* created formidable warriors which created and maintained a theory that ‘might is power’. It gave a base to the hierarchical order in the society. *Kalaripayattu* is not only an expression of the body performance of the contemporary period and space, but it was encoded and it offered political and social platform to an individual to gain a space in medieval Kerala. *Kalaripayattu* had the status of an agency of power and it is closely associated with other institutions in that particular society. In contemporary Kerala, *Kalaripayattu* has become deracinated by its uproot from military art and has been commodified as a performance art in present time. Commoditization made an impact on the character of the training of the *Kalaripayattu*. Now *Kalaripayattu* focuses on the spectacular performance element and the martial element has lost its significance to a great extent. *Kalaripayattu* has also become a symbol of Kerala tourism. Old martial face with the modern theatrical face is endorsed in its title as the cultural icon of Kerala tourism.

However, the gender relationship in *Kalaripayattu* has not been explored in any research. The long history of the presence of *Kalaripayattu* in Kerala deserves an understanding of gender dimension of it in the past and the present. A serious research study on the role of women in *Kalaripayattu* as an institution and an agency related to power will enrich the knowledge about the status and role of the women in Kerala.

If we look at the history of *Kalaripayattu*, there are only a few references about the women practitioners in *Kalaripayattu* in the medieval period. Here, it is important to mention that the oral tradition of a particular geographical place and the society expose the history of the common people and the history of the subaltern

group including women who were neglected by the mainstream academicians. There are not much written materials about the performance and practice of women in *Kalaripayattu* during the medieval period. However, '*Vadakkan Pattukal*', the collection of folk songs praising the warriors in the medieval Kerala who lived in 15th and 16th centuries, tells the history of the participation of few women in *Kalaripayattu*. Such songs portrayed women figures such as *Unniyarcha*, *Mathilerikanni* and *Kunjithalu* in northern Kerala. *Kalaripayattu* lost its importance as an agency of power in colonial Kerala due to the social and political changes in society.

Coming to the contemporary period, the participation of women in *Kalaripayattu* is relatively less. Though the nature of the *Kalaripayattu* has changed over centuries the role of women and their nature of participation in *Kalaripayattu* has not changed much. The participation of women seems to be very less whereas wide male presence is noticeable in the present time. Though *Kalaripayattu* has a long tradition and importance in Kerala society and has a history of different roles in different periods, the absence of women's participation in this body art is noticeable. The present study enquires about the ideology and practices which are operating in society and inside the *Kalaripayattu* itself that prevent and limit the practice of women in *Kalaripayattu* in Kerala historically. The study analyses the evolving notions and constructions of femininity and masculinity in Kerala and how this influenced gender relations in the society to understand women's participation and representation from late medieval period onwards. The notion of the practices of female body in Kerala is examined by looking at this traditional martial art. Apart from this, the study also investigates the historicity of the gender dimension in '*Kalaripayattu*'. To understand the historical dimension, the study looks at how

women are portrayed in *Vadakkan Pattuka*¹. By looking at ‘*Vadakkan Pattukal*’ the study tries to explain how women’s image get idealized and romanticised through these songs. To, analyse the contemporary scenario, the study depends on various forms of data gathered from field.

I.1. The Statement of the Problem

Historically, when we look at the Kerala society, some of the practices were favourable to women compared to the other societies of India. It was recorded by the travellers who visited Kerala during medieval period. They mentioned about the social practices such as matriliney, Marumakkathayam² and polyandry etc. While women had the choice in their marriage and property rights, the practices related to caste such as *Pulayapedi and Parayapedi*³, shows the inferior status of women. The concept regarding the purity of female body in the form of menstruated body and vulgarity of body controlled the entry and representation of women in the public domain in medieval Kerala. This can be called as an ambiguous status in medieval Kerala society. As an agency of power apparatus, *Kalaripayattu* acted as a mechanism to ensure the individual security and status in the society. But in everyday practices of social life the absence of the female participants in it is noticeable. This absence of women is precisely linked to the ambiguous status of women in medieval period.

Coming to the present scenario, same kind of abstract status can be seen in the case of women. For example, the statistics and reports in India like Census of India (2001 and 2011), NFHS-3 (National Family Health Survey 2005-06) etc.

¹ A group of folk songs praised the heroes and heroines who were well versed in Kalaripayattu.

² Marumakkathayam is a system in which the family lineage goes through sister’s children

³ Paraya Pedi or pulaya pedi : In the afternoon time of Karthika Day, if at a Nair lady sees a man belong to pulaya or Parayar(lower castes) she is been thrown stones and is rusticated from the caste.

indicates favourable female birth rates, good maternal health, high female literacy. On the other hand, many unfavourable conditions exist regarding the status of women in Kerala. The female labour participation in the organized sector is very low. The National Crime Bureau 2005 also reveals the increasing violence against women and high rate of female suicides. This less participation of women in the public arena is noticeable in the light of the complete negligence of women in the Kerala model of development and academic discourse. This shows the ambiguous status of contemporary women in Kerala. This study explores this ambiguous status of women in both medieval and contemporary Kerala and its linkage to the body politics in *Kalaripayattu*. Though the nature of *Kalaripayattu* had undergone several transformations from medieval to modern Kerala, the nature of women's participation in *Kalaripayattu* has not changed much. As a body art, *Kalaripayattu* deserves a historical study by linking performance, body and gender.

I.2. Scope of the Study

As it is mentioned above Kerala is well known for its high literacy rate and good health status of women. The census report 2011 shows that the sex ratio of Kerala is thousand and eighty four females per thousand males. It indicates that Kerala is the only one state in India with a positive figure in terms of sex ratio. These led to public perception that women in Kerala enjoy higher status in the society. But in actual practice one can see the lower status of women in Kerala in both public and private realm of social life. For example, the less rate of women employment indicates that the higher female literacy did not help Kerala women in achieving a rapid occupational mobility. This gender paradox in contemporary Kerala needs a historical detailed study of their public role and involvement of public institutions like sports and performance arts. *Kalaripayattu*, a unique martial art of Kerala can

claim the status of a sports item, a martial body art and a body performance. In the medieval period, it has performed a role of an agency of power apparatus of the Kerala society and later it became a stage performance art. With the commercialization of Kerala society it has become an icon of cultural heritage of Kerala along with *Kathakali* and *Theyyam* which are considered as the traditional performance art forms in Kerala. The changing notion and ideology of the *Kalaripayattu* also indicates the sign of the changing political and social sphere of the Kerala society. Practice and performance of *Kalaripayattu* and its relationship between the notion of gender and body is an area to be explored historically. As a body art, the changes in this particular martial art is also related to the dress culture and notions of masculinity and femininity in society. This demands a critical study of the *Kalaripayattu* from a feminist historical perspective. To find out the role of gender and body in the power relationship of the society it is crucial to look at the practice of women in *Kalaripayattu* in detail.

I.3. Status of Kerala Women

The state of Kerala, located in the southwest corner of the Indian sub continent was very little known outside India till the so-called 'Kerala Model of development' became a part of the broad global debate about the ideal pattern of development in the third world. Historically the state has been different from the rest of the country in terms of the indicators of women's development as well. As it is mentioned above, the statistics show that the status of women is high in Kerala when compared to other states in India. Kerala leads India in women's education. The Kerala model of development owes its success to the achievements in the areas of health and education where the contribution of women is particularly significant (2000). Status of women in Kerala is always an issue of ambiguity. While the

Census of India 2011 report shows high literacy and good health of Kerala women; the National Crime Records Bureau (1998-2000) and Reproductive and Child Health (District Level House Hold Survey-2001) reveals that, despite having the highest literacy rate and educational achievements, the suicide rate among females is very high and domestic violence committed against women is increasing every year in Kerala. (Mithra, Aparna, 2007, 1228, Sreekumar, Sarmila, 2007, 34). This shows that Kerala women are subjected to the patriarchal domination.

But generally there is a notion that women in Kerala have been enjoying higher status in the society. This was attributed to a greater extent to some historical and social practices from medieval periods like family succession system. *Marumakkathayam* or the matrilineal system prevailed in some religious and caste groups especially among *Nairs* in the medieval period. In the matrilineal family, the inheritance is through the females. At that time the *Nairs*, an upper caste group followed a peculiar kind of sexual relationship with *Nampoodiri* or Kerala Brahmin which is called *Sambandham*. In this alliance system, either the *Nampoodiri* man or the male member from the royal family used to have sexual alliance with the Nair women but the children never had any right in the father's property. The family records showed that the Nair women could have more than one '*Sambandham*' relationship. This gave her a little sexual freedom, although their mobility was controlled by the elder brother of the family. J Devika says that the Nair women cannot cross beyond some particular rivers for example is the *Kora Puzha* or the *Kora Puzha* in the northern part of the Kerala, for once these women cross the rivers, they would be sent out from their community (Devika J, 2010, 43). Again she has referred to the customs called *Pulaya Pedi* and *Paraya Pedi*. These systems showed how Kerala society regarded woman as the keeper of their caste purity and she was

expected to suppress her personal choice in deciding the person to marry. These all showed that the women in the *Marumakkathayam* system also didn't have equal status with men. However this system has welcomed the birth of the baby daughters in the family. Moreover majority of the lower castes, Christians and major groups of the Muslims also practiced *Makkathayam*⁴ system. But it is difficult to say whether women from the other religious/caste groups in Kerala had the right to their family property.

The modern period shows the decline of the *Marumakkathayam* system in Kerala. The social reformers of Kerala succeeded in getting it banned officially by the government in 1975 which led the Kerala society becoming a patrilineal system. Here the importance of the daughter in the family is lost. Anna Lindberg observed that before the formation of Kerala as a state, it saw the emergence of a large number of working class movements although large number of women participated in it but their role was invisible in the history of the communist movements in Kerala. (Lindberg Anna, 2005, 135-136)

After the arrival of missionaries in Kerala, concepts of masculinity and femininity have changed significantly. As a result of this, the dress culture of men and women has changed. This also points to a new notion the people of Kerala developed towards the female body. In the medieval Kerala lower caste people had not practiced dowry. But, in modern Kerala the practice of dowry is prevalent among all caste groups. In Kerala, dowry deaths and sexual harassment cases are consistently reported during these days which showed the shift in the marriage system (Lindberg Anna, 2005, 135-136). Now a woman has become a commodity in

⁴Makkathayam is related to patrilineal family. In the patrilineal family the inheritance is through the sons in that family.

the marriage market in Kerala. Again the Kerala development report 2011 proves that the impressive gains in women's education and health did not provide a way for achieving upward occupational mobility and brisk the rate of employment for women in Kerala. Kerala ranks at one of the top positions among the states in India in the matter of domestic violence⁵. This shows that literacy did not help Kerala women to get an equal status with men in the society.

I.4. Participation of Women in *Kalaripayattu*

History is always his story and not her story. In the earlier period historians always focused on political events. They neglected the role of family as an institution in the society. Generally the space of women has been considered in the private realms of the family so she did not receive any space in the public realms of history. More over any women who came out of the house and marked her foot prints in the public domain were intentionally neglected by the main stream historians. But these women, especially the peasant women, have lived on in the memory of the local people and they preserved and transmitted the story of these heroines by oral songs.

Kalaripayattu a martial art in Kerala had a long tradition in the political and cultural geography of Kerala. By definition itself, *Kalaripayattu* as a martial art excludes women from participating in it. A martial art make a body physically and mentally fit which is considered as a character of masculinity. This notion itself prevents women to participate in *Kalaripayattu*.

Kalaripayattu as an institution has a very long history from medieval to contemporary time. Its form, nature and popularity varies in accordance with the changing circumstances in society, therefore it is an evolving institution. The widely prevalent practice of *Kalaripayattu* in medieval Kerala shows the attentiveness of

⁵ Kerala development report downloaded from <http://books.google.co.in/books> on 8. 11. 2011.

people towards male body. They used to keep their body fit with daily exercise. Men were very conscious to make a muscled body.

In medieval period the nature of the sports was not as much about entertainment as was about power and rituals. *Kalaripayattu* was also not an exception from this. Only men participated in these sports. When we look at the medieval polity, *Desam* or villages were the basic units of the medieval Kerala society. Each *Desam* is divided into *Nadus* or chiefdoms. Each *Nadus* were ruled by the *Naduvazhies*. Real power was in the hands of the *Nair Madambies* who used to maintain strong troops of soldiers who were well trained in the martial art of *Kalaripayattu*. Every *Nadus* had their own *Kalaris*, where the youth of the land received training in the martial art of *Kalaripayattu*. That was the period of ‘might is power.’ The rulers had to claim power in the society. Organised *Kalaripayattu* institutions used to supply people for fighting and to capture power. In this context it is institutionalised as a power mechanism.

There are not many evidences like written documents except travelogues and oral history to reconstruct the history of women practitioners of *Kalaripayattu* in medieval Kerala. Castanheda, a foreign traveller referred to the women archers and recorded that the ruler of Quillon had both rich and powerful military and the king’s palace squads consisted of three hundred female archers (Castanheda cited in Menon Padmanabha , 1965, 353). Padmanabha Menon also shows that the girls in medieval Kerala also practiced *Kalaripayattu* to some extent (Menon Padmanabha, 1983, 23). *Vadakkan Pattukal* which is a group of folk songs tells the story of participation of many women in *Kalaripayattu* in the medieval Kerala society. As mentioned above, *Vadakkan Pattukal* refers to women named Unniyarcha, Kunjithalu, Mathileri Kanji etc. who were well trained in *Kalaripayattu* and used *Kalaripayattu* as a tool to

protect themselves. All these women are from families who owned Kalaris. But we didn't have much evidence to substantiate the wider practice of women in *Kalaripayattu*.

Colonial period saw the decline of *Kalaripayattu*. The British banned *Kalaripayattu* as part of the disarming the local rulers. There were no references about the women practitioners of the *Kalaripayattu* in colonial Kerala. Though the revival of *Kalaripayattu* was started by Kanaran Gurukkal in 1930s, it was in the post independent period that Kerala witnessed the popularity of *Kalaripayattu* as a performance art. Here *Kalaripayattu* lost its identification as a military art and from then on it began to be used as a spectacular element to get popularity among the Kerala youth (Prasad Gurukkal personal interview on 10th September 2010). Here also the practice of women in *Kalaripayattu* still remained minimal in nature.

I.5. Review of Literature

There are very few books on women in Kerala history more so on *Kalaripayattu*. But we get information about this from some other books. This study has reviewed several literatures on the theoretical and empirical themes related to the study. It is broadly literature related to theoretical and conceptual frame and literature on *Kalaripayattu*, literature on Kerala history and gender.

I.6. Literature Related to Theoretical and Conceptual Frame

Literature on performance studies has enriched this study to address the case theoretically. Performance studies came as a separate discipline and it studies the broad range of cultural expressions including traditional art forms, religious rituals, festivals, ceremonies, folklore and indigenous arts, sports and games etc. This study used Richard Schechner's book (1997) "*Points of Contact between Anthropological*

and Theatrical Thought. In Between Theatre and Anthropology”, Richard states that, “performance is an inclusive term. Theatre is only one node on a continuum that reaches from the ritualization of animals (including humans) through performances in everyday life – greetings, displays of emotion, family scenes, professional roles and so on – through to play, sports, theatre, dance, ceremonies, rites, and performances of great magnitude” (Schechner Richard, 1997, xiii).

Likewise, this study focussed on two different views of performance theory of martial art that is Deborah Kleans Bigman’s theory of ‘martial arts as performance’ and Zarilli Phillip’s ‘martial art is performance’. Zarilli Phillip account on “What does it mean to become the character” in Willa Appel and Richard Schechner (1993) edited book, *“By means of performance: Intercultural studies of theater and ritual”* talks about the idea of ‘martial art is performance’. Deborah Kleans Bigman (2002) in her account “Towards a theory of martial arts as performance art in Jones, David E. (ed.) *Combat, ritual and performance: anthropology* stated that all forms of martial art contains the element of performance or all forms of practice of martial art can be seen as performance in itself. She tries to locate martial arts as an aesthetic practice and performance art.

Moria Gatens (1996), in her book *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality* talked about various feminist theoretical perceptive regarding female bodies. According to her, recent feminist history of Western thought shows a deep hatred and fear of the body that is the semetophobia which is understood in the context of masculinity, gynophobia and misogyny. This pessimistic attitude is challenged by feminists by focussing and celebrating the female body and their capacity to recreate nature. These theories present women as peace loving and careful and biophilic while women actually are aggressive necrophilic and selfish. In

her view, women should retain the essential sexual difference between the female body and male body.

Naomi Wolf (1991) in her book criticized the view of 'body as a project' of determining an individual's self-identity. She connects the objectification of female body with capitalism. She argued that female is the victim of the 'beauty myth' that is a product of capitalism in a patriarchal society. By beauty myth, Naomi means that all myths regarding body which says that male body is superior and female body is ugly, and which is also concerned about virginity and fertility also constitute the beauty myth of a society. This asymmetrical beauty myth is the back bone of compulsory heterosexuality and the subjection of women in the society (Wolf Naomi, 1991, 150-153).

Foucault writes in his book titled '*Discipline and Punish*' that a body is docile, and that it can be subjected, used, transferred and improved, through the strict regiment of disciplinary acts. He talks about power over the individual body through disciplines and the way it is exercised on the social body through biopolitics. These are the two ways through which power operates in the body. But in modern period power operates in body through various institutions and practices. Foucault's idea of 'political anatomy' reveals the 'techniques of power' that shows 'how one may have a hold on others' bodies'. By this process one act according to the wishes and determination of others. Here an individual loose his freedom and control on his body. Foucault describes that political anatomy as "methods which made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body which assured the constant subjection of its forces and impose upon them a relation of docile utility might be called discipline" (Foucault, 1975,137).

Butler in her book *Gender trouble, feminism and subversion of identity* says that body is constructed in the realms of power through embodied acts. “Performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration” (Butler, 1999, xv).

I.7. Literature Related to Kerala History, Society and Gender

Social and Cultural History of Kerala (1979) by Sreedhara Menon is a comprehensive history of Kerala. He has made a detailed study of the Kerala society throughout the ages. The introduction explains the geographical position of Kerala and the second chapter deeply discusses the social life of Kerala from the medieval to modern period. In this chapter he deals with different social institutions, origin of caste system, and customs and manners. Here he talks about the dressing pattern, sports and leisure time. Other works on Kerala history hardly mention about sports and the leisure time of people. So this section is very useful for this research. The next four chapters discuss about the religion, art, architecture, language and literature in the Kerala. Here he discusses the details about the *Vadakkan Pattukal*.

Migration, Money and Masculinity in Kerala (2000), by Fillipo Osello and Caroline Osello focuses on the gulf migration and the change of the Kerala society. Their opinion is that the gulf migrant’s remittances are invested in huge amounts in Kerala and it has changed the society’s culture to a commercialised culture which made the notion of masculinity very powerful in that society. But at the same time it has increased women’s responsibility in the society. This article helps us to understand the physical culture in contemporary Kerala.

In the article ‘*Notes on the Making of Feminine Identity in Contemporary Kerala Society*’ (1995), T. K. Ramachandran critically examines the image of femininity

from ancient Kerala to modern Kerala. He concluded with the statement that the emergence of the culture industry and its twin products, popular journals and popular cinema paved the way for the commodification and objectification of women.”

“Human Capital Attainment and Gender Empowerment: The Kerala Paradox” by Aparna Mithra (2007), and *“The land of ‘gender paradox’? Getting past the commonsense of contemporary Kerala”* (2007) by Sharmila Sreekumar discuss the paradoxical condition of Kerala women. They point out that though the statistics show that the literacy and the good health among Kerala women is high , other statistics show that the suicides rate and the unemployment among Kerala women is also high. These indicators point out the paradoxical status of Kerala women. They concluded that women in Kerala are also subjected to discrimination in the society despite the fact that they are educated.

Negotiating women’s social space: public debates on gender in early modern Kerala, India (2006) by Devika tried to show the status of women in the early modern Kerala. She talks about the modern gendered identities in early-20th century Kerala in which womanhood was confined into a certain domain with certain forms of power.

Robin Jeffery tried to point out in his article *“Legacies of Matriliney: The Place of Women and the “Kerala Model”* (2004)” that matriliney did not create Kerala model of development alone but without the matriliney it is hard to imagine the model taking place. This helps us to understand the status of the women in the matriliney family as well as the society.

I.8. Literature Related to *Kalaripayattu*

When the Body Becomes All Eyes Paradigms, Discourses and Practice of Power in Kalaripayattu, a South Indian Martial Art (1998) by Zarilli B. Philip is the

first in depth study of *Kalaripayattu*, one of the India's traditional martial arts dating from at least the twelfth century based on twenty years of research practice in Kerala. It gives the whole history of *Kalaripayattu*. This book provides us with notions on physical culture of each period and also hints towards women's participation in sports. He gives the picture of *Kalaripayattu* and the important Kalari families based on the *Vadakkan Pattukal*. He also mentions about a few women from *Ezhva* and *Nair* caste who practised *Kalaripayattu*. But he didn't say about the image of women in medieval Kerala.

Society in Medieval Malabar a study based on Vadakkan Pattukal (1979) by Mathew KS. This is the most important analytical study about the nature of medieval Kerala society based on the *Vadakkan Pattukal*. He thoroughly discussed the origin of *Vadakkan Pattukal* and explains how it depicts the picture of caste system at that time. But he overlooks the representation and status of women in *Vadakkan Pattukal*.

Vadakkanpattu patanagal (*Studies of Vadakkan Pattukal* (2000) edited by Payyanad Ragavan. This is a collection of articles based on the *Vadakkan Pattukal*. Among these articles Madhyakala Stree Samootham Vadakkan Patukalil (Medieval women folk in *Vadakkan Pattukal*) by Devi.EH looks at the depiction of women in *Vadakkan Pattukal*.

K.B Geethi's (2010) book titled *Kalarippyattum Jnanum* (*Kalaripayattu and me*) narrates her own personal experience as a practitioner. The book questions the hegemonic practices of male practitioners by giving an account of her personal experience in the domain of *Kalaripayattu*. Rose Merin Mathew's (2009) *Kalaripayttum Rangae Vedyum* (*Kalaripayattu and stage*). looks at the overall changes that took place in *Kalaripayattu* with special reference to gender.

I.9. Research Questions

- What is the role of gender and construction of body in *Kalaripayattu* a martial art in Kerala?
- How has the ideology of *Kalaripayattu* changed from the role of an agency of power apparatus in the medieval society to the status of a stage performance art?
- What is the nature of the concept of masculinity and femininity in Kerala through out the ages and how it has influenced the participation of the women in *Kalaripayattu*?
- How have women practitioners been represented in oral histories and memory of the folk?

I.10. Aims and Objectives

- To understand the nature of women's participation in present-day *Kalaripayattu* and its relationship with the contemporary body culture.
- To understand the position of the practitioners of *Kalaripayattu* in Medieval period and how this position was related to the body culture that prevailed in Medieval Kerala
- To analyse the role of gender in the formation, evolution and dissemination of *Kalaripayattu* and how the position of women practitioners were related to ideology and practice.
- To examine how have the forms and concept of *Kalaripayattu* changed from medieval representations of honour and heroism in a caste society, connected to local power structures to its contemporary form as a performance art or

medical practice.

I.11. Methodology

Available archival sources and travelogues were used to understand the history of '*Kalaripayattu*'. Since the historical materials on *Kalaripayattu* are less, it is necessary to depend on oral narrations especially the rich collection of folksongs to look into the issue at a deeper level. The study mainly intends to do a qualitative analysis of both the primary and secondary data. To understand the role of women practitioners of *Kalaripayattu*, unstructured interviews were conducted with the present day practitioners. Personal interviews were also conducted through questionnaires with the practitioners of *Kalaripayattu*. These are the main primary sources of data for the study. The secondary materials include books, auto biographies, biographies, journals, various articles and other relevant sources such as folk songs, tales and movies which are based on the *Vadakkan Pattukal*. The study depends on the content analysis of the sources like '*Vadakkan Pattukal*'.

The methodology is designed to account for

- The analysis of the performance practice of the *Kalaripayattu* practitioners especially women practitioners.
- How these women practitioners view their performance and their interaction with the male practitioners.
- The nature of the *Kalaripayattu* practice of women in that particular institution and their relationship with society.
- How the government can take measurements for resolving the participation of women in *Kalaripayattu*.

In order to research this topic, the researcher principally utilized these four techniques.

1. Participant observation
2. Analysis of performance and practice of women practitioners of *Kalaripayattu* at various levels.
3. Interviews with *Kalaripayattu* practitioners, state bureaucrats, *Kalaripayattu* professionals and audience.
4. Archival research

I.12. Participant Observation

This method helps a researcher to involve and focus on naturally occurring discourses in daily social interaction. Staying, studying and performing *Kalaripayattu* within that institution has enabled the researcher to observe and experience the nature and gender relation in *Kalaripayattu* as a particular martial art. Researcher could experience the events in *Kalaripayattu* in the same way as ordinary women practitioners of *Kalaripayattu* experience them. It made researcher make sense on *Kalaripayattu* professionals. As a *Kalaripayattu* student, the researcher got the opportunity to know about this martial art in detail, especially through the strong bond of the teacher student relationship (Guru Sishya relationship) which has been considered as the back bone of this age old martial art.

For the analysis of the *Vadakkan Pattukal*, a group of oral songs in the northern part of Kerala were considered as the key sources for studying the practice of women in *Kalaripayattu* during the medieval period. The researcher observed and spent time with the local people especially old peasant women who gave an insight on the epistemology of these songs which praised heroines who were well versed in

Kalaripayattu. These peasant women shaped and structured themselves for preserving their inspirational heroines through the performance of these folk songs.

Epistemology has a key role in feminist methodology. The different notions about these heroines in the memory of men and women indicate the difference in attitudes towards the women practitioners of the *Kalaripayattu*.

I.13. Interview

Next technique of this research is unstructured interviews with the female and male practitioners, and the partial structured interviews with *Kalaripayattu* association members and Kerala sports council members (*Kalaripayattu* is considered as a sport item) and the audience of *Kalaripayattu* performance. Interview started with open- ended questions to practitioners, officials and audience to make opinions on the various issues and themes related to the history, ideology and present status of *Kalaripayattu*. The questions were also related to the participation, status of women in the *Kalaripayattu* and what they thought about the most important item and impressive elements in this martial art called *Kalaripayattu*. Interview with the female practitioners mainly focussed on the differences between the contexts of the performance of female and male practitioners in *Kalaripayattu*. To find out the changes in the *Kalaripayattu* practice of women in the contemporary period, we categorized women performers into three groups based on their age. This helped to know about the motivation behind the participation of *Kalaripayattu* at different period, different trends in the dress culture in the *Kalaripayattu* which may show the changing notion of the femininity and masculinity in the Kerala society. Questions to the bureaucrats focussed on the policies and measures for the development of *Kalaripayattu* especially for the policies encouraging the

participation of the women. Questions to the audience focussed on their attitudes towards women performers in society.

I.14. Analysis of Performance and Practice of Women Practitioners of *Kalaripayattu* at Various Levels

The Research utilized photos, videos and the records of the practitioners of *Kalaripayattu* especially women while they are performing on the stage. This was used as the basis of feedback interview that gave an opportunity to the performers to explain the various factors like encouragement to practice and the obstacles in the way of their performance.

It is very difficult to find out the written documents about the participation of women in the medieval period as the women and her achievements are avoided by mainstream historians. Oral history is considered as a key source for studying the subaltern group including women as this is constructed and developed by the local people. Kerala is also not an exception from this. *Vadakkan Pattukal*, a group of folk songs in Northern part of the Kerala, praising the heroes belongs to that particular period. This is the principal source for studying the women practitioners of *Kalaripayattu* in medieval Kerala. So it is necessary to depend on the representation of these women practitioners of *Kalaripayattu* in *Vadakkan Pattukal*.

I.15. Archival Research

For the historical research this thesis depended on the various archives and libraries. Travelogues provide another source of information about the women practitioners of *Kalaripayattu* in the medieval period. More over the official records and documents also have thrown light on the history of *Kalaripayattu*.

I.16. Chapterization

This dissertation is organised in to seven chapters.

I.16.1. Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter one is *Introduction* that introduces the dissertation in brief. This chapter provides an overview of the study: aims and objectives, area of study and methodology. This chapter also contains a short note on the participation of women in *Kalaripayattu* with a special reference of the status of women in Kerala.

I.16.2. Chapter 2: Reconstructing Histories and Gender: A Glance at the Historiography of Kerala

By looking at the various inscriptions and travelogues and doing a critical reading of the books available, this chapter gives details of descriptive and historiographical account of Kerala. The chapter uses folk literature that uncovers the ways in which the history of participation of women in *Kalaripayattu* has gone unexplored.

I.16.3. Chapter 3: Gender, Body and Performance Theories and their Application to Performing Arts in a Feminist Historical Perspective

This chapter mainly addresses a number of questions such as why theories on performance and bodies are more suitable to studies about *Kalaripayattu*. How do these theories enhance our knowledge particularly related to gender participation? How can one get an understanding of gender dimensions of *Kalaripayattu* by using these theories? The chapter deals with the question of how ideal male body in medieval Kerala is constructed through literary, performative and pictorial representation.

I.16.4. Chapter 4: Ideology and History of Kalaripayattu through Ages: With Special Reference to *Vadakkan Pattukal*

This chapter contains three sections. The chapter in its beginning deals with the categories of *Kalaripayattu*, its origin and development. The ideas, meanings and practice attached to the institution of *Kalaripayattu* in medieval Kerala are looked at in detail. The chapter also addresses the question of the perpetuation of ideology in maintaining social order with special reference to patriarchy. The third section of this chapter also problematizes how the women historical figure like Unniyarcha, Kunjithalu and Mathilerikanni are represented during the late medieval Kerala society which has been identified as a martial society based on the representation of women in the *Vadakkan Pattukal*.

I.16.5. Chapter 5: Masculinities, Practices and Performances of Male Practitioners in *Kalaripayattu*

Historical analysis of practice of male practitioners of *Kalaripayattu* tries to explore the various practices of male practitioners and the changing masculinities evolved in *Kalaripayattu* throughout the period. This chapter focuses on the practice of male practitioners both in medieval and contemporary Kerala.

I.16.6. Chapter 6: Female Discourse: Contemporary Practitioners of *Kalaripayattu*

Firstly this chapter bring different narratives of women who participate in *Kalaripayattu* in Kerala into focus. Such narratives will be taken as a key entry to explain the status of women inside and outside the field of *Kalaripayattu*. Special attention is given to understand the nature of the status of these women. The network of *Kalaripayattu* and the process of recruitment and training of women will also be analysed.

I.16.7. Chapter 7: Conclusion

The conclusion part broadly evaluates the different status of women in modern form of *Kalaripayattu* and compares this to the pre-modern time. This chapter also highlights the construction of body and gender in the Kerala society.

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Chapter II

RECONSTRUCTING HISTORY AND GENDER: A GLANCE AT THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF KERALA

By looking at the primary sources which include inscriptions, travelogues and critical reading of secondary literature, this chapter first attempts to give a detailed descriptive account of Kerala. The chapter then try to uncover the history of women which has been silenced in the dominant historiography of Kerala by using insights from other sources. This reconstruction of the history of women in medieval and colonial Kerala examines issues related to the participation of women in various spheres of social life such as private space and public space in both medieval and colonial period. The dominant historiography of medieval and colonial Kerala has ignored the gendered dimension of society despite of its rich contribution to various other aspects of Kerala's history and society. However the alternative sources like oral histories and folk songs have revealed the ways in which women has been subjugated and suppressed in medieval and colonial period. This chapter reconstructs the social history of Kerala by bringing the gender dimension into the centre of discussion in Kerala history.

This chapter chronologically deals with the history of Kerala from medieval to colonial period and tries to scrutinize the transformation of the notion of gender such as masculinity, femininity, domestic women, aesthetic women and ideal women. 'History is his story not her story'. Kerala history is also not an exception

from this. It is hard to find out a meticulous research study on the status of the Kerala women in the medieval period from a women's perspective. But for a rigorous research on the paradoxical status of the contemporary Kerala women, it is important to look at the condition and status of the women in the Kerala society in the medieval and colonial period intensively.

There are various political, economical and social factors that construct the gender relations in a society. These gender variables determine the status of women in that particular society. So the polity, economy and social structure of a society create a unique culture which is related to the gender relations in that society. There are various kinds of social customs and practices that are embedded in that unique cultural society. Travellers of medieval Kerala have stated that, Kerala had a unique culture especially related to women. It is not possible to look at these particular cultural practices without deciphering the nature of political, economical and social structure of that particular society.

II.1. Historiography of Kerala

The root of the Kerala history can be traced back to Sangam period as it is a part of ancient *Tamizakam*. The discovery of heroic songs from different parts of Kerala has underlined this view. Historiography of Kerala started with *Mushakavamsam* written by Athula in eleventh century. *Keralolpathi*⁶ and Kerala *Mahathmyam*⁷ claims that the founder of Kerala is a Brahmin saint called *Parasuraman*. This *Brahminical* origin of Kerala has received various criticisms. K. N Ganesh has rejected this theory of the origin of Kerala and points out that,

⁶ It is a Malayalam work deals with origin of Kerala.

⁷ Sanskrit book deals with history of Kerala.

these texts were written by *Brahmins* during the sixteenth century (Gurukkal and Warriar, 2011, 16). All these *Keralalolpathies* are divided in three parts: first part discusses about *Parasuraman* the founder of Kerala who had brought the Brahmins to Kerala; the second part analyses the rule of *Perumals* in Kerala and the third part talks about the power of *Naduvazhies*, after the period of *Perumakkans*. These *Keralalolpathies* claim that the *Brahaminical* supremacy in Kerala was divine, unquestionable and undeniable (Warrier and Gurukal, 2011, 17).

Historical recordings of the lineage of kings gained prominence after the establishment of powerful kingdoms in *Thiruvithamkur*⁸. This new emerging need of collating the histories of kings had led to the completion of *Granathavaries* (Warrier and Gurukal, 2011, 18). British rule and propagation of the english education demanded the script of Kerala history to be written in English (Warrier and Gurukal, 2011, 20). *Manipravalam* literary works such as *Unniadi Charitham*, *Unnichiruthevi Chaarithem*, *Unniyachi charatham* and *Kokasandesam* throws light on the nature of medieval society. These sources have mentioned about the *Angadis*⁹, small hawkers, medieval towns and the prostitutes called *Attakkaris* (Warrier and Gurukal, 2011, 40).

First phase of Kerala historiography was only about the heroes and kings and it totally neglected the plight of common people. For the administrative purpose, colonial rule and its administration recorded the local history of Kerala with its minute details that also included specific geographical and topographical features of that particular locality (Warrier and Gurukal, 2011, 20). Malabar manual written by

⁸ Erstwhile Trivandrum

⁹ Bazar

Willian Logan can be considered as the best example of Kerala records in the context of documenting historiography. Epigraphical evidences are also an important source to study of Kerala history. *Tarisapalli copper Plate* mentions about various caste groups and their professions in Kerala such as *Thahan*, *Vannan*, *Ezhavar* etc. The place of the name itself can be traced back to the local history of Kerala. Oral songs also help to study the social history of Kerala. *Ankam*¹⁰, *Kudippaka*¹¹ and *Chekavor*¹² are well reflected in *Vaddakan Pattukal* or Northern ballads of Kerala. This *Pattukal* mentioned the political and social structure of medieval Kerala (Warrier and Gurukul, 2011, 294). *Tottam Pattukal*¹³ says that goddesses are having blood relations with other. For example; the *Kodungallur* goddess is an elder sister of *Chettikulagara* goddess. This is very meaningful in the light of *Marumakathayam*¹⁴ practice in Kerala (Warrier and Gurukul, 2011, 295).

II.2. Nature of the Medieval Kerala Society

Archaeological evidences show that people started to inhabit in Kerala towards the end of stone age (Ganesh, 1990:3). *Sangam* literature gave vivid picture of life in ancient Kerala. Supremacy of *Brahmins*, development of *Taravadus*¹⁵ and the emergence of *Swarupams*¹⁶ were the main features of medieval Kerala (Ganesh, 1990:57). Cheriyan has classified the history of the transformation of Kerala society. There are different phases of Kerala history that shaped its cultural life such as the primitive tribal system, the formation of feudal society, the reorganization of the

¹⁰ The duel in medieval Kerala society

¹¹ Family Feud

¹² The fighters in Ankam

¹³ It is a vocal ballad sung just before performing the Theyyam ritual.

¹⁴ Matrilineal system of inheritance.

¹⁵ Traditional joint family in Kerala

¹⁶ Royal family household in medieval Kerala society

feudal system, the emergence of democratic forces fighting against the feudal and colonial domination and the appearance of organized working class that took the task of carrying forward the struggle for democracy. In his view these are the different phases of the Kerala history which shaped the cultural life of Kerala (Cheriyian, 1999, 11).

Regarding the medieval Kerala polity, Elamkulam Kunjan Pilla establishes that it was *Chera* kingdom that ruled in Kerala during the period of A.D Ninth century to A.D Twelfth century. His argument is mainly based on epigraphical evidences that are prominent. But P.K Balakrishnanan has questioned this argument (Balakrishnan, 1983, 41).

II.3. Emergence of Naduvazhi *Swarupams*

By the end of twelfth century the *Chera* Empire disintegrated into numerous principalities. Brahmins gained socio- economic dominance through control of extensive area of gifted lands, ritual dominance was by means of hierarchally ordered relationships and through an intricate pattern of martial relationship with *Kshatriyas* and high ranking *Nairs* (Narayan, 1972, Pillai, 1987 cited in Zarrilli, Philip, 1998,35). *Naduvazhies* emerged from the locality where their joint families were originally situated. The original location of joint family was known as *Swarupam*. These *Swarupams* claims the *Kshatriya* status conferred by the *Brahmins* and temples (Ganesh, 1990.58).

The *Desam* or the village has always been considered as the fundamental unit of the medieval Kerala society. These *Desam* are divided in to *Nadus* or chiefdoms. In that sense, each *Nadus* are not only political unit but socio, cultural and religious

unit.(M. N Sreenivasan, 2010, 38) During this period *Naduvazhies* were the rulers of 'Nadus', which means a region. The important *Nadus* are *Venad*, *Kolathunad*, Cochin and Calicut. Each *Nadus* were subdivided in to *Tara*. *Tara* formed the unit of civil administration. *Taras* or the villages were presided over by the *Karanavars* or elders who were also know as *Mukhusthans*. K.N Ganesh has observed that, caste system was the backbone of the *Janmi Naduvazhi* system in the medieval social system. Medieval Kerala's political system was formed and developed in terms of the culture of the society (Ganesh K.N 2011, 38).

Though the rulers are the *Naduvazies*, the real power was in the hands of the *Nair Madambies* who used to maintain strong troops of soldiers who were well trained in the martial art of *Kalaripayattu*. *Ankam* was very popular for the settlement of the dispute between two *Nair* persons (Warrier and Gurukal, 2011, 275). *Kalaries*¹⁷ were popular in Kerala. There are many places in Kerala named along with the word *Kalari*. (Warrier and Gurukal, 2011, 276). Every *Nadus* had their own *Kalaris*, where the youth of the land were trained in martial art *Kalaripayattu*. This is known as the period of 'might is power'. *Ankam*.¹⁸ *Poith*¹⁹ and *Kudippaka*²⁰ are the main characters of this period. Soldiers called *Lokars* and *Kavalchagathams* are also strong in Kerala (Warrier and Gurukal, 2011, 260). The absence of permanent army was noticeable in the medieval Kerala.

According to Elamkulam the medieval Kerala society was dominated by the *Jenmi* system headed by the *Nampoothiri Brahmins* known as *Uralars* who were the

¹⁷Indiginious Gymnasium

¹⁸ fight between two Chakovars or the fighters for the settlement of the dispute between the two upper caste aristocratic families

¹⁹ fight between two soldiers

²⁰ Family feud

owners of the *Devasam* land and *Brahmasam* lands. *Karalars* were the labourers. These classifications formed the back bone of the medieval society. (Gangatharan, T.K, 2005, 127) The temples were also very powerful in this period. Most of the temples owned vast areas of land and they have separate armies to protect this wealth. EMS Nampoodiripad has argued that, during the medieval period Kerala witnessed the *Brahmanical* scheme of division of labour and the division of the society into high and low castes. This social division lead to the emergence of the worst form of untouchability and even ‘unseeability’. There was an absence of strong centralised ruling system as land was fragmented and the rulers had no right on land and even had no right to receive the annual land tax (Nampoothiri, 1967,40).This system of private ownership of land changed the medieval society into a feudal society.)

Settlements of Brahmins in Kerala were a landmark in the formation of agrarian society in Kerala agrarian system. As it is mentioned above, the most prominent story in the *Keralolpathi* is about the migration of Brahmins to Kerala. There is a belief that a Hindu saint called *Parasuraman* was the founder of Kerala and he brought *Brahmins* to Kerala (Warrier and Gurukul, 2011, 17). Rise of temples was related to the settlements of *Brahmins*. *Brahmin* households had dominated the agrarian economy and temples emerged as a major institution in medieval agrarian society (Gurukkal Rajan, 1999, 29). *Brahmins* were not cultivator groups so they had to hand over the land to another group of people for cultivation. The new *Brahmin* settlements and their dependency on the new non kin group of labourers led to the formation of a new system of relation of production. (Gurukkal Rajan, 37). As a

result of this relation of production two new groups emerged namely the land owners and the land cultivators.

Inscriptions of *Thiruvalla* and *Trikkakkara* contain the details about the land grants given to different temples from *Perumals*, *Brahmins*, *merchants*, *devadasis*²¹ and others. (Travancore Archaeological series, vol v) The inscriptions show that gold was also offered to temples. Exchange was done between land and gold. The temples were also very powerful in this period. Most of the temples owned vast areas of land and they have separate armies to protect this wealth. *Nairs* who are trained in *Kalaripayattu* were organized in to guilds or bands of hundred, five hundred and six hundred called *Nutuvr* , *Anjuutavar*, *Aranuttuvar* respectively to protect the people and the business of the people in a Nadu or country (Padmanabha Menon. 1982,252).

In medieval period, land was handed over to cultivators also. Land and agricultural products were paid as salary to temple employers and cultivators (Warrier and Gurukul, 2011, 118). The practice of *Virthi Bhoomi* was common, it means land was given to temple employers in terms of salary (Warrier and Gurukul, 2011, 131). Warrier and Gurukul argued that, in the socio-economic hierarchy, *Uralars*²² were at the top. They had the proprietary right over the *Ur (the Uranmai)*. The leaseholders or the *Karalar* who held the *Karanmai* or the right of cultivation occupied the second position in the social hierarchy. Then comes the right of the artisan-cum-craftsmen groups called the *Kutimai*. The primary producers or the actual cultivator with the *Atimai* right comes at the bottom. These were the *Pulayas* and the agrarian labourers of the society. Artisans and other craftsmen groups also

²¹ Devadasis were the girls who were dedicated to temples during medieval Kerala

²² Brahmin Land laords

congregated around the proliferation of temples. These artisan-cum-craftsmen group evolved and settled around the temples, trade centres and locality of Naduvazhies.

Kudiyans and *Adiyars* were the prominent groups in the medieval society. *Kudi* means house or dwelling area and the people from the Kudies are known as Kudians who were the peasant groups in medieval Kerala. Lower caste agriculturalist called *Kudians* were exchanged or sold with the land (Ganesh, 1990.79- 85). This system did not allow them to participate in the mode of production.

II.4. Economic and Social Condition of Medieval Kerala

Balakrishnan observed that the kings of medieval Kerala had built house by mud and leaves, that indicated the poor economic situation of that society.(Balakrishnan, 1983, 96-97). Sainudheen who visited Kerala in 1580 had noticed an exceptional feature of the Kerala revenue system where it was found that the farmers were exempted from the land tax while the merchants had to pay it. (Sainudheen cited in Balakrishnan, 1983, 99). The land tax is the main income source of the state generally. EMS Nampoothrippad also noticed that the king did not have the right to collect the land tax. Poor economic condition of the ruler adversely affected the whole society.

II.5. Social Customs and Practices in Medieval Kerala

Marten argued that the pre-modern Kerala had unique culture as the society was characterised by the peculiar practice of polyandry and nepotism in domestic economy, demon worship in religion and the strict practice of rigid casteism (Marten 1883, 288). He noted the prevalence of polygamy and dowry system among the Brahmins. Marteen writes

Though the wife is alive and had children, yet if the Brahmin is unable to meet the expense of giving his sisters or daughters in marriage, he may in exchange take one or two additional wives from the family to whom he gives daughters or sisters. This account will be balanced” (Marteen 1883, 294)

Child marriage also prevailed during that period. Widow Remarriage was strictly banned for Brahmin widows. Sham marriage was practiced among *Nairs* and *Ezhavas*. By sham marriage Marteen meant *Thalikkettu kalayanam*²³ for the young girls among *Ezhavas* and *Nairs*. Polyandry was practiced among Kerala lower castes. Lower caste women in Kerala had a little freedom in selecting her temporary male partners but *Brahmin* women did not have any choice in their marriage. Females in *Nair* family who were not obeying the *Karanavar*²⁴ in their family could be deprived from the right of their subsistence and inheritance from the family property.

Caste system was very powerful in Kerala; untouchability was practiced during that period. Marriage system maintained this caste system in the society (Ganesh, 1990.197). KN Ganesh argued that *Kudiyans* in Kerala have some similarities with the serfs in European feudalism. These *Kudiyans* also stayed near the agricultural land like serf. Relation of production of agriculture was changed in medieval Kerala (Ganesh, 1990.78).

Duarte Barbosa noticed that the king of Quillon had in his guard four or five hundred women who were trained to be archers (Barbosa Duarte, 124). This indicated that women in medieval Kerala practiced *Kalaripayattu*. Barbosa has

²³ It is a marriage ceremony performed for the girls in the *Nair* and *Ezhava* family before attaining puberty in Medieval Kerala. This is not permanent marriage relationship as the wife may not live with husband who knot the *tali* on her neck. It is an initiative of women to start their conjugal relationship with the men.

²⁴ Elder male member of the family.

remarked the existence of rigid caste system and gender relationship in medieval Kerala. He has observed the practice of a law related to women and caste purity where *Nair* women were killed by their families, once they were touched by lower caste men (Balakrishnan, 1983, 115). *Nairs* who were ranked below the Brahmins in medieval Kerala claimed the status of a military group and formed *Sanketham* in order to protect the businessmen as security guards. The native rulers claimed separate status as *Kshatriyas* and used the patriotic title. *Varma* who are elevated from the *Nair* caste, gradually affirmed the status of *Kshatriyas* through *Sanskritization*²⁵. Chinese traveller Mahomedan Ma Huan who had visited Kerala in the 1403 A.D recorded that the king of Calicut was a follower of Buddha (Padmanabha Menon. 1982, 230). It indicates that people followed different religions during that time.

Before the reign of Marthanada Varma, Kerala kings didn't have a habit of keeping a strong standing army (Balakrishnan, 1983, 127). *Kudipaka* or family feud also prevailed in the medieval Kerala (Balakrishnan, 1983, 138) *Kootayankam*²⁶ was common in the medieval Kerala (Balakrishnan, 1983, 151). In north Malabar a system prevailed among the *Nairs* that *Nair* women should not cross the river called *Korapuzha*. (Balakrishnan, 1983, 196). Nampoothri women were not allowed to see the male members in their family including their father and brother (Padmanabhamenon cited in Balakrishnan, 1983, 83-88).

In Medieval Kerala, *Ezhavas* who were married out of their *Desam* used to be ex-communicated. Fraternal polyandry was common among the castes like *Ezhavas*,

²⁵ It is concept introduced by M.N Srinivas. Sanskritisation is a process through which members of lower caste imitate the life styles, ritual and other practice of above caste groups.

²⁶ A group of people were fighting and Killing each other in a line.

Vilkuruppan, Kaniyanmar, and Pananmar (Balakrishnan, 1983, 314). *Khashatryiyas, Nayars and Eazhavas* practiced *Talikettu Kalayanam* for the girls before attaining puberty. Balakrishnan observed that the *Talikettu kalyanam* was a licence to adult free sex. If a *Nair* family was not arranging the *Talikettu Kalyanam* for their girls, then their *taravadu* or family is set out from their caste. *Thirandu kalyanam* a custom arranged by a family for their girls when they attained puberty was also practiced among all caste except Brahmins and Giri tribes in medieval Kerala. (Balakrishnan, 1983, 319). Padmanabha Menon reported in his Marumakkathayam reports about the observations of Captain Nihof on a proclamation of the Karthikapalli raja in 1678. The proclamation declared that a *Nair* woman would be killed if she was not ready to have sex with a desired upper caste man (Balakrishnan, 1983, 320). Child marriage was practiced in medieval Kerala. Ellamkullam observed that after eighteenth century the concept of *Varnasrama* became powerful which made women illiterate and reduced their status as slaves (Elamkulam, 1970, 121). There was an institution called *Salas* which were residential institutions attached to temples (Ellamkullam, 1970, 181). The admission in *Salas* was restricted to *Nampoothri Brahmins*. These *Nampoothiri* students are known as *Chattan*. *Unniyadicharitham*²⁷ has referred to the *Brahmins* who had weapons (Ellamkullam, 1970, 275). Here Ellamkullam, by referring to the foreign travellers mentions that the *Nampoothiris* always used to keep their swords at the door of the residence of prostitutes when they visit prostitutes. *Tarisapalli Copperplate* in A.D eight century gave informations about *Aranuttuvar* or six hundred soldiers of Kollam administration who were also in charge of safeguarding two merchant associations called *Manigramam* and *Anchuvannam*. They also played an important

²⁷ Manipravalam literature

role in the civic administration. The church was protected by soldier group. *Purananuru*²⁸ mentioned about a place called *Muchuri* or *Kodangallur* which was an important trade centre in medieval Kerala protected by *Arananuttavar* or the group of six hundred trained people in martial arts. *Akananuru*²⁹ and *Trisapalli* Copper Plate mentioned about the tax collected from slave trade. Most of the temples kept a group of *chavers*³⁰ called *Chagatham*.(Ellamkullam,1970, 237)

II.6. *Devadasi* System in Kerala

The tenth century inscription of *Chera* king Godaravi Varman found in *Nedumpuram Tali* temple in Kerala was called *Nedum Puram Tali* inscription which mentioned about the salary of *Nagakal* or *Devadasis* for their temple service. Thiruvalla Copper Plate also recorded the salary of the *Devadasis*. These inscriptions show the prevalence of practice of *Devadasi* system in Medieval Kerala (Travancore Archaeological series V). *Devadasis* are mentioned as *Nangakal* , *Nangyayar*, *Tevdichi*, *Koothechi*. For example, *Chokur* in *Nedupuram Tali* documents of the reign of *Kottha Ravi Perumal* in 898 A.D. This inscriptions mentioned devadasis as *angamar* and similarly *Tarisapalli copperplate* mentioned them as *Thevidichi* and *Koothichi*. These inscriptions mentioned *Devadasis* along with the musical artists in the temple. This indicates that these women were dancers in the temple (Warrier and Gurukul, 2011, 162). *Manipravalam* literature such as *Ilayachi Cheriachi*, *Maralekha*, *Marachemanthika* and *Manimeka* have referred *Devadasis* as *Atakkaries*. Sources show that *Devadasis* got good education during those periods.

²⁸ Sangam literature

²⁹ Sangam literature

³⁰ The chavers who were fighters in medieval Kerala assisted king or Naduvazhi in battles.

Female education was restricted to *Devadasis*. These women had high status in society.

Suchindram temple inscriptions show 32 *Devadasi kudis*. Though the main duty of *Devadasi* was singing and dancing, they have given some special duties like holding *Tookuvilakku* or lamp during possession in *Thiruvanchikulam* temple. *Devadasis* were considered as auspicious and they were purposefully posted at the door of the palace when the king set out. They were very wealthy during the medieval Kerala and had the ownership of land also. There are inscriptions which mentioned the donations made by the *Devadasis* to the temple (Travancore Archeological series vol 5). Ellamkulam compared the training given to *Devadasis* with the training given to Geishas in Japan. It was considered that education provided to the girls was considered to be profane and immoral (Ellamkullam, 1970, 277). They were well versed in dance and music and other fine arts and were reserved as an employee of temple (Ellamkullam, 1970, 277). Even kings used to marry *Devadasis*. For example a *Devadasi* named Kandir Tevadichi Unni Kalatram was the consort of Veera Kerala Varma who ruled *Venad* 1225 A.D. (Ellamkullam, 1970, 280). Inscriptions of the *Sucheentram* temple showed that the theatre and *Mandapam* of the temple were donated by *Devadasis* which showed the wealthy status of the *Devadasis* (Ellamkullam, 1970, 281). *Devadasis* system was mentioned in *Chokkur* temple inscriptions during A.D 932. In 1930 this system was abolished by state. (Ellamkullam, 1970, 280-281). *Manipravalam* literature showed that some of these *Devadasis* were from royal families also. By thirteenth century, *Devadasi* system became a hereditary system. Pleasure seeking *Nampoohiri Jemmi*

system and the over lordship of ease loving chieftains together degraded this system (Ellamkullam, 1970, 281)

II.7. *Marumakkathayam* and Matrilineal System

Under the system of *Maruakkathayam* the successors of the family property are the children of the sisters. Travelogues showed that *Marumakkathayam* system was very important because most of the caste groups in Kerala followed this system including the royal families also. In *Marumakkathayam* system the inheritance right of property went through the sister's children. Matriliney is the backbone of this system. In 1324 Friar Jorrdams who was a Roman Catholic missionary came to quillon and noticed the prevalence of the *Marumakkathaya* system among the rulers. S. Marteen says that the law of despotism was based on the matrilineal succession (Marteen, 1883, 288). He noted that the royal families in Kerala followed the *Marumakkathayam* system. Castenheda and Montaigine states that the *Marumakkathayam* and the matrilineal system were devised to maintain the military habit of the people. Man with no family responsibility would have greater linking for the martial life (Ellamkullam, 1970,314).

II.8. *Marumakkathayam* and the Status of Women in Medieval Kerala

Marumakkathayam system welcomed the birth of the female children in to family as the succession was through the sister's children. It is argued that hegemonic power of the Nampoodiri land owners particularly in south Malabar induced *Nair* women to hypergamous sexual relations or *Sambanatham* with them. (Arunima,2003,14 cited Panikkar , Land control and ideology and Reform, 35)

Sreedhara Menon stated that the origin of *Marumakkathayam* system was related to the *Chola-Chera* war(Cited in Balakrishnan, 1983,68). In the eighteenth century, *Nair* women had enough power to establish separate house hold because they had access to their own separate revenues and properties which showed that the women had not only share in the common revenues of the house hold but also retained rights of matrilineal succession to properties demarcated specifically for them. But women in nineteenth century did not have any right to the property. Francis Buchan noted that both female and male shared the same rank in the family according to their seniority of their age (Arunima, 2003, 34). *Marumakkathayam* lost its female headed nature in the nineteenth century. Gender relations in property were more institutionalized in colonial period. She points out that authorities in the former public sphere were from the male communities and not from female communities (Arunima, 2003,35). This indicted that these female house holds did not make any impact on the gendered power relations within the house hold. Arunima perceived that the uncle or the elder male member became the power locus in the *Taravadu*. The importance of women in social reproduction of *Taravadu* was subordinated to its sexual reproduction in the nineteenth century. Arunima points out that “reformers argued for an alteration of the matrilineal system on the grounds of protecting the virtues and chastity of women”(Arunima, 2003, 139). She noted that the politics of modern Kerala was linked with the question of marriage, inheritance and house hold partition. Female sexuality and conjugality in the matrilineal system became main themes among the *Nair* reformers (Arumima, 2003,162).

II.9. Dress Culture of Women and Men in Medieval Kerala

Pamanabha Menon has discussed about the observation of the travellers on the dress style of the people during the medieval Kerala. They had observed that Kerala people were almost naked and only used small loin cloth on their waist including the rulers also (Padmanabha Menon. 1982,236). Marcopolo referred that “the man and women they are all black and go naked save for a fine cloth worn about the middle” (Padmanabha Menon. 1982,279.). This is not seen as a sin.(Padmanabha Menon. 1982,279). Marteen also noticed the dress culture of Kerala. He observed that the funeral procession of king was accompanied by a group of *Sudra* women or lower caste women with the naked body but with a single cloth around their waist (Padmanabha Menon. 1982,529). This shows the dress culture of medieval Kerala. *Smarthavicharam* is a ritual trial to prove the chastity of Nampoothiri women. Cheriayan observed that the matriarchal joint family system among the lower castes in medieval Kerala was a re introduction by *Nampoothri Brahmins* supplanting their patriarchal system. (Cheriyan,1999, 11). King in medieval Kerala was not the centre of power. Slavery was the basis of the agrarian system in medieval Kerala (Nair Ramachandran, 1986,15-17) Slavery and excommunication was imposed as a punishment for violating caste rules and customs especially among women who were found guilty of adultery with a lower caste men.

II.10. Political and Social System in Colonial Period

Under the British, Kerala was divided into three political units: the princely state of Travancore in the south, the princely state of Cochin in the centre and the

directly ruled British district of Malabar in the north. After expulsion of Tippu army from the Kerala, English East Indian company have reinstated the Rajas in their respective position and retained them not in a position of the feudal lord but as the deputy of an all power suzeral which shook the existence of the age old feudal system in Kerala (Padmanabha Menon,1982,267). Modern Kerala under the British rule has been integrated in to world market which changed the structure of feudal economy (Cheriyann, 1999, 21). Victorian Christian morality had shaped civilized civil society's concept of sexuality (Cheriyann, 1999, 26).

II.11. Social Reform Movements and Status of the Women

The project of modernisation of Kerala is primarily located in the domain of social reforms initiated by anti casteist movements. The struggles of left movement in 1930s and 40s have been regarded as the second phase of the renaissance, which dilated and fortified the anti caste foundations of the renaissance through anti-feudal and anti-colonial struggles and the uprooting of landlordism. This subaltern dimension further strengthened in the second phase when the agrarian movements led by the left forces came into being and fought against landlordism that had provided the economic foundation for the caste system. All this underlines the fact that the renaissance experience of Kerala cannot easily be equated with that of Bengal and other regions. If conceived in this manner it would be clear that our reforms and renaissance movements were very much restricted by the ideologies of patriarchy and caste and also by its middle class foundations (Ilyedam, 2007, 10). The conception of womenhood in the social reform movements of Kerala is the notion of an ideal wife. (Ilyedam 2007,9).

Private space and the participation of women in the public space were the main issues in the social reform movements. Social reformers encouraged the women in to the public space as part of social reform movements. The educated women were initiated to publish the magazines for women like *Sarada*, *Mahila*, *Muslim*, *Mahila Sreemathi* etc. These women magazine editors namely Tharavattu Ammalu Amma, Ambadi Ekkavu Amma, T.K Kalyani discussed various issues related to women in colonial Kerala. These modern educated women tried to get new space in home as well as in the public space and by questioning the gender relationship in Kerala through their editorial magazines. Moreover the pathetic status of the women is reflected in the modern Kerala literature for example in like dramas composed by V.D Battathiripad (Ganesh, 2011, 126.). Another remarkable movement in the Malayalam literature was a play titled *Thozhil Kendrathilekku* (in to employment sectors.) composed, acted and presented on the stage by sincere effort of a group of women. This play addressed various issues related to the social and domestic role of women.

Christian organizations helped the lower caste to enter in to modernity. (Binumol cited Dilip Menon , 2007, 288). Former women reformers tried to eradicate the problems of women of their own community. Most of these reformers focussed on their own community. But they never argued for the equal representation of women. They distinguished the manly and womanly space (Binumol, 2007, 290). The community organization also linked engagement of the men in to modern socio-political circumstances with the transformation of their community identity from the traditional conventionality to modernity. She noted that this period witnessed a transformation of caste identify to community identity. In 1930's and 1940's the direction of women's organizations changed from the

community to collectivity. They focused women's needs and grievances. The names of women's organizations were also changed such as Ladies Association Thiruvananthapuram, *Samastha Kerala Mahila Samajyam* etc. these secular association formed a public space for the discussions and debates regarding women's issue (Bimumol, 2007, 293). Regarding the issue of women's education, two groups were formed in modern Kerala. One group argued for separate schools and separate curriculum for girls. Training in domestic jobs like home science, tailoring weaving should be a part of this separate curriculum while other group argued for the mixed education with the boys and higher education which will facilitate them in to public sphere. Though the reformers were interested in modernity, most of them were highly critical of women's imitation to western culture especially dress culture and costumes. Their notion is that modernisation should not affect the domestic duties and role of Kerala women. But they embraced the economic participation of the women in the domestic sphere. It is very evident in the article titled '*Swathatrayaya Keralastree*' (Independenet Kerala woman) published in '*Mahila*' by BB Amma. She discussed the privileges enjoyed by the *Nair* woman in their family such as property right and stated that Kerala woman were more empowered in terms of their property rights and their choice in the marriage. But she focuses on the concept of *Pathivratha* or the chaste wife with the ideal motherhood.(BB Amma, 1933,). This paradoxical position in the discussion focussed that the *Malayalee* women was clinging to the notion of an ideal women at par with the society lady who desire to assume man's role.

II.12. Analysis of Status of Women in Medieval and Colonial Kerala

Historiography of medieval Kerala explores the political and agrarian history of Kerala. However, the status of women in the medieval Kerala was not touched by prominent historians. *Manipravalam* literature and temple inscriptions mentioned the life of Devadasis and land owning women. More over *Kerala Mahathmayam* and other traveller such as Barbosa ,Casthande also recorded the laws and regulations and the practices related to women in the medieval society (Padmanabha Menon. 1982,477 and .Balakrishnan, 1983, 115)

Kerala Mahathmayam emphasizes that it was ordered by *Parasuraman* that *Nair* women should show special concern for the pleasures of Nampoothiris and do everything to gratify them. (EllamKllam, 1970, 295) *Manipravalam* works also justify that the women of Kerala should obey Jenmy and Naduvazhis.(Ellam Kullam, 1970, 298). Ellamklulam noted that *Nampoothri Brahmins* formulated a theory that women in Kerala need not observe chastity for convenience of *Nampoothiris*. (Ellamkullam, 1970, 282). There was a proclamation which pronounce that Kerala women who belong to lower caste should not cover the upper part of their body and should also not maintain their chastity.(EllamKullam, 1970, 295).)

Portuguese writer Arehesishop Menezes and Duch writer Nieuhoff in sixteenth century recorded a royal Proclamation on women that “if there are any women so immoral in our kingdom that they will not submit to men of their own higher castes, they will be immediately killed”. (Ellamkullam, 1970, 295). Abdul Razaque, Niciolo conti, Catenheda and Varthema have stated that sexual relations were nowhere as loose as in Kerala and they have recorded about the practice of

*Thalikettukalyanam*³¹ for the girls (EllamKullam, 296). (Varthema, 146). Varthema recorded that “one woman has five six and seven husbands and even eight and the woman has children, she says it is the child of this husband and or that of husband and thus the children go according to the world of women” (Varthema Ludovicodi, 146-147).

Duarte Barbosa who visited Kerala during 1500- 1517, noted the gendered practices such as *Pullaya pedi and Parayapedi*

They call Poleas, who among all the rest are held to be accused and excommunicate;.....they go by in order to get in to the house of Nayres to touch women woman during these monts..... if they touch any women, eventhough none have seen it , and there may be no witness, yet she declare it once, crying out, and she will stay no longer in her house that her caste may not be destroyed; in general she flees to the house of some other lower caste folk and hides herself that her kingfolk may not slay her (Barbosa, 68-69).

Nair women were forced in to slavery by excommunication especially through the *Pulayapadi and Parayapedi*. Here the relationship between the caste purity and women is noticeable. *Nair* women who happens to be in front of the lower caste men in a particular day called *karthika* day is considered to be impure and is banished from the community. These women were sold as slaves or killed by their own family. This showed that the mobility of women was controlled by a caste based and gendered society. Moreover the proclamation of 1856 by Otram Tirunal Marthanda Varma Maharaja of Travancore also ordered that lower caste women's prominent

³¹ A kind of mock marriage.

duty is to obey upper caste men. These proclamations were made for women to remove their upper cloth in the presence of officials and others (Ellamkullam, 1970, 295).

Barbosa recorded that the status of woman in Kerala depended on their number of husbands (Barbosa, 54). Fraternal polyandry was practiced. The concept of *Patrivrathas*³² came to practice in the Brahmin family and widows were prohibited to participate in public functions (Ganesh, 1990.219). Concept of purity related to menstruation also prevailed in Medieval Kerala. Bride price was practiced among Nairs and Ezhavas (Ganesh, 1990.224). *Khashatryiyas, Nayars and Eazhavas* practiced *Talikettukalayanam* for girls before attaining their puberty. Balakrishnan observed that Taliketukalyanam was a justification or a licence for adult free sex. Thirandu Kalyanam at the time of puberty was also practiced. But these practices were noted as expensive functions of girl's family. In colonial Kerala these functions were considered as liability to girl's family.

Promiscuity was the word used to describe the polyandry system in Kerala by various travellers such as Varthema, Barbosa etc. who had visited Kerala during medieval period. (Varthema Ludovicodi, 146-147³³, Barbosa, 54). Polyandry and fraternal polyandry gave a little freedom to women to select their male partners. Later it was questioned by social reformers in the light of Victorian morality. Arunima argued that the socio reform movement in Kerala focussed on the ban of

³² The chaste wife

³³ The travelers of Varthema Ludovicodi, 146-147).

Marumakkathayam system. *Marumakkathayam* system allowed the women to have many husbands.

Saradhamoni argued that in the *Marumakkathayam* system women had crucial role in economic and social life of the people in terms of property rights and family. *Tharavadu* gave her security and place through out their life. From the very birth women are the owners of their family property and the succession went through their names. So women didn't face a situation to depend on her husband for their maintenance (Saradamoni,1994, 156).

Marumakkathayam didn't attain legal marriage status. Inter -caste marriages were prohibited in medieval Kerala. Kerala society never encouraged the Aniloma marriage system. These all social laws and practices related to women directly curtailed their mobility in the society. Here the concept of *Brahmanical* patriarchy formulated by Uma Chakravarthi is very significant. "The lower caste male whose sexuality is a threat to upper caste purity has to be institutionally prevented from having sexual access to women of the higher castes so women must be carefully guarded"(Chakravarthi Uma, 1993. 579) Caste hierarchy and gender hierarchy are the organising principles of *Brahmanical* social order. Caste purity is maintained through the blood relations, especially through women. Thus, need of the sexual control over women became a necessary tool to perpetuate patriarchal succession with caste purity to maintain the *Brahmanical* supremacy in Indian social order. This notion supported the extreme expression of social stratification in which women and the lower castes have been subjected to humiliating conditions of existence in Hindu society. Here in Kerala context the *sambandham* was the base of the *Marumakkathayam*. *Sambandham* is a kind of sexual relationship between the

Nampoothiri man and *Nair* woman. In the caste hierarchy the *Nampoodiri* man belongs to the upper caste Brahmin and *Nair* woman belong to the lower caste. The social practices like *pulayapedi* shows that if a lower caste man sees the *Nair* woman then she would be excommunicated or killed by her family. Here the relationship between the caste purity and women is noticeable. Here the *sambandam* allow the authority of the upper caste male over the lower caste women while the *pulaya pedi* underlined the view that women must be guarded to protect the caste purity.

Marumakkathayam or the matrilineal system among the *Nairs* in Kerala can be read in another way that it is a very well planned institution of Patriarchal Brahmin ideology. The *Sambandham* is considered as a kind of sexual relationship between the *Nair* woman and Brahmin man and their children does not have any right in their property. But at the same time *Pathivratha* concept was very powerful in Brahmin group and a *Brahmin* women had no right to see the male members of the family even her father also. Women from the upper caste marry the lower caste man and it was considered as a big offence. At the same time the same *Brahmanical* patriarchy enabled Brahmin men to control lower caste women. Here *Brahmanical* patriarchy dominated over the women in all castes in medieval Kerala society. Medieval Kerala society was found on a strong casteist base system in which the *Brahmins* in Kerala were called *Nampoothiries*. They hold the top position and have the power to subjugate the sexuality of the women. Here it is very evident that power, subjugation of women and caste are linked.

Cheriyar observed that the land relations, political set up, man woman pairing relationship, mode of succession, the forms of worship and rituals, the language, art and literature and the dress culture were different from other regional cultures in India. Kerala saw a shift in marriage patterns that is from group marriage

to pairing marriage. In medieval Kerala most of the caste followed the polyandry system and property rights were through the mother's lineage. Fraternal polyandry was practiced by the patrilineal caste group like *Musari*³⁴.

There are some instances of heroines who had challenged and broken the social barriers. They have entered the public space as narrated in the folk songs and recorded in colonial documents. Folk songs such as *Vadakkan Pattukal* mentioned women called Unniyarcha and Mathilerikanni who took weapons against the male enemies for their self defence.

Aswathi Thirunal Thamburatti from *Attingal Swarumapam* ruled *Thiruvithamkoor* during 1678 to 1698. She was referred to in British records as Umayammarani. These records show that she was a bold, good politician and participated in the discussion directly (Devika, 2010, 56-57). Umayammarani was bold to challenge the laws regarding the women. She had violated the traditional laws and had crossed the *kararaman* river. She even actively participated in the political rivalry between the *Swarupams*.

There was a system that prevailed in *Swarupams*, the elder woman is the ruler in absentia of the elder male heir of the *Swarupam*. But the British has changed this system. The policies of colonial government also did not improve the status of women in the public sphere. Devika observed that woman can only be their regiment under the british government and she cannot become the ruler (Devika, 210, 61-62). Here women both in medieval and colonial society did not achieve the top of the political structure of the society. The curriculum of the western education for girls focussed on the Victorian morality and new ideology of domesticity that brought new dressing culture for women and these were supported by social reformers

³⁴ blacksmith

belonging to all castes. After the ban of the *Marumakkathayam* the system of *matriliny* and polyandry changed and the *Makkathayam* got the prominence in the colonial Kerala society. Monogamy is the base of the *Makkathayam* system and the concept of *Pathivratha* was focussed upon by all caste groups in Kerala. The educated women had published various magazines such as *Mahila*, *Muslimmahila* etc. These magazines acknowledged and distinguished manly and womanly space. They did not question the patriarchy in the homes and emphasis was on the domestic role of women at home. They emphasised the chastity and motherhood of a woman. (BB Amma, 1933) New modernization did not affect the domesticity of ideal women.

Women in Kerala have remained as victims in the caste patriarchy. They were exploited in medieval and colonial period in various ways. The concept of ideal women and femininity prevailed during colonial period in Kerala. In medieval Kerala the notion of a fully covered female body was a sin to morality. But in colonial Kerala women adored the sari with blouse which became a symbol of ideal women. Status of women among most of the castes depended on the number of husbands she had but this practise was not there during the colonial period. Practise of Polyandry was compared to promiscuity in colonial Kerala.. *Devadasis* were respected as aesthetical and educated women in society but colonial government banned *Devadasi* system under the title of immoral traffic. In colonial Kerala, elements of aesthetics have been attached to domesticity. New ideal women in colonial Kerala should be domestic and aesthetic to their husbands. Moreover, their sexuality is subjugated by their husbands completely. Social mobility of women and entry into public space especially from the power apparatus was strictly restricted in

both medieval and colonial patriarchal system which kept them as second sex in the society.

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Chapter III

GENDER, BODY PERFORMANCE THEORIES AND THEIR APPLICATION TO PERFORMING ARTS IN A FEMINIST HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

This chapter tries to analyse the various body and performance theories and its scope and applicability in the study of gender performance of *Kalaripayattu* in a historical way. In the first section, the chapter tries to locate *Kalaripayattu* in the framework of performance theory. By using various theories, this study tries to understand the various roles of *Kalaripayattu* from medieval period to contemporary Kerala. This study views *Kalaripayattu* as a performing art which enable the use of performance theory. The emphasis on gender dimension of *Kalaripayattu* prompted the use of various theories related to body. This chapter examines how these theories help to find out the relationship between various notions regarding body and performance in the Kerala society and how it is related to the practice and performance of *Kalaripayattu* especially with regard to the female practitioners.

Kalaripayattu encompasses three elements; an artistic element expressed through the performance of codified forms and the ritualistic structure of lessons; bodily practices and techniques used for self defence; practice for healthy body and fitness. *Kalaripayattu* preserves traditional and cultural symbols and meanings. All these dimensions of *Kalaripayattu* can be studied by using theoretical insights from various disciplines. Though *Kalaripayattu* as an active performance art of both medieval and modern Kerala is being studied, the male dominance in this practice

across various periods of history and relative absence of women and its gender dynamics have not been addressed so far. Social and cultural theories of body substantiate the view of gender discrimination and notions of body in any society. As a bodily practice and performance, the study of gender practice of *Kalaripayattu* needs to be understood through a feminist historical theoretical perspective. By exposing gender performances of *Kalaripayattu*, this chapter is trying to argue that the thoughts and perceptions about body modify and determine the nature of the performing arts and martial tradition in a society.

III.1. Definitions of Performance

The term Performance has become a key concept in the various academic disciplines like anthropology, sociology, gender studies, history, philosophy and theatre studies. “Performance is the centre of a chain of relationships linking genre, gender, history, ethnography, and social (embodied) practice” (Kapchan A Deborah, 1995, 499). Performance studies came as a separate discipline and it studies the broad range of cultural expressions including traditional art forms, religious rituals, festivals, ceremonies, folklore and indigenous arts, sports and games etc. Richard schchner states that “performance is an inclusive term. Theatre is only one node on a continuum that reaches from the reutilizations of animals (including humans) through performances in everyday life – greetings, displays of emotion, family scenes, professional roles, and so on – through to play, sports, theatre, dance, ceremonies, rites, and performances of great magnitude” (Schchner Richard, 1997, xiii). Marvin Carlson defined performance as “Performance is always performance for some one, some audience recognizes and validate it as performance even when as is occasionally the cause, the audience itself.” (Carlson Marvin, 2004, 71).

III.2. Performance Theories in Martial Art

The study of performance in martial art has not received much attention in performance theory and theatre studies. This study focuses on two different views of performance theory of martial art that is Deborah Kleans Bigman's theory of 'martial arts as performance' and Zaralli Phillip's 'martial art is performance'.

III.3. Martial Arts as Performance

Daniel Bolnell, who studied martial art, argues that martial art include different dimensions such as aesthetic performance, cultural significance, transmission of ethnic heritage and sports competition. (Bolenlli Daniele, 2008, 127). He categorized martial arts into performance art, internal art, weapon art, self defence art and combat sports. Daniel Bolnell argues that some of the martial arts are performance art as they focus on the spectacular element of the aesthetic part of martial art (Bolelli Daniele, 2008, 119). Deborah Kleans Bigman criticized him for this categorization of martial arts and stated that all forms of martial art contains the element of performance dimension or all forms of practice of martial art can be seen as performance in itself. She tries to locate the martial arts in an aesthetic practice and performance art. (Bigman Kleans Deborah, 2002, 2). She views martial art as an aesthetic experience and a performance art. She looks at martial art as a performance art because a martial performer turns into an actor on the stage in her view.

Kalaripayattu is not only a traditional martial art of Kerala but it symbolises various periods of historical development of Kerala. *Kalari* is a word to denote a training centre of martial art called *Kalaripayattu*. *Kalaris* have always preserved and maintained rituals and costumes for the *Kalaripayattu* practitioners. In the

medieval period training and practices of *Kalaripayattu* were considered as a sacred and secret activity of a particular group or family because *Kalari* acted as an agency of power apparatus of the medieval Kerala society. Karunan Gurukkal says that *Kuzhi Kalari* or *Pit Kalari* was built with an intention to keep the secrecy of *Kalaripayattu* from other groups (Karunan Gurukal Interview 23 August 2010). But in contemporary Kerala, there are no restrictions and rules for the public to enter and enjoy the performance of *Kalaripayattu*. Today all items of *Kalaripayattu* are not performed in front of the audience as *Kalari Gurukkanmar* maintains that all techniques of *Kalaripayattu* is not good to teach every one as some techniques are more dangerous and it can't be learnt by pupils who are standing for the well being of others. For a *Kalaripayattu* practitioner the practice in *Kalari* is a part of their every day practice of life. But historically the day was called *Chuvadumattaldivasam* is the day when practitioners perform *Kalaripayattu* to an audience to get the public sanction as a *Kalaripayattu* performer. On the stage performance of *Kalaripayattu*, a performer is turned to an actor and his movements and body become spectacular experience to the audience. Daily hard practices of *Kalaripayattu* make a '*Kalaribody*' of the performer prepared for the audience. Aesthetic element and spectacular element of *Kalaribody* cannot be avoided in the study of *Kalaripayattu*. Each phase of the building up of a *Kalari* body shows the importance of the synchronization of the movements of body and weapons of the performance of a *Kalaripayattu* practitioner. This aesthetic element of *Kalaripayattu* got huge audience and even attention from film industry also. They used this synchronization of the movements of body and weapon used in the choreography and combat scenes in the movies which attracted international publicity for *Kalaripayattu*.

Kalaripayattu practitioners have their own *Kalaripayattu* performance team and they use the foot works of *Kalaripayattu* to choreograph the martial dance.

Perfection is the basic law for a *Kalari* student to go for the next phase of *Kalaripayattu*. ‘*Mayyu kannavumbol*’ or ‘When the body becomes all eyes’ is the basic law of *Kalari* body. ‘*Kalaribody*’ means a healthy, fit and vigilant body with a peaceful attentive mind which can be built up through the every day hard practice of *Kalaripayattu* (Karunan Gurukkal Personal Interview June 18 2010, Sajil Gurukkal Personal interview July 24 2010, Hemalatha Gurukaal Personal interview July 25, and Mathu Puthuppanam Personal interview August 30). During the field work one *Kalari* teacher said that the immense benefit of practicing of *Kalaripayattu* is that it contributes to the unity between mind, body and breath. For them *Kalaribody* is a unity between mind, body and breath. Influence of performance element of *Kalaripayattu* in other arts forms of Kerala such as *Kathakali*³⁵, *Theyyam*³⁶, *Parichamuttukalai*³⁷, *Thirayattam*³⁸ and *Kolkali*³⁹ also indicate that *Kalaripayattu* is a performance art.

III.4. *Kalaripayattu* is a Ritual Performance Art

Phillip Zarilli argues that Asian arts are not simply ritual art but is a ritual Performance art (Zarilli Phillip, 1993, 113). He says that transformation of person from a raw, unknowledgeable, inexperienced, unconcentrated, unskilled youth to seasoned, knowledgeable, experienced, concentrated, integrated skilled warrior is the main characteristic feature of Asian martial art. *Kalari* constructs on the basis of

³⁵ A classical art form of Kerala

³⁶ A ritual art form of Kerala

³⁷ A martial art dance form of Kerala.

³⁸ A ritual art perform

³⁹ A folk art form of Kerala.

*Tachusatra*⁴⁰. *Kalari* consists of different places for worshipping god, goddesses and ancestors such as *Poothara*, *Guruthara*, and *Aydhathara* etc. *Poothara* is considered as a seat of goddess of *Kalari* and *Guruthara* near the *Poothara* is constructed for the memory of the ancient preceptors who were instrumental in the evolution of the *Kalaripayattu*. *Gurukal* enters *Kalari* before students arrive and lightens the *Kalariviakku* or *Kalari* lamp on the *Poothara* and he used to do *Pujas* or rituals with flowers. Students enter the *Kalari* and they touch the feet of *Gurukkal* or *Kalari* teacher for blessings. Students used to wear loin cloth and apply the medicated oil on their body before starting training of *Kalaripayattu* with *Thozuthu* or the prayer of *Kalari* deity. This *Thozhuthu* is not a verbal prayer but is part of body training of *Kalaripayattu*. All students have a role in the training of *Kalaripayattu* in the *Kalari*. Students practice *Kalaripayattu* by the *Vaithari* or the oral command given by the *Gurukkal* or *Kalari* teacher. They are practicing with weapons and stick and they practice it with each other in the *Kalari*. Before training or practicing of each item in *Kalaripayattu* practitioners touch the feet of *Gurukkal* and ask the blessings. They are very much concentrated and focussed on the opponent's movements when they are combat with each other. Every technique of *Kalaripayattu* starts with the *Thozuthu*⁴¹. *Gurusisya* or teacher-student relationship is the base of the ideology of *Kalaripayattu*, *Gurukkal* is considered as symbolic figure of *Kalari*. Various elements of *Kalaripayattu* have prompted to consider *Kalaripayattu* as an aesthetic stage performance art along with every day life practice and ritual art. Zarilli point out that every processes of *Kalaripayattu* from the initiation into the process of training to exit from the *Kalari*, is punctuated by

⁴⁰ Ancient science of construction of building

⁴¹ Prayer which is offered at the beginning of each item of the *kalaripayattu*

rituals.(Zarilli Phillip, 1993, 113). Zarilli argued that Asian Arts are ritual performance arts because it consists of all rituals and is followed very strictly.

Kalaripayattu has been following the rituals very strictly throughout the ages. When the practitioners practice outside *Kalari* also, they try to follow the rituals (Zarilli Phillip, 1993, 123). It is very evident in the words of the practitioner of *Kalaripayattu* from *Attakkalari* ⁴² “ When we practice *Kalaripayattu* we set our studio as a *Kalari* in our mind and follow the tradition of *Kalari*” (Pooja, interview 20 December 2011). Prasad Gurukkal says

I am teaching *Kalari* in an institution at Bombay, there also we are observing the Gurusisya relationship like Kerala *Kalaris*. So it is very difficult to see the practice of *Kalaripayattu* with out the essence of its ritual tradition. So *Kalaripayattu* is a ritual art (Prasad Gurukkal Personal Interview 18th September 2010).

However each phase and all processes involved in the training of *Kalaripayattu* develop a performer for spectators. Aestheticism and spectacular elements dominate in the training and performance of *Kalaripayattu* including the training of weapon. Synchronization of mind, body and ritual processes during training claims that ‘*Kalaripayattu* is a performance art’ rather than ‘as a performance art’.

⁴² A contemporary dance theater in Bangalore.

III.5. 'Transformation and Transportation' in Performance of

Kalaripayattu

Performance has a triangular shape which constitutes an actor, spectator and space and time. Every actor passes thorough the process of characterization, representation, imitation, transformation and transportation. Richard Schchner defined performance through the process of transformation and transportation where transformation represent the performative world and transportation represent ordinary world. He says that the act of performance can make the transformation on the performer and spectator (Schchner, Richard, 1985, 4). He points out that rhythm and time can be used the same way as text, prop costumes and the bodies of the performers and audiences as the concrete, physical, pliable things. Transformations of consciousness have different variations among the individual performers, among performing group, among the audience as individual and group and between these entities (Schchner, Richard, 1985, 9-10).

"I call performances where performers are changed "transformations" and those where performers are returned to their starting places "transportations" (Schchner, Richard, 1981, 91). Schchner says that transportation means the return of a performer from his performance to ordinality or performance world to his ordinary life. Trans exhibit the features of changes and involuntariness. He criticized the categorization of transportation performances as theatre performances and transformation performances are ritual performances. He says these two performances coexist in same event. The audience of the transformation performances are either relatives or from the same community of the performer (Schchner, Richard, 1981, 96).

Preliminaries of the *Kalaripayattu* performance of the *Ankam* in the stage are noticeable in *Vadakkan pattukal*. *Natysathra* shows the importance of the preliminaries or the preparations before the performance in the Indian performance art forms. Most of the performances begin with playing drums and stringed instruments. In *Kalaripayattu* before the *ankam* there is a custom that *Chekavor* will perform some individual techniques and will check his body flexibility by dancing as per the drums and music. There are no prescribed rules that everyone follows, but most of the *Pattukal* gives the picture of the *Chekavors* who seeks blessing from the elders of their family and do some rituals in their family for their victory before the *Ankam*. Here the rituals also help to transform an individual practitioner to a *Chekavor*. Audience are more active and cheerful in *Ankam*. This exuberant sociality also fills performers with full energy and excitement. In medieval period Kerala audience were connoisseurs of *Kalaripayattu* performance and they knew all about the *Chekavors*.

Kalaripayattu is performed on stage and inside. *Kalari* is different from the experience of theatre performance. In the medieval period the social practice like *Ankam* and *Poith* provided an open platform or an open stage to the *Kalaripayattu* performers to prove their skill in *Kalaripayattu*. *Ankam* and *Poith* ends with death of one of the *Kalaripayattu* fighter. *Ankam* and *Poith* act as a platform for *Kalaripayattu* performers to gain status and role in the society. So *Kalaripayattu* practitioners fight each other with their complete vigour and strength. *Chekavor* fought for the land lords in *Ankam*. In this *Ankam* the individual transform the *Chekavor* who is considered as a symbolic power and status of the feudal lord who was assigned to him for *Ankam*. Here *Chekavor* and *Chaver* were ready to die for

their patrons. So the transformation of an individual to a *Chekavor* or *Chaver* takes place here only; transportation or back to the *Chaver* or *chekavor* to their earlier life is not possible. Performance of *Chekavor* marked the status of his patron but this performance brought no glory for his family in *Ankam*. The complete transformation of an individual to a martial artist is very visible in *Ankam* and *Poith*, this period also witnessed the public demonstration of the *Kalaripayattu* performer in his skill of *Kalaripayattu*. Aesthetic expression of the *Kalaripayattu* is noticeable here. In medieval period *Kalaripayattu* performance went through the process of transformation but did not return to the ordinality of an individual that is in transportation. Here the permanent transformation of a *Kalari* practitioner to *Chekvor* has happened, but returning back to his individual life is not possible. Once an individual becomes a *Chekavor* or *Chaver*, he cannot return back to his ordinary life.

III.6. Transformation of being Consciousness or Transportation

In contemporary Kerala, *Kalaripayattu* performance on stage is not a fight in its real nature. It includes various performances with weapons and stick. Each performance item is fixed for a definite time. Performers on the stage are very conscious and try not to hurt the opponent. If it happens, soon they are back from individual life to their performer life or it is transportation from the performer to individual. Here permanent transformation of an individual to an artist is not possible. Though performances are the public demonstration of their skill in *Kalaripayattu*, some people are performing *Kalaripayattu* as a carnival performance to a huge audience. It is a new spectacular experience for most of these audiences.

For getting more attraction for their performance the performers are more conscious of their costumes also.

Kalaripayattu practitioners have ritualistic and authentic aesthetic experience in their systematic training under a definite ideology. There is a rhythmic movement of body in performing *Kalaripayattu*. The power of the body is visible while practicing *Kalaripayattu* on the stage. Recently, there is a critique among the *Kalaripayattu Gurukkanmar* that contemporary fusion of *Kalaripayattu* performance in the stage will loose its relationship between *Kalaripayattu* and self and it will become an emotionless or mechanical experience to both performers and audience.

Ethnographic sources show that lower caste people used *Kalaripayattu* as a resistance to the caste oppression in the society. Karunan *Gurukkal* says that the techniques of *Kalaripayattu* are different from lower caste *Kalari* and upper caste *Kalari*. He points out that most of the techniques of lower caste cannot be easily understood as a martial art technique. Moreover these techniques are used to defend the attack from the upper caste masters in their every day lives. Women practitioners in contemporary period shared the view that their aim of learning *Kalaripayattu* is to acquire self defence and use it as a weapon to fight against gender violence. Here *Kalaripayattu* practice is used as a resistance against the oppression. Representation of women in *Kalaripayattu* is integral to understanding the relationship between oppression, body and resistance. Individual empowerment has been seen as a result of performance of *Kalaripayattu*.

III.7. ‘Transformation ‘and ‘Transportation’ and Women Performers in *Kalaripayattu*

It can be argued that transformation has not happened in the case of female *Kalaripayattu* performers in medieval period as they were excluded from participating in *Ankam*, *Poith* and other warfare activities. There were no sources regarding the title of female *Chekavor* and female *Chavor* and they could not mark their name as warrior in the medieval society by the practice and performance of *Kalaripayattu*. So the kind of transformation that took place in a *Kalaripayattu* male practitioner did not happen in the case of female *Kalaripayattu* practitioner in medieval Kerala.

In contemporary stage performance, a *Kalaripayattu* practitioner is under transportation. Here they transform to the performance world once and get back to or transport to their individual life after the performance. But, in the case of women, this process is not happening. But women practitioners shared their experience regarding the consciousness they had about their body while practicing. They say that ‘our male counterparts are doing freely but we are very conscious regarding our body and audience’ (Sirisha Interview 15 October 2010). Here in the case of female practitioners, their gender position dominates their performance. So, on the stage, transformation to a performing world is not possible in the case of women. Their gender identity interrupt in their performance and transportation is not taking place. Thus transformation and transportation are not possible in their performance.

III.8. Role of Gender in the Rituals of Kalaripayattu

In modern *Kalaris* also this practice of impure body can be observed carefully. *Kalaripayattu* is a self defence martial art and its techniques are for every one; it can be practiced by every one without any gender biases. *Kalari* deity is *Kalari* goddess and practitioners worship and observe rituals every day. But the training and rituals and practices of *Kalari* are gendered. Women are strictly prohibited to enter into the *Kalari* during menstruation. This notion regarding impurity of female body is embedded in *Kalari* rituals. This notion of impure female body accords inferior status to women in the performance of *Kalaripayattu*. Geethi, one performer shares her experience that taking a break for seven days during the menstruation period creates difficulties in performing *Kalaripayattu* in its perfect way (KB Geethi, 2010). This may bring differences in female and male performers in bringing the *Kalaripayattu* performance to its perfection. In this difference in the performance, we can see the gendered practice of *Kalaripayattu*.

Vadakkan pattukal talks about some women who used *Kalaripayattu* to save themselves from the males. There are also reference of woman in the *Pattukal* who were bold to send their male members of their family to war, *Ankam* and *Poiyth*. Some of the women are portrayed in these songs as heroic mothers; they give birth and brought up their children by nurturing them to practice of *Kalaripayattu*. It is depicted that those mothers send their children to die like heroes than coming back as a coward. So the portrayal of women as mother, sister and wife blessing and offering prayers to male members of *Chekovar* family are noticed in the rituals of *Kalaripayattu*. This gendered roles of women as mother, sister and wife continue even today in the ritual tradition of *Kalaripayattu*.

III.9. Theoretical Perspectives of Body

Body has become a key thought among the debates of both feminist and gender studies around the twentieth century. Most of the body theories focused on either mind/ body concept or culture/ nature concept. Naturalist approach of body conceptualizes body as some biological features and as unchanging natural reality. This notion is deeply problematised by the 20th century feminists. Reclamation of the female body from male control and abuse was one of the agenda in the second wave of feminism in 1960s. Thus body became vehicle for the feminist political struggle and action. They argued for the rights of women related to reproduction and abortion. Feminists brought body into academic conceptualization of patriarchy by analysing women's oppression. (Shilling, 2002, 27-28)

Shulmith Firestone criticised Engel's analysis of the sexuality in economic terms. She explained that the reproductive functions-related female body such as menstruation, menopause, child birth and caring of infants make women depend on men for their physical dependent in a society (Firestone Shulmith , 1970, 10-11). The argument is that sexual imbalance of power is not based on biology. Firestone argued that social units are formed in the biological reproduction and oppression of women confines them to their biological destiny. She insisted that social structures like marriage and family maintain male domination over female in the society. She says that women should be liberated from the Tyranny of reproductive biology and biological family to gain social equality with men in society (Shumith Firestone, 1970, 225-242).

Merleau Ponty defined body as the subject of perception and something which is a part of us, and essential to our engagement with world (MerleauPonty, 211-213).

Burkitt Ian criticized Merleau-Ponty that he failed to examine the difference between the experience of the body as a male and female or the gendered experience of embodiment in a patriarchal society (Burkitt Ian, 1999, 99).

Gatens argued that female embodiment is the major barrier to gain equal participation in the socio-political milieu. This female embodiment is related to the feminine body image of a society. For her, body images are established in a culture as they were related to individual bodies through their individual experience in societies. (Gatens 1996, 71). Moria Gatens tries about various feminist theoretical perceptive regarding female bodies. According to her, recent feminist history of western thought shows a deep hatred and fear of the body that is the semetophobia which is understood in the context of masculinity, gynophobia and misogyny. This pessimistic attitude is challenged by the feminist by focussing and celebrating the female body and their capacity to recreate the nature. These theories presents women as peace loving and careful and biophilic while men are aggressive necrophilia and selfish. Women should retain the essential sexual difference between the female body and male body (Gatens Moria, 228). Gatens argued that the concept of imaginary body provides a sense of the intersection of power, domination and sexual difference in the lived experience of the men and women (Gatens Moria, 229). Female embodiment itself is a barrier to the women to enter in to public spheres. But this female embodiment is created by power and domination. She argued that this difference has nothing to do with the biological 'facts' but with the culture that marks body and create the specific situation in which they live and gets recreated (Gatens Moria, 230). She insisted that difference between the male body and female body is not based on biological essentialism but a patriarchal culture that creates

differences between bodies by generating special privileges to the male body that make female body to experience inequalities in the society (Gatens Moria, 232).

Shilling says that body became central in defining modern men's sense of self identity. Burner argued that body became a principal field of social, political and cultural activity (Turner, 1992a: 12, 162). Body became a phenomenon of option and choices in the modern period by the developments of genetic technologies and plastic surgery. Thus body became an uncertain phenomenon. He also argued that religion lost its importance in the control of bodies in the modern period. Individuals became more conscious about the body and individualization of body came to the society. He says this new thought of ownership of body created a new discourse around abortion and surrogacy. He points out that the reconstruction of the body by techniques like plastic surgery focussed more on either being feminine or masculine based on the gender of the individual.

Shilling Chris argued that body acts as a project of individual identity (Chris Shilling, 100-111). Naomi Wolf criticized the view of 'body as a project' of determining an individual's self identity. She connects the objectification of female body with capitalism. She argued that female is the victim of the 'beauty myth' that is a product of capitalism in a patriarchal society. By beauty myth, Naomi means that all myth regarding body that is male body is superior and female body is ugly, and virginity and fertility also constitute the beauty myth of a society. This asymmetrical beauty myth is the back bone of the compulsory heterosexuality and the subjection of women in the society (Wolf Naomi, 1991, 150-153). Ideal beauty is always related to female body and she perceived that the ideal beauty is not natural but is always ideal only. Reconstruction of the female body by plastic surgery

emphasizes the ideal unreal image of femininity which is created in favour of a male chauvinist consumer society. This beauty myth regarding female body makes woman always an object in the male society. She argued that the post industrial society created a beauty myth around the female body that forced the women to hurt their body by starvation and cosmetic surgery (Wolf Naomi, 1991:228-229).

Politics of female body in post colonial countries came as a hot topic among feminist studies. Ketu H Katrak argued that ‘a politics of the female body includes constructions and controls of the female sexuality and its acceptable and censored expressions, its location socio culturally even materially in post colonial regions’ (Katrak h Ketu, 2006, 8). Body politics in a society evolved through socialization and was influenced by the socio cultural religious ideology that enforce and justify the subordination of female body and create female body as an object. Female body in colonial countries including India experienced a state of self exile and austereness and self-censorship within the indigenous patriarchy strengthened by British colonized racial patriarchy.

Foucault writes in his book titled ‘Discipline and Punish’ that a body is docile that can be subjected, used, transferred and improved, achieved through strict regiment of disciplinary acts. He talks about power over the individual body through the disciplines and the way it is exercised on the social body through biopolitics. These are the two ways through which power operates in the body. But in modern period power operates in body through various institutions and practices. Foucault’s idea of ‘political anatomy’ reveals the ‘techniques of power’ that shows ‘how one may have a hold on others’ bodies’. By this process one acts according to the wishes and determination of others. Here an individual lost his freedom and control on his

body. Foucault describes that political anatomy as “methods which made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body which assured the constant subjection of its forces and impose upon them a relation of docile utility might be called discipline.”(Foucault, 1975,137). This disciplinary methods became domination process in the eighteenth century discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, docile bodies” (Foucault, 1975,138).

Foucault focussed on the same practices that made both male and female body docile. Sandra lee Bartkey criticized Foucault, for his neglect of the fact that imposition of the discipline on the male and female body is quiet different. She argued that Foucault ignored those practices that produce a modality of embodiment that is feminine. She examined three disciplinary practices that create body recognizably feminine in its looks: the practices that aim to produce female body in a certain shape and configuration; practices that produce repertoire of gesturers, postures and movements; practices that encourage an adorned/the ornamented body. These practices collude with the modernized oppressive patriarchal structures (Bartkey Sandra lee, 1997, 132). These practices are supported by the modern medcial technology and institutions through cosmetic surgery and diet etc and theses new ideals are reinforced through the mass media. Disciplinary practices are related to the culture of that society. She argued that women’s body speaks her subordinate status in the gender hierarchy eloquently and silently, through her body language (Bartkey Sandra Lee 142). Bartkey lee succeeded to demonstrate Foucault’s view of female body constructed by disciplines of practices by showing various examples of practices regarding female body such as various diet and cosmetic surgery through medical institutions, notion of smooth soft supple unblemished un wrinkled and

hairless skin, standards of appropriations for how to apply and how much apply make up in various contexts. Her analysis shows that these practices are created by patriarchal structures and how this is internalized in a culture (Bartkey Sandra lee, 1997, 129-137). She told that how female body is created and how it maintained and legitimised the subordination of women by the disciplinary practices.

III.10. Body Performativity

Judith Butler says that body is constructed in the realms of power through embodied acts. Category that is the culture created for the everyday performance of the gender identity. “Performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration.”(Butler, 1999, xv)

III.11. Construction of Body in *Kalaripayattu*

Kalaripayattu is basically a body art and it focuses on the mind-body union of a human being. To build a Kalari body is an aim of Kalaripayattu. All the processes of Kalaripayattu are very visible from the construction of Kalari also. *Kuzhi Kalari* or pit *Kalari* is used to construct in order to maintain temperature for the training of the body. ‘*Mai Kannavumbol*’ or the body becomes eye is the base of a *Kalari* body. *Mai kannavumbol* means union of mind and body together. “A perfect *Kalaripayattu* practitioner can defend the attack from his four sides as his mind and body awakening together” (Karunan Gurukkal interview 18 june 2010).

The building up of *Kalari* body starts with the massage of the whole body of the practitioner by a medicated oil for flexibility. Hard practice of the body is the core element of the training. Saji *gurukkal* said that the performance of

Kalaripayattu needs every day hard compulsory practices to build up a Kalari body (Sajil Gurukkal, interview July 24 2010). Historically *Kalari* body is related to masculinity. Folk song on *Kalaripayattu* praises the body of the heroes of the society especially the *Kalaripayattu* practitioner. Most of the *Gurukkanmar* or the *Kalari* teachers agreed that *Kalari* body is not a biological body but is one which is made through the every day's practices and proper diet. But the conventional thought regarding *Kalari* body is that a female body cannot be a strong body as it is weak. This biological essentialism dominates *Kalaripayattu* historically. In contemporary period also some *Kalari* teachers think that the *Ayudha payattu* or the performance with weapons are not suitable to female practitioners as their bodies are passive and feminine.

In the contemporary society the numbers of the female practitioners have increased in order to attract audience for the *Kalaripayattu* stage performance. This is a result of the commodification of *Kalaripayattu* in the consumer society. Here these female practitioners are also the family members of the *Kalaripayattu* practitioners and male practitioners decide the nature of performance of female on the stage. Here their choice and right to their body in the performance is totally absent and they are made as object on the stage.

The absence of the female *Kalaripayattu* practitioners and their choice to perform on the stage is related to the performance of gender in Kerala society. In the wider Kerala context, the abjection of female body in the public sphere is noticeable. This gender imbalance in the Kerala society is not a sudden act but it has been repeating through out different phases of history in the form of the abjection of female body in the mainstream Kerala society. The construction of gender in the

Kalaripayattu is also linked with this construction of body through the repetitive acts of roles assigned to women.

III.12. Female Representation of ‘masculinity’ on the Stage

Rebecca Schneider says that female body have been considered as an object of desire or the “site of the sex that take place” (Schneider Rebecca, 1997, 66). The way audience is seeing the body is noticeable. “Agency of the body is displayed. The authority of the agent – that was the problem with women’s work.”(Schneider Rebecca, 1997, 35). Here she says that men can see women’s body as an object but women cannot use their body. If they use their body they will be accused as narcissist. In this context, it can be argued that *Kalaripayattu* is essentially a male art body art.

Rabecca says,

The body marked female has signified the feminized realms of representation”. (Schneider Rebecca, 1997, 51). She points out that consumer capitalism made domestic space as leisure marked space and as space for commodity exchange. Here the feminine also became consumptive with the domestic space. Rebecca argued that the right of possession of private property lies in the hands of male and women became consumptive vehicle of private property. Here women became a public insignia of the private realm, the consumptive vehicle of masculine private property. Women are never acknowledged as an image maker but signified as a terrain of representation with consumptive desire. (Schneider Rebecca, 1997, 51)

Rebecca Schneider revealed that the changes from the separation between the viewer and viewed especially in the transition of female from a cultural view to a

capitalist view. She says that the female always used to make a masculine representation as they used to perform in a manner that the male chose for them. So feminine representation in the performance for women itself is totally absent here. She linked the gendered separation between the viewer to view the gendered distinction between producer (male) and consumer (female). Here viewer is male and the viewed as female; this gendered separation provide a conceptual space for commodity exchange and in which viewer is a male processing an unsuitable desire for the viewed who is a female (Schneider Rebecca, 1997, 536).

Rebecca Schneider says that the “appropriate female body signifies masculinity” as the female body possess as in male desire while male body has signified masculinity. She says that women representing in the art form does not mean that their body signifies ‘women’. Rather their body functions by what male appropriates female body for male desire. Here women both signify male desire and masculinity and women do not have the privileges for this masculine representation. She points out this double bind can make paradoxical situation regarding their own body of these “real woman” (the woman who are ready to appropriate male desire).

III.13. *Kalaripayattu* and Performance of Female Body

Vadakkan Pattukal shows a little about women’s performance in *Kalaripayattu* during medieval Kerala. However these songs mentioned some of the female names such as *Unniyarcha* and *Mathelikanni* who were well versed in *Kalaripayattu*; but these women were not active in the practice and performance of *Kalaripayattu* like male members of their family. And the performance of the female body on the stage is not referred to by any songs and sources.

Coming to the contemporary scenario, *Kalaripayattu* as a stage performance art and a commercialized indigenous art form needs female women *Kalaripayattu*

performers. After 1990s *Kalaripayattu* underwent a lot of changes and it emphasised on the female body and its commercial values in the society. Performers shared their experience that the audience are more interested in watching the female performance. Rebecca Shneider coined a new word 'secret eye' to denote the desire of male audience on the body of female performers on the stage. This secret eye is visible in the case of audience of the *Kalaripayattu* female performers.

Increasing number of female practitioners and the development of *Kalaripayattu* into globalized commercialized indigenous art forms are interlinked. *Kalari Gurkkal* Rajan says "I found that it is very difficult to get female performers of *Kalaripayattu* who would be receiving much attention from audience nowadays, so I thought to bring back my wife Ajitha in to *Kalaripayattu*" (Rajan Personal Interview 18 October 2010). Because of the increasing demand for women from audience many of the earlier women practitioners began to return to *Kalaris* after 10 to 30 years of break. This trend is increasingly seen after 1995s which was the time of remarkable change in the *Kalaripayattu*. This period witnessed a re-emergence of a commercial face of *Kalaripayattu* as a globalized indigenous art form of Kerala. *Kalaripayattu* became a cultural heritage of Kerala which privileged *Kalaripayattu* as an icon of Kerala tourism. In the new form, *Kalaripayattu* underwent various changes and more women were involved in order to get market value in the globalized world.

Here with the rise of women performers in *Kalaripayattu* and the question of how and whom they were representing in the stage is relevant in the study of gender performance of *Kalaripayattu* in Kerala. Women who are performing *Kalaripayattu* on the stage follow a different dress pattern from their male co practitioners. This separate dress for the women itself become an obstacle in performing on the stage. In

the context of Kerala, *Kalaripayattu* women performers are forced to follow their every day dressing style such as sari, salwar churidar with dhuppatta and hijab also. It is the concept of 'vulgarity of female body' that is predominant in the ideology of *Kalaripayattu* performance on the stage.

Unlike western theatres, *Kalaripayattu* theatres in Kerala do not support the explicit female body performance on the stage. Though female nudity is not shown on the stage, the representation of *Kalaripayattu* female body on the stage is noticeable. If masculine representation is expressed through nudity in western society, it is through the dress code of covering body, the masculine expectations are fulfilled in various performances in societies like India. This is very much evident in the performance of *Kalaripayattu*. Here female body is controlled by the male *gurus* as they decide the costumes and assign the role or the items of *Kalaripayattu* (*Maipayattu*, *Ayutha payattu*) etc to them. Female performer does not take part in deciding their performance on stage.

As it is mentioned above, rising numbers of the female performers in the *Kalaripayattu* is evident after the commercialization of *Kalaripayattu*. *Kalaripayattu* male performers understood that female performers can get a huge audience and hence in the practice of *Kalaripayattu*, they started involving female members. Rebecca Schneider argued that female performers used to perform for male audience and male desire and they represent masculinity on the stage. These women performers cannot perform for themselves or represent their desire of female practitioners. Performance of female practitioners also reflect the desire of their audience. Most of these female performers came to the stage for helping their male members of their family and they are practicing and performing for male audience.

Here these women performers are representing male desires and they are not aware of the gender equality in the realm of *Kalaripayattu*.

The absence of the performance of the “Third gender” body in the *Kalaripayattu* is also noticeable especially in the in the light of the silence and absence of the “Third gender” in the Kerala mainstream society. Gereena a ‘Third gender’ activist argued that a third gender cannot reveal their gender identity in Kerala society. She says “an interview was published with my picture. There are some of my neighbours who recognize me in the gender attires that created problem for my family and me.” (Gereena, 2006, 19)s Absence of third gender in the performance of *Kalaripayattu* point out the same intolerant and gendered attitude of Kerala male audience towards the representation of the third gender body in the Kerala society.

Therefore we see that *Kalaripayattu* is a performance art in itself articulated in various forms in different phases of history of Kerala society. The theory of transformation and transportation explains how an individual becomes a performer in *Kalaripayattu*. By using body theories the chapter explored the ways in which *Kalaripayattu* becomes a gendered performance art. By using Rebecca Schneider’s theory on masculine representation of female body it is shown that the female performance of *Kalaripayattu* on stage signifies male desires and not their choice. Various elements of *Kalaripayattu* performance including dress worn during the performance are decided and influenced by male expectations. Representation of female performance must be signifying femininity in the form of their choice. These theories of performance and body help to substantiate the argument that the construction of body in Kerala society influences the gender practice of *Kalaripayattu*.

Interviews

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Mathu Puthuppanam Personal Interview. 24 July 2010

Hemalatha Gurukaal Personal Interview. 25 July 2010

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Chapter IV

IDEOLOGY AND HISTORY OF KALARIPAYATTU THROUGH AGES: WITH THE SPECIAL REFERENCE TO VADAKKAN PATTUKAL OR NORTHERN BALLADS OF KERALA.

This chapter deals with the history of *Kalaripayattu* and its transformation in Kerala through ages. It also attempts to expose the gender dimensions of this practice with a specific attention to medieval Kerala. By looking at the long history, it also seeks to examine the transformation of *Kalaripayattu* from the status of an agency of power apparatus to the status of a spectacular art of contemporary period. The first part of this chapter analyses the origin and evolution of *Kalaripayattu* from medieval period onwards and the role of caste in perpetuating this particular martial form as a cultural apparatus. Second part of this chapter tries to expose the gender dimensions of this practice with a specific attention to the medieval Kerala. To examine the role and participation of women in the *Kalaripayattu* in the medieval Kerala, this section tries to explore the representation of the women in oral songs in Kerala called *Vadakkan Pattukal*, which is considered, as the key source for studying the women practitioners in the *Kalaripayattu* during the medieval period. *Vadakkam Pattukal* tells us the nature of the participation and role of these women and the attitude of society towards these women practitioners of *Kalaripayattu*. In the third part we look at the transformation and changes that occurred in the *Kalaripayattu* in the contemporary period.

Kalaripayattu as an institution has a very long history from medieval to contemporary times. Its form, nature and popularity varies in accordance with the changing circumstances in society, therefore it is an evolving institution. *Kalaripayattu* can be interpreted as overlapping and at times in competing ways. It can be defined as an “Ancient martial art encapsulating Kerala’s cultural, mythico–historical heritage, a traditional psycho- physiological discipline which cultivates mental, physical and spiritual benefits, a practical fighting arts, a system of physical training beneficial to sports people, dancers and actors”. (Zarrilli, 1998, 10)

Kalaripayattu is a body art and the only way to learn it is through practice. *Kalaipayatt* has been considered to be a divine martial art by its *Kalari* teachers or *Kalari Gurukkanmar*. *Kalaripayattu* is known as Kerala’s own art, Kerala’s power and beauty, and mother of all martial arts. *Kalaripayattu* had an incorporated relation to the rulers in medieval Kerala. With the coming of colonial powers, *Kalaripayattu* started to face its decline. After realising the military potential of *Kalaripayattu*, British started to destroy these indigenous military martial art through disarmament policies⁴³ As a part of the nationalism, *Kalaripayattu* was revived in 1920s. Modern Kerala witnessed a new form of *Kalaripayattu*. Now the contemporary *Kalaripayattu* performers use the spectacular element or theatre element of the *Kalaripayattu*.

IV.1. Types of Kalaris

Kalaris used to be constructed in the locality where the aristocratic houses were situated. Most of the aristocratic families had their own *Kalaris*. *Kalaris* are

⁴³ District act 1847 and Act Xx1Vof 1839. judicial department 1878 Indian Arms Act No: 1669 19th August 1878 Nos: 97-99

constructed on the basis of *Tachu Sastra*.⁴⁴ There are two kinds of *Kalaris*: the *Cherukalari* and *Kuzhikalari* or Pit *Kalari*, which are built for practicing physical and weapon training. *Kuzhi Kalaris* are still used now. *Kalari* is built in the south west corner of the plot. The face of *Kalari* should be facing towards the east. The construction of a *kuzhikalari* should follow some architectural style, “Earth is dug out to a depth of about three feet from a rectangular plot of ground measuring forty two feet in length in an east westerly direction and twenty one feet in breadth. The dug up soil is piled around the pit and rammed in to strong ridges. The floor is also levelled and rammed. The area is thatched roofed with the support of two main pillars one in the east and other in the west” (Chirakkal T Sreedharan Nair, 2007, 3). *Ankamkalari* is the place where fights are to be conducted. These kinds of *Kalaris* are helpful to maintain the body temperature of the practitioners; more over the mud in these kinds of *Kalaris* is also good as it cannot cause any skin disease to the practitioners.

IV.2. Definition of *Kalaripayattu* as a Term

C.V Narayanan Nair, the prominent *Kalaripayattu* practitioner translates the word *Kalaripayattu* in to English as ‘The Art of Fencing’. According to Zarilli the term *Kalaripayattu* derived from two words *Kalari* and *Payattu*. In Malayalam *Kalari* means open space, threshing floor, and battlefield. “This word drives from the Tamil word *Kalam* meaning arena, arena for gladiatorial or gymnastic exhibitions, and assembly place of work or business. In Malayalam the word *Kalari* idiomatically refers to the special place where martial exercises are taught. In Tamil *payilamil* means to become trained. In Malayalam *Pailuka* means to learn, speak. *Payattuka*

⁴⁴ The ancient science of construction of building

means to exercise in arms, practice and having the idiomatic meaning fencing exercise a trick. (Zarilli, 2000, 25).

The word *Kalaripayattu* was not used as a compound word in *Vadakkan Pattukal*⁴⁵. Malayalam lexicon notes, the word *Kalaripayattu* used as a compound word for the first time in Ullor Parameswaran's early twentieth century drama titled '*Amba*' (Zarilli, 2000, 25). Sasidaryan argued that *Kalari* and *Kalarividya* are different. *Kalari*, as an open space, *Kalarividya*, the word includes whole body of knowledge, including aspects of fighting technique (*Payattu*) healthcare, education, rituals, lifestyle, philosophy, and meditation, art of life and art of performance. But in modern Kerala the word *Kalarividya* replaced by the word *Kalaripayattu*. But this word *Kalaripayattu* is deficient to capture the wholesome of activities of the word *Kalarividya*. The word *Kalarippaytt* shows the fencing art aspect only. (Sasidaran, 2006, 170)

IV.3. Various Regional Styles of Kalaripayattu

The style of the techniques and training of *Kalaripayattu* differs from region to region. *Kalaripayattu* is divided in to three categories: Northern *Kalaripayattu*, Central *Kalaripayttu* and Southern *Kalaripayattu*. The Northern *Kalari* itself included three different types called *Arappukkai*, *Pillathangi* and *Vattenthiruppu* (Mathu Puthuppanam, interview 28th August 2010). Northern style of *Kalaripayattu* focuses on hero combat. Training in weapons was the main technique of those regions. Square pattern of foot work is the central technique in the central

⁴⁵ This is a collection of folk songs in the northern part of Kerala the collection of folk songs praising the warriors in the medieval Kerala who were living in the 15th and 16th centuries, it also tells the history of the participations of women in *Kalaripayattu*.

Kalaripayattu. Origin of central style of *Kalaripayattu* is related to the *Chaver*⁴⁶ and *Mamankam*⁴⁷. Mythology of Northern and central *Kalaripayattu* are traced back to the linkage of *Parasuraman* while the southern tradition relate to *Agasthya* sage. The southern tradition promotes the spontaneous fighting which is also called *Dranam Palli Sampradhaya*. They are not giving much importance to the weapons (Luijenjik, 2005, 5). These traditions of *Kalaripayattu* emphasize different methods of training in weaponry and the importance of bodily engagements including *Verumkai* (empty-hand), *Koltari* (wooden weapon), *Ankamtari* (iron weapons).

IV.4. Origin and Institutionalization of *Kalaripayattu*

It is very difficult to trace out the actual period where *Kalaripayattu* evolved. There are various myths about the origin of *Kalaripayattu* and its institutionalisation from region to region. Various *Keralolpathy*⁴⁸ narratives tell us various stories behind the origin of *Kalaripayattu*, among them two myths are very popular in the north and south Kerala. The most popular myth related to *Kalaripayattu* goes back to the mythical history of *Parasuraman* who is considered as the founder of Kerala. He brought thirty two Brahmin families and taught them the art of combat and archery in the new land he had reclaimed. Another story is that *Kalaripayattu* originated from Lord Siva and his *Sivatandava* (Prasad, Personal Interview 10 August 2007).

In south Kerala, another popular notion is that Hindu saint legend *Agastya* is the founder of *Kalaripayattu*. Again, another *Keralolpahti* claimed that the origin of *Kalaripayattu* is from *Dhanurvedha*. But the historians questioned the authenticity of

⁴⁶ Warriors like a suicide squad, prepared to give their lives for the king's sake at any moment.

⁴⁷ Mamankam was an important religious festival of Kerala which was held to celebrate the mythological descent of the river Ganga into the Bharathapuzha, most important river in Kerala.

⁴⁸ The legendary Kerala Brahman chronicle.

this *Keralolpathi* and these myths (Rosemerin, 2009, 11-12). Modern historian K.N Ganesh has criticized that the authors of this *Keralolpathies* are Brahmins and their views about the origin of *Kalaripayattu* was a part of their vested interests to make links between all local traditions with Brahmanism.

Eellam Kullam Kunjan Pilla is the first historian who tried to trace out the period when *Kalarippayat* has evolved. He argues that *Kalaripayatt* has evolved in hundred years of Chola Chera war. But the period of this war is questioned by other historians. Vijayakumar says in his book '*Kalaripayattu Kerelathinte sakthiyum sountharyavum*' that, the *Kalaripayattu* evolved and developed during the *Sangam* period (Vijayakumar, 2000, 46). Travellers recorded the heroism and the expertise of the soldiers in the *Kalarippayatt* in various accounts. Folk songs are the very important source for the study of *Kalaripayattu* and its evolution. Another argument is that the savage man made the footsteps of *Kalaripayattu* from animal fight (Mathu Puthupanam Personal Interview 20th August 2010).

IV.5. *Kalaripayattu*, Meaning and Ideology in Medieval Kerala

Kalaripayattu in medieval Kerala is considered as a ritual art. "*Kalari* (a space) and *Kalaripayattu* (praxis) personify religious themes through their various representations". *Kalaripayattu* is always practiced in a sacred and divine atmosphere. Construction of Kalari especially the *Kuzhi Kalari* itself resembles a temple. Some Kalaris are constructed as a part of temples of *Bhadrakali* or *Bhagavathi*⁴⁹ cult. Kalaris worships female deities that are various forms of Bhadrakali. In all *Kalaris*, Patti says "Seven tapering semi-circular steps at the corner form a pedestal known as *Puttara*. Next to the *Puttara* on the north western

⁴⁹ Mother goddess of Kerala.

end remains *Ganapatipitom*, the abode of Lord Ganesha, remover of all obstacles. Adjacent to the *Puttaara* and north of the *Ganapatipitom* lies a small-elevated place known as *Guruttara* constructed in memory of *Gurukkal*, or ancient teachers of martial arts. Here, the *Puttara* and *Guruttara* are adorned with flowers and *Nilavilakku* (traditional lamp) define the space as a ritual space. The Gods and the spiritual dimension of the *Kalari* express the inherent significance of *Kalaripayattu*” (George patti, 2010, 182). In *Kalari*, *Kalari Gurukkal* or *Kalari* master is considered as the human god. It is a strict rule followed by all the *Kalaris* that a student should get the blessing from *Kalari Gurukkal* during the time of admission to *Kalaris*. Practice of *Kalaripayattu* begins with the lighting of the lamp in the *Puthara* by the *Kalari Gurukkal*. Moreover a student must pray *Puthara* and *Guruthara* and *Kalari Gurukkal* when she or he enters the *Kalari*. Before starting the practice of weapon, there is a custom that the student should get the blessing from the *Kalari Gurukkal*. This shows that *Kalari* is an institution of devotion and power. Contemporary *Kalaris* are still following these rituals but these are not practiced as strictly as the medieval *Kalaris*.

Before starting the *Kalaripayattu* competition, candidates who are going to fight pay respects to each other by a particular item of performance called *Thozuth*, a kind of prayer which shows respect to each other. This practice itself teaches the performer of *Kalaripayattu* the value of the sportsmanship. *Maipayattu* or the body exercise is the most important part of the practice of *Kalaripayattu* which makes the *Kalaripayattu* practitioner to be good-minded and healthy. Moreover the defensive nature of *Kalaripayattu* helps the practitioner to be confident and prudent which changes his or her body to the state of the phrase ‘when the body becomes all eyes’. Zarilli argues that the *Kalari* is a complex nexus of experience and self-formation, a

crucible for an individual's experience and the embodied practice which helps to shape a self. (Zarrilli, 1998, 9). *Kalaripayattu* in medieval Kerala is also considered as a cultural performance. During the Onam festival *Kalaripayattu* competition is conducted, usually large numbers of people including the Nair women attend the platform as the spectators (Zarrilli, 1998, 26).

IV.6. Political Geography and the Role of *Kalaripayattu* in the Medieval Kerala Society

By the end of the twelfth century the Chera empire disintegrated into numerous principalities, Brahmanic socio economic dominance was consolidated through control of extensive area of gifted lands, ritual dominance by means of hierarchal ordered relationships, and an intricate pattern of martial relationship with Kshatriyas and high ranking Nayars. (Narayan, 1972, Pillai, 1987 cited in Zarrilli, Philip, 1998, 35). It was the period of *Naduvazhies* who were the rulers of '*Nadus*', which means a region. The important *Nadus* are Venad, Kolathunad, Cochin and Calicut. The temples were also very powerful in this period. Most of the temples owned vast areas of land and they have separate armies to protect this wealth. According to Elamkulam, the Medieval Kerala society was dominated by the *Janmi* system headed by the Nampoothiri Brahmans known as *Uralars* who were the owners of the Devasam land and Brahmasam lands. *Karalars* were the labourers. These classifications formed the back bone of the medieval society (Gangatharan, T.K, 2005, 127).

For the research on the role of the *Kalaripayattu* in the medieval Kerala society, it is necessary to examine the social stratification of the medieval Kerala and its nature. EMS Nampoodiripad argued in his book titled 'Kerala yesterday today

and tomorrow' that the medieval Kerala has adopted the brahmanical scheme of division of labour, the division of the society in to high and low castes and developed in to the worst form of untouchability and even unseeability. There was the absence of a strong central government system as the land was fragmented and the government had no right on the land even no right to receive the annual land tax. (Nampoothiri, 1967,40). The system of private ownership of land gave medieval society a feudal nature.

The *Desam* or the village has been always considered as the fundamental unit of the Medieval Kerala society. These *desams* were sufficient and caste ranking bore a relationship to differential rights to land. These *desams* divided in to *Nadus* or chiefdoms. Each *Nadus* were not just political units but socio-cultural and religious unit (M. N Sreenivasan, 1972, 38). Though the rulers are the *Naduvazies*, the real power was in the hands of the Nair *Madambies* who used to maintain strong troops of soldiers who were well trained in the martial art of *Kalaripayattu*. Every *Nadus* had their own *Kalaris*, where the youth of the land received training in martial art *Kalaripayattu*. This is the period of 'might is power'. *Ankam*.⁵⁰ *Poith*⁵¹ and *Kudippaka*⁵² are the main characters of this period. Here the fighters needed to claim power. Organised *Kalaripayattu* institutions used to supply people for fighting and to capture power. In this context, it is institutionalised as a power mechanism.

There are large numbers of references available about the valour of Nair soldiers by foreign travellers who have visited Kerala during that particular period.

⁵⁰Fight between two Chakovars or the fighters for the settlement of the dispute between the two upper caste aristocratic families

⁵¹ Fight between two soldiers

⁵²Blood feud

Duarte Barbose a Portuguese traveller who visited Kerala in the 15th century describe a *Nair* soldier in detail for the first time (Kumar Vijay, 2000, 63). Fawcett, who is the author of the '*Nairs of the Malabar*', describes a *Kalari* of *Paruva* caste which point out the fact that the lower caste also had their own *Kalaris*, but they didn't have right to train in upper caste *Kalaris*. Another traveller Abu Saithu refers the valour of a *Chaver* in his work. (Barbosa, 1868, 125-128) These all travelogues show the marvellous beauty of the *Kalaripayattu* and the skills of the Kerala martial practitioners. British government official records also mentioned that the local rulers of Kerala had a strong well disciplined efficient military. The Disarmament policy of the British to disarm Kerala *Kalaris* was a result of British fear of Kerala military supremacy.

The *Ezhavas*⁵³ who trained in *Kalaripayattu* were called *Chekavars* and *Nairs* which constituted the prominent soldiers at that time. This reveals that the women from the *Kalari* families were trained in *Kalaripayattu*. Based on the particular political structure, the nature of the medieval Kerala society was martially oriented as all the *Nadus* maintained well organized military troop. For organizing this martial troop *Naduvazhies* depended on the *Kalaris* where the youngsters trained *Kalaripayattu*. This all point out that the *Kalaripayattu* played the role of an agency of power apparatus in the medieval Kerala society.

With out the study of social stratification in the society, the study of the particular institution as an agency of power apparatus in the medieval Kerala society cannot be complete and it is necessary to examine what was the role of *Kalaripayattu* as an institution in the different caste group in the medieval Kerala.

⁵³A caste in Kerala

Kerala medieval society was strict on the side of casteism and untouchability. This sport is in the form of military combat or fight (*Ankam*) had a history between two *Chekavars* or the fighters belong to the *Ezhava* caste for the settlement of the dispute between the two upper caste Nair families. *Ankam* ended with the death of *Chekavar* (Menon Sreetharan, 2005, 276). Although all castes have their own *Kalaris*, but *Nairs* were recruited to militaries of *Naduvazhies*. Through this military position, they claimed the status of the warrior caste in medieval Kerala. *Chekavars* were fighting for *Ankams*. This is the crookedness of the caste system during that period. The *Nairs* who were considered as the upper caste were recruited to military and not sent for the *Ankam*. The *Chekavar* who belonged to the lower caste called *Thiyya* community were selected for *Ankams*. *Ankam* ends with the death of one of the participants. This shows the attitude of the society towards the life of the lower caste men where life had no value in terms of society. The folk song named '*Puli maranja thondachan*' point out that are some restrictions for lower caste people in training in mainstream *Kalaripayattu*. This song narrates the story about the lower caste fighter named Kari Gurukkal. He could not get military training as a *pulaya* caste. But he has hidden his lower caste identity and trained the *Kalaripayattu*. He started to train *Kalaripayattu* for lower castes also. This provoked the *Naduavazhi* and they killed him by trickery. This story showed the petty interest of the upper caste people to prevent the lower caste people to use the *Kalaripayattu* as tool of power apparatus. Though all caste in medieval Kerala had practiced the *Kalaripayattu*, but its practicability is different from castes to castes. It never changed the social status as a caste in the society.

IV.7. Participation and Representation of Women in *Kalaripayattu* in Medieval Kerala

Kalaripayattu is considered as an agency of power related institution in medieval Kerala. It is considered as the vehicle of masculinity. The ideology of masculinity was centred on this institution. There was the notion that an ideal man should be a fighter and capable to win over any kind of enemies. The death in the battle considered to be a heroic death. The mothers also were happy to send their sons in the battle for getting the title of the mother of a brave son or the hero. It has a great political role in the society. There are large numbers of legends and histories about the braveness of the male practitioners.

Histories are always about his stories not her stories. This same phenomenon we can see in the field of *Kalaripayattu* when we are going for an in depth study of women practitioners of *Kalaripayattu*. There are not many references about the participation of women in *Kalaripayattu* in medieval Kerala. Two important sources to find out the women in *Kalaripayattu* practitioners are the travelogues and *Vadakkan Pattukal*.

Padmanabha Menon says in his book 'History of Kerala' that girls also practiced *Kalaripayattu* (Menon Padmanabha, 1983, 23). Here he points out that the girls also have undergone *kachakettal*⁵⁴. This makes the body athletic and the helps blood to circulate to the internal organs more freely and for this reason it is often resorted to as a cure by the weak and invalid. Some historians argue that the children including girls also used to train in *Kalaripayattu* from their very seven years onwards. But it is not substantiated by many evidences.

⁵⁴ The practice of tying a long and narrow sheet of cloth bound the waist and which is the only wear during the process of learning military and sports tactics.

Castanheda, a foreign traveller referred about the women soldiers. He recorded that the ruler of Quillon kept both rich and powerful military and the kings' palace squads consist of three hundred female archers (Castanheda cited in Menon Pdmanabha, 1965, 353). This notification of the women archers, points out the presence of the military women in Kerala. Obviously these women were trained in martial arts and were strong and fit. *Vadakkan Pattukal* which is a group of folksongs tells the story of the participation of many women *Kalaripayattu* practitioners in the medieval Kerala society.

To find out about the women *Kalaripayattu* practitioners who are hidden from the mainstream history, one needs to depend on the oral histories including oral folk history and oral personal history (first personal narratives) and oral traditional history (sagas and local legends). Oral folk historians always tried to record the motions, biases and reactions aroused by the supposed fact. Sherma Gluk argues that the oral history is the most useful method for a women historian (Sherma Gluck, 1996, 217). Again she argues that the women's history have been used as oral history to explore the *Special rhythm of women's lives*. Gerda Lerner has used the word 'special rhythm' to show the real role of the women - whether women have played out public roles or adopted the traditional female role in the private realm, their lives have been governed by what Gerda Lerner called *Special rhythm*. In this sense it is important to analyse the representation of the women in *Vadakkan Pattukal* which tells us the stories of heroines in the medieval Kerala to understand the nature of the participation of women in the *Kalaripayattu*.

IV.8. Representation of Women in *Vadakkan Pattukal*

Vadakkan Pattukal are a group of folk songs transmitted orally by the working class women. It is a progressive literature and it acts as a tool of the lower section of the society and women to express their feelings against the exploitation and suppression by the feudal powers and the existing patriarchal norms. There are no other literary sources except *Vadakkan Pattukal* to describe the life of all women irrespective of their caste and class. Generally these songs praise the deeds of heroes and heroines of that society although they reflect the wishes of the ordinary women as well. Most of the heroines of these *Vadakkan Pattukal* tried to challenge the existing barriers and the male superiority to come to the front of society. Most of these songs pointed out the long-aged dream of the women that is their desire for social mobility. The *Pattukal* of Unniyarcha is the story of a resistance of a woman against the social norms which curtailed her mobility. Pumatha Ponnamma, who belonged to Puluva caste represents the victim of the casteism, at the same time the folk songs bestow her with pride and raised her to the position of goddess in that society.

The women in *Vadakkan Pattukal* represent all caste groups and class during that period. The songs describe the women as warriors, prostitutes, chaste women, dancers, aristocratic women, *Dasis* or servants, sluts, greedy, and mother goddess called Bhagavathi. *Otta Pattukal* as a category of *Vadakkan Pattukal* deals the story of women. Aristocratic women are depicted in *Vadakkan Pattukal* as women warriors, Unniyarcha sister of Aromal Chekavar and Mathilerikanni are very famous among this group. *Pattukal* of the Unniyarcha praised her valour. She is represented in the *Pattukal* as the symbol of power and social mobility of women. She was the

sister of Aromal Chekavar who got the training in *Kalaripayattu* since her childhood. *Pattukal* refers to her decision about marriage. The most important *Pattukal* is about the fight between Unniyarcha with *Jonakas* or the thieves at Nadapuram town. This song is very significant as it shows Unniyarcha was courageous enough to question the existing patriarchal norms. When her husband and his family tried to forbid her from the journey to Allimalar temple through the *Nadapuram* town where the thieves inhabited, she didn't listen to their objection and went to the Nadapuram town. When she met the thieves she asked her husband

being a woman I'm not afraid of anyone,

then why are you, a man shivering with fear? ”. (Devi, 2000, 109)

This shows she was bolder than men. She defeated the *Jonaka* with her *Urumi*. Here, she argues for her freedom for mobility, she succeeded in that. Here, Unniyarcha represents the power of women in *Vadakkan Pattukal*. But Unniyarcha has done all home chores before she went to temple festival. This reflects the patriarchal ideology of that period which has embedded in the *Vadakkan Pattukal*. Unniyarcha is depicted as a heroic mother in the *Pattukal*. She told her son Aromalunni before he is going to fight Chanthu that

“If you fight and die

The society will take pride.

I will take your dead body

With veeraliPattukal(silk) and praisings.

If you die outside war field

Your body will be dragged on raw palm leaf

I wouldn't do the after death ceremonies. (Devi, 2000, 106)

Vadakkan Pattukal represents women as mother goddess. These mother goddesses are women who lived in the society once and dared to question the male supremacy and punished the offenders. The Chonnamma Thotungara Bhagavathi, Kappalathi and Muchilottu Bhagavathi are very famous mother goddess among them. They were worshipped for their heroism. *Kapalathi* is story of a woman who married a man who belongs to lower caste and she was killed by her brothers. This *Pattukal* questions the attitude of men who interferes in the right of decision making of women. Muchilottu Bhagavathi is a story of a brilliant, well-read woman who had the knowledge to defeat men in the Vedas and all other subjects (Kumarai Vasantha, 2000, 84-87). But society did not accept the women as intelligent as men and they out casted her by suspecting her virginity. Here the mindset of the folk about the education of women and attitude of the superiority of men are revealed.

Vadakkan Pattukal says that the mother has enjoyed respect and power in both society and family as the status of the son through the mother's family, it indicate that the existence of matrilineal and matrilocal system in the society. *Tacholi* songs talk about the affection of Tacholi Othenan to his mother. There the mothers have taken care to develop courage in their children which is very evident in the relationship between Unniyarcha and her son Aromalunni.

IV.9. Educated Women in *Vadakkan Pattukal*

Vadakkan Pattukal represent the educated military heroines, they also point out that the women were given military training also. *Puthuram* songs about Unniyarcha and the other heroine Mathilerikanni represent them as the best warriors than men. In the *Pattukal* titled 'Mathilerikanni', the heroine Mathilerikanni

distinguish as a man warrior and saved her husband Venad king from the enemies (Nampiar Kunji Raman, D,H, 1994, 84). The story of the Muchilottu Bagavathi suggest that the women were given the education in Vedas, logic and mathematics and this story indicates the existence of the women scholars in the society. Apart from the aristocratic family women, the lower caste women including tribal women were also given the military training. For example Unniyarcha's fight with the thieves in Nadapuram is well articulated in the following lines.

*She has taken urumi(a kind of longsword wih narrow blade) from her waist
Tied with wet clothe
She took pause in the Kalari style
She had the speed of a horse.
She swirled the wet clothe
And people fell in hundreds
She took a second turn
And stood at a height of eighteen men (Devi, 2000, 104)*

The 'song of Kunjithalu' says the story of a Kuruma tribal woman named Kunjithalu and her encounter with a king. The following lines of Kunjithalu's replay to the abusive questions of the king show the confidence and the bravery of a military trained woman.

*Who is he (king)?,
Who's there in this land
Who'll buy an elephant by abusing me?
No woman in this land has
given birth to somebody like it (Panikkoti, 2000, 60)*

Vadakkan Pattukal proves that women had the freedom to accept or reject their husbands. The *Pattukal* of the Kodumala Kunki is a story of woman called Kodumala Kunki who killed her husband to marry Tacholi chandu. The mother of Chandu has accepted her as daughter in law with the common marriage customs. More over the Puturam songs told about the promise of the Unniyarcha that she will marry Chandu if he takes care of her brother Aromal Chekavar in the *Ankam*. But at the same time the *Pattukals* says about the tragic stories of the upper castes women who married lower caste men.

Vadakkan *Pattukal* is regarded as a source for the historian to study about the nature of the society. It acts as a mirror of the life of lower sections of the society especially women. Although it represents some women as wicked and greedy, most of the heroines in the *Pattukals* are educated, military trained, efficient and capable women. Most of the heroines are bolder and more intelligent than the heroes in the *Pattukal*. Some *Pattukal* describes the stories about these women who saved the heroes from the battle. Mathilerikanni and Unniyarcha are the best examples of this category. These *Pattukal* also represents the lower caste women as the symbol of power of their whole community against the suppression and the exploitation of women.

These kinds of songs express the concealed, painful and bitter feelings of the women folk to the society. However these songs represent the women who consider looking after her children and the house chores as the main duty. It is very evident from the *Puthuram Pattukal* line which says that before going to see temple festival, she has done all house chores. Here the heroin didn't question her traditional roles.

This is very clear from the following lines which show the preparation of the Unniyarcha for going to see the temple festival.

After paying obeisance to the Sun god

She took the broom

After sweeping

She worshiped the god

She went to kitchen

Washed and arranged the vessels

Fetches water to ox

Hurriedly came back

She took the rice

And sluiced it

Then kept the rice on fire hearth

And cooked a curry for it (Madavi Personal Interview 10 October 2010)

Some songs also portray the women as an object for pleasure as these songs praised the fights of the heroes for getting women and gold which considers as a heroic activity. This shows the existence of patriarchal system in the folk society during that period. Nevertheless we can't close our eyes towards the heroic representation of the women in *Vadakkan Pattukal*. The women in the *Pattukal* represent all classes and castes in the society. The songs show the power of the women as the mother goddess by using the *Bhagavathi* cult. Many of these songs claim the importance of the mothers in the family. Most of the heroines in the *Pattukal* are bold enough to challenge the social barriers for their social mobility, at the same time they are ready to do anything for the dignity of their family. Thus women are represented in many ways in the *Vadakkan Pattukal*.

Vadakkan Pattukal shows that the less participation of women performers in the *Kalaripayattu* in the medieval Kerala. Their representations have thrown light onto the fact that the lower caste women including tribal women also practiced the *Kalaripayattu*. *Pattukal* represent some women like Unniyarcha and Kunjithalu were more vigorous and talented in *Kalaripayattu* than the men practitioners who were represented in the same *Pattukal*. But these women performers are from the *Kalari* families. They all practiced in family *Kalaris*. But these songs also justify the notion of the private role like house hold work as more suited for women than the public roles. These heroines tried to challenge the notion of their right to the practice *Kalaripayattu* which was reserved mainly for men and made use of it to save themselves. However, there are no references about the women practitioners of the *Ankam*. The less participation and the absence of women in the mainstream aspect of *Kalaripayattu* like *Ankam* and *Poith* shows that *Kalaripayattu* is a patriarchal power apparatus in the medieval Kerala and its nature of this patriarchal public power apparatus itself prevented the participation and practice of women into *Kalaripayattu* with men. Here it is very clear that the women in Kerala didn't have any role in the origin and evolution of *Kalaripayattu* as a power apparatus in the medieval Kerala which shows her less political participation in that particular period.

IV.10. Status of *Kalaripayattu* in Colonial Kerala

For the first time British banned the use of weapons and art of fencing. In Thiruvithamkur and Kochi they introduced some control on the *Kalaripayattu* as a part of the war tactics to reduce the military power of Veluthambi Dalawa and Pazhassiraja. *Ankam* and *Poith* are the back bone of the *Kalaripayattu*. In 1792, British banned *Ankam* by law. Again British banned the practice of *Kalaripayattu* in

1804 by law. British intentionally reduced the number of soldiers in the armies of the *Naduvazhies*.

After the 1857 revolt, the Indian arms Act in 1878 banned the people from making and keeping arms (Rose Merin, 2009, 54). By these disarmament policies of government and their actions towards the confiscating the arms saw a decline in the art. *Kalaripayattu* has lost its various techniques like *Dranam Palli* technique and *Odimurriseri* techniques. Police raided houses and confiscated all arms and disarmed all *Kalaris* and *Kalari* practitioners (Karunan Gurukkal, 23rd September 2010). With the coming of Portuguese and the popularity of the guns and gun powder for the military purpose with them, *Kalaripayattu* could not survive as an agency of power institution in the society. *Kalaris* came to be the temples to protect the weapons from the attack of British.

IV.11. Revival of *Kalaripayattu*

It was in Talacheri that the resurgence of public interests in *Kalaripayattu* began during the 1920 as part of the wave of rediscovery of the traditional arts throughout south India which showed the growing reaction against British rule (Zarilli, 2000, 51). Revival of *Kalaripayattu* was led by Kottakkal Karunan Gurukkal and his disciple C. V. N. Narayanan. Palm leaves manuscripts on the *Kalaripayattu* by the old medieval *Kalaripayatt gurukkal* has been preserved in the long aged traditions and techniques of the *Kalaripayattu*. However it could not keep the medieval form of *Kalaripayattu* in detail and it lost so many *Payattu Mura* or the techniques of the *Kalaripayattu*. *Kalaripayattu* lost its glory and the role of a power institution after the British intervened in the lives of Kerala. In Modern India, the old face of the *Kalaripayattu* totally changed and turned towards a new direction.

Kalari tradition had three aspects: *Kalari* practice, *Kalari* medical practice. Practicability of *Kalari* is different from medieval Kerala to modern Kerala. Today *Kalaris* are opened for all caste in the society to practice *Kalaripayattu* together. But with the coming of foreign martial arts like Kungfu and Karate, Kerala society also got attracted towards these new martial arts and ignored the *Kalaripayattu* and its importance as a martial art in making the body fit.

IV.12. *Kalaripayattu* as a Cultural Institution and the Heritage of Modern Kerala

After the revival of *Kalaripayattu* in modern Kerala, it faced an identity problem as it lost its old status as a power institution in the society. This is the time to find out the new role of the *Kalaripayattu* in the society. Revivalists of the *Kalaripayattu* faced several problems. Here the role of C. V. N. Narayanan Nair in spreading *Kalaripayattu* as an art among the society is noticeable. He used the exhibitionalism of *Kalaripayattu* and it became a performance art. For getting public appeal, many innovations were made which helped this particular martial art to get wide popularity among the world and it became a cultural symbol of Kerala tourism. The agenda was to popularize a new form of *Kalaripayattu*. For getting popularity, they used choreographed *Kalaripayattu* dance (Kunjimusa Gurukkal, 24th august 2010). Moreover, dancers like Chandralekha took this martial art form and developed some dance fusion.

IV.13. *Kalaripayattu* as a Defence Art and a Gynaecium in the Modern Kerala

Kalaripayattu has been considered as a defence art from in its very formation. But it has different meanings and different functions both in medieval and modern Kerala under the title of ‘defence art’. In medieval Kerala *Kalaripayattu* was

a power institution. *Ankam* and *Poith* were the agents of this martial institution, therefore defence had broader meanings. It meant that the state defence was also a part of the duty of *Kalaripayattu*. But in the modern period *Kalaripayattu* has a narrow meaning, that is individual defence only.

After 1980's large number of *Kalaris* opened for the people to practice *Kalaripayattu*. Here the society used to get the benefit from *Kalaripayattu* as an exercise. This is well connected to the larger structural changes in the Kerala society. In 1980, Kerala witnessed the migration of large number of people to the gulf countries. Gulf migration helped the families to improve their economic status and led to the emergence of the new middle class. These Gulf migrants acquired a new identity in social life. During this time, the physical culture changed in the society. The notion of masculinities and the femininities changed. Because of gulf money, drinking and the smoking became common as a characteristic of the masculinity (Osello, 2000, 119). The cash with a family became the value of that society. Food culture also changed. In this background people are thinking about a healthy and masculine body. As a result of this awareness of healthy body attracted the people to *Kalaripayattu* (Sajil 4th September 2010).

IV.14. *Kalaripayattu* as a Sports Item

In 1958 Kerala *Kalaripayattu* association was formed under the Kerala Sports Council. Most of the *Kalaris* are registered under this association. The Association used to conduct the *Kalaripayattu* stage performances to spread the popularity of the *Kalaripayattu* among the mass. Moreover, there are many debates on the new policy of government to take *Kalaripayattu* as part of the school curriculum and recruitment of teachers from the *Kalari* practitioners. This will give

new impetus to the position of *Kalaripayattu*. In medieval Kerala, *Kalaripayattu* had a role in the society in all sense as it involved and affected all the aspects of the society. But in modern Kerala, the status of *Kalaripayattu* was reduced to a stage performance and remains outside life. The change involved in *Kalaripayattu* from the relationship between military man and society to that of martial artist and spectator is very evident.

Hence to conclude, though there are several mythical stories available from various sources, Kerala historians have different opinions about the origin and evolution of *Kalaripayattu*. Feudal social structure of the medieval Kerala society demanded large number of soldiers to maintain power. Here *Kalari* became an institution to supply the soldiers to the local rulers and *Kalaripayattu* acclaimed a status as a military art and an agency of power apparatus of the medieval Kerala society. With the disarmament laws and the invention of gunpowder established by British, *Kalaripayattu* lost its prominence in the society and it got deracinated from its military root.

In the post independent Kerala, *Kalaripayattu* was revived with emphasis on its spectacular element. This period witnessed the transformation of *Kalaripayattu* from the status of an agency of power apparatus to that of a theatre art form. The evolving status of *Kalaripayattu* is very much related to the modernisation process in Kerala. Its presence in the arena of sports, arts and self-defence shows the multiple role of this institution in the society. When we look at the practice of women in *Kalaripayattu* during medieval Kerala, the participation of women is relatively absent. *Vadakkan Pattukal* or the Northern Ballads of Kerala showed some of the women who are educated and trained in *Kalaripayattu*. *Mathilerikkanni*, *Kunjithalu*

and Unniarcha were few well known women in *Kalaripayattu* who fought for their self-respect against the rulers. In *Vadakkan Pattukal*, they are represented as heroines who were ready to fight against the patriarchal, casteist, feudal and masculine society. Hence, it shows the resistance of women against the dominance of masculinity and the creation of a public sphere for women.

Interviews

Mathu Puthupanam Personal Interview 20th August 2010

Madavi Personal interview 10 October 2010

Kunjimusa Gurukkal, 24th August 2010

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Chapter V

MASCULINITIES AND PRACTICES AND PERFORMANCES OF MALE PRACTITIONERS IN *KALARIPAYATTU*

This chapter is about the male practitioners and performers in the institution of *Kalaripayattu*. The chapter tries to explain the unique features of male oriented practices and performances in the institution of *Kalaripayattu* and its transformation over a period of time. This chapter tries to show how male practice has been historically associated with the notion of gender in society. The norms, customs and roles associated with the male practitioners and performers are distinctive from their female counterparts and this distinction sustained as an integral features of the institution of *Kalaripayattu* across time and space. This chapter builds on the personal narratives of contemporary male *Kalaripayattu* practitioners, folk literature and the printed sources.

V.1. Historical Context of Kerala Masculinity

Historical analysis of male practitioners of *Kalaripayattu* shows that the nature of masculinities in Kerala varies from period to period. Notions regarding the meanings and images of Masculinities alter according to time, place and culture (Cornwell Andria and Nancy Lindis Farnell, 1994, 12). Masculinity is culturally constructed and always related to power and authority. It is very difficult to construct the history of masculinity of medieval Kerala due to the scarcity of written materials. However travelogues and oral songs have given some hints about various images of medieval Kerala. This image largely revolves around the cult of the heroes. Hero cult

is a unique feature of Kerala society. Most of these heroes including females were martially skilled and showed enough courage to challenge the authority in their life period. After the death of these heroes and heroines, they were worshipped as god in various forms such as village shrines, family shrines and in the ritual art form called Theyyam. Some of the particular political organizations and social practices of that period also attribute definitions of masculinity of medieval Kerala in its interwoven relationship with *Kalaripayattu*. It is noticeable that the perceptions and changes in the practice of *Kalaripayattu* varied with changes in the notion of masculinities at different periods of time.

Study of masculinity of that particular society cannot be completed without an analysis of the social and political geography of medieval Kerala. EMS Namboodiripad, PKS Raja and Cheriyan viewed that medieval Kerala society was feudal in nature. EMS Nampoodiripad points out that the absence of strong centralized ruling system and the system of private ownership of land gave a feudal character of the society. (Nampoodiripad, 1967,40).

According to P K S Raja, *Narnbutiri-Nair* relationship tried to establish a theocratic feudalistic form of government in Kerala like the church and baronage of medieval Europe. This *Narnbutiri-Nair* alliance helped in maintaining their position of supremacy in the society (Raja PKS, 1958, 253). This martial pretension of *Nairs*⁵⁵ helped them to gain the status of military caste in medieval Kerala.

Kesavan Veluthat argued that *Bhramina* land owners or the *Uralars* claimed their power through the meetings and decisions of *Sabhas*⁵⁶. These decisions were

⁵⁵ A caste in Kerala

⁵⁶ Council of elders of the village

unanimous and any abrogation on these decisions would be punished. This solidarity and the sense of discipline were masochistic in nature that helped *Uralars* to gain dominance over the population. (Veluthat Kesavan, 2010, 253- 255).

Medieval Kerala social system was based on the *Naduvazhi* system. Absence of a strong centralized ruling system paved the way for the emergence of *Nadus* and powerful feudal local rulers. These local rulers maintained martial troops to claim their authority and succeeded to check the rise of a centralized monarchy. *Swarupams*, new political principalities came under the title of *Natuvalis* and *Desavalies*. Several groups of militia known as *Cannatam* literally meaning camaraderie or companionship that took up Kaval (watch and ward) came to help these *Desavalis* and *Nadusvalis*. This period witnessed the professional classes or castes of fighters in the *Nayars* and mercenaries in the *Ezhaava* or *Thiyya*⁵⁷. (Veluthat Kesavan, 2010, 263). The *Nagarams* or the guilds were also controlled by martial bodies.

These martial troops as an endowment of the *Kalaripayattu*. During that period most of the local noble houses attached to a *Kalari* where people especially the members of that particular household practiced *Kalaripayattu*. More over all *Nadus* maintain a number of *Kalaris* where local martial culture was nurtured. These local *Kalaris* were given patronage from the local rulers.

Veluthatu shows that some of the non-Brahman autonomous organizations with some military pretensions known in various names such as Tara, Kara etc. were the bodies that were constituted and controlled by a particular lower caste group. They had power over a defined land or other means of production. Though they had

⁵⁷ A caste in Kerala

some social significance in the society, their engagement of actual process of production is invisible in the written records. (Veluthat Kesavan, 2010, 264). This group was also considered as companion of honours.

The *Nadu* with body guards in the form of an organization counted in hundreds. For example six hundreds each of Venadu, Vulluvanadu and Eralanatu were deployed in medieval period (Veluthat Kesavan, 2010, 197). Kesavan Veluthat points out that the importance of these body guards in the division of *Nadus* was their close proximity with the local rulers and these body guards were the ‘Companions of the honours’ of the king. (Veluthat Kesavan, 2010, 253). Hundred organizations also considered themselves as the ‘companion of honour’ of the ruler. He points out that the system of appointment of bodyguards from *Nair* caste to protect the Chera kings under the title of *Onnukure Ayiram* or the Thousand minus one and the *Ayiram* or the thousand had continued in the period of *Naduvalis* also after the reign of Cheras.

In this feudal social system *Kalari* became an institution for supplying the martial skilled people to an authority to claim their power in society. Every caste has their own *Kalaris* and the people from that particular caste practiced in their caste-*Kalaris*. Lower caste people did not enjoy the right to enter in to upper caste *Kalaris*.

Karunan *gurukkal* talks about the importance of the *Kuzhikalaris*⁵⁸ in the medieval period. He says that *Kuhikalari* help to keep the secret nature of Kalaripayattu. Every *gurukkanmar* or *Kalari* teachers used to keep their own *Kalari* techniques to themselves and never reveal it to other *Kalaris*. Due to the structure of *Kuzhi Kalaris*, *Gurukkal* or the teacher of *Kalaripayattu* could catch the enemies

⁵⁸ Etiled description given in the chapter 3

who were peeping in to *Kalaris*. The concept of *Gurukkal* in a medieval *Kalari* *Gurukkal* represents a living god with the deity of *Kalari* (Karunan Gurukkal Personal Interview 2010 August 22). Concept of a *Gurukkal* is a real representation of masculinity of both *Kalari* and medieval Kerala society. *Gurukkal* were respected everywhere. Oral songs reveals two types of *Kalari* practice: in the first way the students used to leave the home and learn and stay with *Kalari Gurukkanmar*. There are number of instances were in the *Vadakkan Pattukal* talks about the journey of the students to learn some particular kinds of *Payattu* or techniques of Kerala. These *Kalaris* were attached to the home of *Gurukkal*. The second was that students from the noble household used to invite *the Kalari Gurukkanmar* to come and stay with them and practice in their particular household. These families had their own *Kalaris*.

Hegemonic masculinity was understood as the pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men's dominance over women to continue. It embodied the currently most honoured way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men. (RW.Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, 2005, 832).

In Indian context caste also contributes to the construction of masculinity to maintain caste system in the society. In medieval Kerala the dominant caste called *Nairs* played a key role in the construction of masculinity in society.

V.2. Image of a Hero in Medieval Kerala

Though a traveller such as Barbosa refers to the local men and women in medieval Kerala in their travelogues, the depiction of the soldier is very noticeable to help locate the image of heroes. Social practices like *Ankam*, *Poith* and *Kudippaka* strongly substantiated the feudal political social structure of Kerala with a military base. *Ankam* is a fight between two *Chekavors* in order to settle the dispute between two *Nair* families. There was a rule in the system of *Ankam* to get permission from the *Desavazhi* to announce the date and venue of the duel. It is an open fight in front of a huge audience. This duel should end with the death of a *Chekavor*. The *Chekavor* who won in the *Ankam* would be respected and given so many gifts by the local rulers in front of the public. The honours conferred upon him the status of a hero of that particular society. Chivalry and courage were considered as the main characteristics of the heroic image of medieval Kerala.

Poith is a completely private affair between the two *Nair* families. Generally people from *Nair* caste used to participate in *Poith* to settle the duel between two *Nair* families. *Naduvahi* did not have any role in this fight. *Kudippaka* is another feature of this period. *Kudippaka* means blood feud. The custom is that if a member of a family is killed by a man from another family, the members of the family of the victim would keep alive the revenge and enmity to slaughter the man who killed and the whole family. This enmity and revenge would pass over to future generation also. In order to have the destruction of the whole family of an enemy, the victim's family would arrange the martial training to their future generation (Menon Sreedhara A, 2008, 83). These social practises such as *Ankam*, *Poith* and *Kudippaka* are justified by an accepted code of conduct of that particular society; that "Eye for

an Eye” and Tooth for Tooth’ point out a existence of feudal martial society during the particular period.

V.3. Representation of Heroes in Folk Tradition of Kerala

Most of the heroes represented in folk traditions are martially skilled people. Most of the themes of *Vadakkan Pattukal* focussed on the heroic activities of both men and women. Most of these *Pattukal* showed the relationship between the concept of heroism and *Kalaripayattu*. The sagas of *Aromal Chekavor* and *Thacholi Othenan* indicate their martial proficiency and the success in *the Ankams and Poith*. Northern ballads portray the heroes with martial pretensions. Narrations of the *Aromal Chekavor* showed that some concepts regarding masculinity also existed in medieval period.

Some of themes in the songs that narrate the virtues of a hero are courage, truth, justice, mercy, generosity, theism and nobility etc. Songs say that loyalty towards the ruler must be a quality of an ideal man in the society. The tale of a hero named *Payyampally Chandu* who was a famous fighter narrates that of the suicide of *Payyampalli Chandu*, who in order to keep his loyalty toward his patron that is the *Deshavazhi*, selected a technique of *Kalaripayattu* to end his life.

Another song narrates the heroic activities to gain wealth and women. *Thacholi othenan* was the famous hero for his chivalrous acts of protecting/saving women. The *Pattukal* talks about his character as one who dared to fight and win over the things, including women and anything he wants. This is evident in the following lines

If he sees a fair woman

Or a huge fish, or gold

Othenan can't move away with empty hands. (Panikkoti 2000, 182).

These lines show a society that gives importance to martial people and *their struggle* for power over the other group in the society. Martial skill is used to construct a hyper masculinity which helps them to claim the status of a hero ensured in the memories of folk.

V.4. Concept of *Chekavor*

There is no doubt about the strict practice of the casteism in medieval Kerala. But some of the *Vadakkan Pattukal* portray the heroes known as *Chekavor* as belonging to *Ezhava and Thiyya* caste which was considered lower in rank. This portrayal of lower caste heroic figures showed the importance of the relationship between the martial spirit and the concept of heroism. This martial spirit was an endowment of *Kalaripayattu* to an individual during that period. This shows that *Kalaripayattu* could make an individual as a hero in the medieval society, although it failed to change the status of his caste completely. Narratives of the *Chekavor* show his proficiency in *Kalaripayattu* and his victories in *Ankams*.

The Ankam is between the two

Victor in 'saraswatiyAnkam',⁵⁹

'ganapatiyAnkam'⁶⁰, 'kolthariy Ankam'⁶¹

⁵⁹ Different kind of an *Ankam*

⁶⁰ Different kind of *Ankam*

The master of the 18 'Adavus' of 'Kalaripayattu'

Victor in 'puliyanam' too.

There were a number of references about the *Chekavors* in the *Vadakkan Pattukal* such as *Kannappan chekavor*, *Aromal chekavor*, *Chandu Chekavor*, *Aringodar*, *Kunjiraman Chekavor* etc. Every *Chekavor* maintained a lot of *Kalaris* also in that that period. *Chekavor* fought in *Ankam* to settle the disputes between two *Nair* noble family members. The relationship between the *Ankam* and *Chekavor* is explicit in the words of *Aromal Chekvor* to his brother before he was leaving for *Ankam*:

Grain or wealth we can buy or borrow

But honour we cannot beg or borrow.

When one is born a chekavan

The chekavan has to earn bread at the point of his sword.

If anybody comes for Ankam

He cannot refuse to go

Better to die with honour Than to die a plain death... (Zarilli 1998, 42).

V.5. Travelogue Accounts of the military People of Kerala

In Kerala, the *Nair* caste group claimed their military status by their skill in the martial art called *Kalaripayattu*. This notion was very much evident in the lines written by travellers who visited Kerala during the medieval period. Barbosa says,

These kingdoms of Malabar there is another sect of people called *Nairs*, who are the gentry, and have no other duty than to carry on war, and they continually carry their arms with them, like swords, bows, arrows, bucklers,

⁶¹ Fight with stick

and lances. They all live with the kings, and some of them with other lords, relations of the king, and lords of the country, and with the salaried governors ; and with one another.....These people accompany their lords day and night ; little is given them for eating and sleeping, and for serving and doing their duty ; These are not married nor maintain women or children ; their nephews the sons of their sisters are their heir..... In general when these *Nairs* are seven years of age they are immediately sent to school to learn all manner of feats of agility and gymnastics for the use of their weapons.” (Barbosa, 1868, 125-127).

Description of Barbosa who visited Kerala in fifteenth century reveals the link between the *Nair* armed forces and *Kalaripayattu*. The custom of *Nairs* to send their children to *Kalari* to receive training in Kalaripayattu at the age of seven paved the way to increase the strength of the fighters to maintain the power of the feudal *Desavazhis and Naduvazhis* in the society. Here he gives the account of the every day life of Nair. He describes that how this everyday practice helped them to construct a flexile body. These soldiers were very much skilled in the use of weapons and they frequently used the weapons such as bows, clubs or lancers, swords and buckler. Here Barbosa insist that Kalaripayattu as an art of fencing has a science. *Panikkar* was a name conferred to the leader of these soldiers. These Nair soldiers were ready to die for their kings. (Barbosa, 1868, 128).

V.6. *Chaver* in Medieval Kerala

Barbosa illustrated that these *Nair* fighters never married and never had a family. This group was very much obliged to their rulers. This kind of obligation and loyalty led to the rise of a new category of fighter called *Chavers* (*Chaver* a group of

Nair soldiers) of *Valluva Nadu* were ready to fight and die for their ruler at the *Mamankam* festival. *Mamankam* was a great festival held every twelve years at *Bharatahapuzha* river in *Thirunavayi*. *Valluvanadu* ruler had the traditional right to inaugurate and conduct the *Mamakam* festival. But *Zamorian* captured this right by his military power. This incident created a permanent enmity between *the Valluvanadu* ruler and the *Zamorian* of Calicut. During every *Mamankam* festival the *Nair* soldiers or the *Chavers* were fighting with the mass army of *Zamorian* for regaining the traditional right of their ruler. The strength of the both rulers was significant in this fight. The strength of the *Chaver* was very low when compared to the military strength of *Zamorians*, although the *Chavers* were ready to die for their king and gain the martyrdom (Sreedhara Menon, 2008, 92).

V.7. Social Customs

Social customs of medieval Kerala also proved that people always showed keen interest to make their male children fighters. Sending children to *Kalari* to train in the martial art at seven years also point out the intention of the parents and the society to creating a martial spirit in children at a very young age. The ballad narrates the education training of *Palattu Koman* who was a well known fighter of his period.

Sent to ‘*Kalari*’ at seven,
 Grasped the letters so soon
 Brought the mother for Koman
 The ‘*KalariGurukkal*’ from ‘Thululand’
 Three years the ‘*Gurukkal*’ stayed here
 Became proficient Koman in
 Both local and Thulu ‘*Kalaripayattu*’

V.8. *Pedi edi* or Removal of Fear at the Time of Birth of Male Children

This was the custom practiced in the medieval Kerala depicted in the ballads of northern Kerala. This is the custom that when a new male child is born, in order to make him fearless, people produce noise by beating the door or wooden partition of the house. The ballad showed that this custom was observed by the neighbours at the time of the delivery of *Thumbolarcha*⁶² (Achutandan, 1973, 163). But Mathew showed that after the invention of gun powder in the Kerala, noble families used to create explosions by gun powder to make their male child bold. This custom was not observed in the case of the birth of female child. This custom showed that a concept of the medieval Kerala society was that the importance of the practice of martial art called *Kalaripayattu* for the males to be fighters.

V.9. Guru Concept of Kalaripayattu

Guru Shisya relation in the *Kalari* was very significant that there is a notion that one has to learn *Kalaripayattu* from a guru or teacher. In the *Kalari* by the side of *Puthara* considered as goddess of *Kalari* and towards the south was *Guruthara* means the guru's seat where he sat watching his disciples practice. This showed that the *Gurukkal* was given respect as a god by his students.

Ballads and travelogues showed that there was a custom that children used to start their practice when they were seven years old. Before starting the practice of *Kalaripayattu*, *chavutti uzhichil*⁶³ was given by the *Gurukkal* to the student to make his body fit for practicing *Kalaripayattu*. While practicing they used to massage over the body with oil and tied a small loin cloth on their waist.

⁶² A heroine in Vadakkan Pattukal

⁶³ Is a particular method of Kerala Kalari medicinal practice that is a massage by the feet of medical practitioner.

There were several *Kalaris* in ballads. Owning *Kalari* was a symbol of status of a family in a society. *Kalari* was considered as a good source of income during that period. During the time of starting and completing the practice of *Kalaripayattu*, a student must pay to the *Gurukkal*. KS Mathew shows that people used to swear on the name of the deities on the side of the *Kalaris* based on *Kalari* like gods. This shows the importance of *Kalari* in the everyday life of people. For instance *pattukal* describes that Unniyarcha promised *Chandu Chekavor* that she would marry him if *Aromal chekavor* was back home safely after *ankam* (Achutandan, 1973, 41). Puthuram family had thirty two *Kalaris*. Arigodal also had 18 *Kalaris* (Achutandan, 1973, 32).

Kalaripayattu is not only an expression of the body performance of contemporary period and space but it encoded and offered political and social space to an individual of medieval Kerala. But it encoded and offered a powerful political, social and cultural platform to an individual to gain a space in the medieval Kerala society. Training and practice of *Kalaripayattu* was based on certain principles and moral values. These *Kalaris* maintained the ideology of hegemonic masculinity during the medieval period. The partitioners followed this ideology and moral principles and values both in the *Kalari* and throughout their life. The practice of *Kalaripayattu* was vigorous in its nature and this vigorous training made valorous fighters in medieval Kerala.

V.10. *Kalari* Practitioners in Colonial Period

British rulers considered *Kalari* as a threat to their administration. With the invention of gunpowder by Portuguese, *Kalaripayattu* lost its prominence as a part of administration and jurisdiction. However the British understood that *Kalari* was

an institution to supply fighters to armies of local rulers. They realised that they were capable of striking up a revolt against their administration. Therefore, in 1804 they banned to keep the arms by law and closed the *Kalaris* and confiscated the arms by passing a law⁶⁴. However, the practice of *Kalaripayattu* continued by some *Gurukkal* secretly. *Kalaris* became the temples where weapons of *Kalaripayattu* were kept.

Colonial masculinity was endorsed by the new educated middle class youth of Kerala during the colonial period. Patriarchal legacy of colonial era structured new class and gender systems which shaped sharp dualities between men and women in Kerala society. Victorian morality and colonial ideals replaced the pre colonial legacies, traditional practices and life style of the Kerala society especially body taboos related to dress culture. In 1930s Kottakkal Kanaran Gurukkal and CV Narayanann Nair succeeded to bring back *Kalaripayattu* to Kerala society. Though Kanaran Gurukkal focused on the traditional martial elements of *Kalaripayattu*, CVN *Narayanan Nair* focussed on melodramatic performance element of *Kalaripayattu*. He formed a troop with his disciples in 1940s which gave *Kalaripayattu* a new role that is an on stage art form in the society.

Othenanan *Gurukkal* remembers “In 1940 that is before independence of India, I started to learn *Kalari*. In 1940s I did not have any problem from the government. My *Gurukkanmar* never said that they had to face any problem from the British government. During those times, *Kalari* was maintained under some people who had a good name in the society. *Gurukkanmar* did not get any profit from *Kalaripayattu*. All of the castes kept *Kalaris*. Upper caste *Kalaris* did not give

⁶⁴ District act 1847 and Act Xx IV of 1839. Local act of the Governor General in council force in Madras.

admission to lower caste *Kalaris*.” (Othenan Gurukkal Personal Interview 2011 August 18)

His words indicate that, in some of the parts of Malabar people have owned *Kalari* and trained the students. But by that period, *Kalari* lost its role as a way to generate income for a person. So people were forced to take *Kalari* as a profession like in medieval period. This also adversely affected the practice of *Kalaripayattu*. Yet people considered *Kalaripayattu* as a divine art and considered it as their duty to train the future generations with out any economic profit.

Sajil *Gurukkal* says that:

My *Gurukkal* Ravunni mashu shared his experience about his *Gurukkal* named Ravuttu *Gurukkal*. Once Ravutty *gurukkal* went to his *Gurukkal* to learn *Otta*⁶⁵ in white colour dress. After seeing Ravutty *gurukkal* his *Gurukkal* spit out *murrukkan*⁶⁶ on his dress to provoke him as *Otta* is a very dangerous part of *Kalaripayattu*. So the *Gurukkal* was more conscious about the behaviours of their students”. That was a test by his *Gurukkal* to see if his students had enough patience to learn *otta*

(Sajil Personal Interview 2010 October 12)

In this period also *Gury Sisya* relationship was very powerful and *guru* was considered as god in *Kalaris*.

⁶⁵ A payattu mura or an technique of *Kalaripayattu* which focused on marmas of body.

⁶⁶ Traditional pan of Kerala.

V.11. Male *Kalaripayattu* Practitioners in Post-Colonial Kerala

Though *Kalaripayattu* was revived in 1940s, it could not get much popularity among the people. But after 1990s a new healthy consciousness came to the Kerala society. This notion helped to get people involved for the practice of *Kalaripayattu*.

In 1990s *Kalaripayattu* was more commercialized and it got deracinated from its martial tradition. Here *Kalaripayattu* focussed on its body performance element to become an on-stage art form. Here the notion of the masculine body in the *Kalaripayattu* was changed. Flexibility became the main aim of the practice of *Kalaripayattu*.

V.12. Martial Artist as a Stage Performer

In 1980s **Chandra** Lekha introduced *Kalaripayattu* in her contemporary dance theatre. This became a turning point in the practice of *Kalaripayattu*. Though CV Narayanan Nair used the performance of *Kalaripayattu* on the stage, he did not make it as a fusion art form. He used to perform *Kalaripayattu* on the stage under the title of martial art. Here the word of Prasad Gurukkal about his father Chirakkal T Sreedharan Nair's performances on the stage is significant. "My father performed *Kalaripayattu* on the stage with out losing its vigorous nature. He used to ask the audience to come and fight with him in *Kalaripayattu*" (Prasad Gurukkal Interview 2010 September 7). This showed that the revivalists of *Kalaripayattu* did not make the *Kalaripayattu* as a dance show on the stage. Their performance reminds the nature of *Kaliyankam* which was an imitation of *Ankam* played by the fighters for audience during the medieval period. This stage shows got a large audience and *Kalaripayattu* became very popular both inside and out side India.

Invention of the fusion dance with *Kalaripayattu* and other classical arts forms and western art forms got much popularity among the contemporary dancers. Women also got the opportunity to perform on these stage shows. Mass media covered the new face of *Kalaripayattu*. Again, *Kalaripayattu* became popular as Kerala's own art. This popularity both inside and outside India acclaimed the position of *Kalaripayattu* in Kerala tourism. Kerala tourist advertisements celebrated the pictures of *Kalaripayattu* practitioners as a beauty of *Malayali*⁶⁷ masculinity.

In this period, the nature and aim of the male practitioners of *Kalaripayattu* changed. Flexibility of body is the focus of contemporary *Kalaripayattu*. *Kalaripayattu* male performers started to practice *Kalaripayattu* with some variation of the *Adavus* and foot works according to the music. So many people from outside the Kerala also came and started to practice *Kalaripayattu*. *Kalari* practitioners understood the business value of *Kalaripayattu* and opened *Kalaris* in metropolitan cities like Bangalore and Chennai and Mumbai.

V.13. Revival of *Kalari* as a Profession in Post Independent Kerala

Karunan Gurukkal has observed changes in the practice of *Kalaripayattu*, "I am now seventy two years. I come from a *Kalari* family, I started *Kalari* when I was nineteen years old. Now I am 72 years, I have eight *Kalaris* my students also opened *Kalaris*. Earlier there were no practices of *Kalaripayattu* after the ritual called '*Kalari kayaral*'. But nowadays practitioners used to do *Kalaripayattu* all days of the year. People are showing more interest to learn *Kalaripayattu* after 1990" (Karunan Gurukkal Personal Interview 2010 August 22).

⁶⁷ The word Malayali denote the people of Kerala.

Kunjimusa *Grurukkal* said that

When compared to the strength of *Kalaripayattu* students in 1980, the strength of contemporary *Kalaripayattu* students is very high. However, in the villages we are not asking huge fees from our students as most of our students are coming from poor family back ground. So we could run the family with the income generated from the training of *Kalaripayattu* itself. But I am not denying that *Uzhichil* or the massage treatment and stage show are good source of income for my family”(Kunjimusa Gurukkal Personal Interview 2010 September 2).

Prasad *Gurukkal* also says, “Generally my *Kalaripayattu* students are from poor family, they could not afford high fees. I am doing *Kalaripayattu* and it is training as part of my family tradition. I am retired government officer. I am not doing *Uzhichil* or the *Kalari marmani* medical practice as a profession” (Prasad Gurukkal Personal Interview 2010 September 7). All these showed that training of *Kalaripayattu* itself could not be a bread winning occupation of a person in the Kerala villages.

Kalari Marmani medical practice and *Kalari* massaging got very much popularity as a traditional medical practice of Kerala. In Kerala, most of the *Kalaris* are doing *Kalari Marmani* medical practice and *Kalari* massaging especially in the Malayalam month of *Karkidakam*. This is a new channel to get an income to this *Gurukkal*. Earlier massaging with oil was done in the Malayalam month of *Karkidakam*, but after 1990s, most of the *Kalaris* took this through out the year. Training of *Kalaripayattu* legitimates their efficiency in the *Kalari Marmani* practice and *Kalari* medical practice. In the medieval period the students came to practice

Kalaripayattu to become fighters and there were no evidence of them coming to learn these types of medical practices from the *Gurukkal*. *Kalari* medicinal practice is also a reason why many are taking up the practice of *Kalaripayattu* today. Sajil *Gurukkal* said that, “for teaching the massaging and other *marmams*, my *Gurukkal* used to select the person among his disciples based on his skill in doing *Kalaripayattu* with the good qualities such as mercy and capacity to control all of his feelings” (Sajil Interview 2010 October 12).

In the medieval period, combat was part of a warrior’s life. Here he needed a strong, agile body for a quick relation in the directions of mind. They should need a speedy medicinal system to deal with the injuries of the body. In order to get a healthy body and to cure the injuries from the battle the *Gurukkal* have developed a medicinal system called *Kalari Maramani* medical practice. This medical practice was not the reason for an individual to learn *Kalaripayattu*. This new economic move also made a change in the practice of *Kalaripayattu*.

V.14. *Guru Sisya* Concept in the Contemporary *Kalari*

Concept of *Guru* as god is very significant in the practice of *Kalaripayattu*. Karunan *Gurukkal* said that

I am teaching *Kalaripayattu* massage course in the Department of Folklore, University of Calicut. I have trained twenty four *Kalaris* in Kerala. I observed a difference in the attitude of my *Kalaripayattu* students and my university students that I am getting more respect from my *Kalaripayattu* students as that is our *Kalari* tradition. I am getting respect from society also

as Kalari *Gurukkanmar*. (Karunan Gurukkal Personal Interview 2010 August 22)

Sajil *Gurukkal* said that “In my *Kalari* my students calling me *Ettan*⁶⁸. I am very friendly with my students. But my *Gurukkal* is so strict” (Sajil Personal Interview 2010 October 12). Most of the *Gurukkanmar* acclaimed that they are getting much respect from their students. However they agreed that the level of respect towards *Gurukkanmar* is reduced from generation to generation. The term *Gurukkal* and the concept of *Gurukkal* have changed over a period of time in the *Kalari*.

V.15. Changes in the Styles and Practice of Male in *Kalaripayattu*

There was a tradition that a student must under the *uzhichil* massage his full body for preparing to training of *Kalaripayattu*. Mathu puthuppanam *Gurukkal* said that this *Uzhichil* make the student’s body flexible and help the students to learn *Kalaripayattu*. But all *Kalaris* are not following this system now a days”. (Mathu Puthuppanam, Personal Interview 2010 September 27)

Kunji musa *Gurukkal* says,

Nowdays some epic movies of the *Kalaripayattu* heroic figures were released, out *Kalari* people train the main artists including those who are going to act as that martial hero in these films. But that training of *Kalaripayattu* is different from the actual training of *Kalaripayattu* in the *Kalaris*. Traditionally we are training the students of *Kalaripayattu* through

⁶⁸ It is a Malayalam word to denote elder brother

the four steps, first step is *mai payattu*,⁶⁹ second step is *Kolthari* ⁷⁰and the third step is *Ayudha payatu* ⁷¹or the *payattu* with various weapons and the fourth step is *Verum kai*⁷². But, when we train *Kalari* to these movie artists, we cannot train these steps of *Kalaripayattu* due to the lack of time. We train them for what they want only.”

Kunjimusa Gurukkal Personal Interview 2010 September 2).

Though these actors are not every day practitioners of *Kalaripayattu*, but they are also the practitioners” (Kunjimusa gurukkal interview 2010 September 2). But this kind of a practice was not possible in medieval Kerala as they believed that the personality of a man is very important to learn *Kalaripayattu*. That concept has changed in contemporary period. Some *Kalaris* were doing some new techniques to do *Kalaripayattu* for the flexible of body.

V.16. Standardization of *Kalaripayattu*

Though so many changes have been taking place in the practice of *Kalaripayattu* as part of modernization process, the question of standardization of *Kalaripayattu* is very significant in the light of the intention of government to introduce *Kalaripayattu* as a part of Kerala school curriculum. To select the teachers, government gave the training to the selected students. This new idea will create the homogenous *Kalaripayattu* practitioners. Generally all *Kalaris* have their own techniques. So the *Kalaris* practitioners are different in styles of *payattu* and are trained by different *Gurukkanmar* or teachers of *Kalaripayattu*. So there are

⁶⁹ Body Exercise

⁷⁰ Practice of *Kalaripayattu* With Wood Sticks

⁷¹ Practice of *Kalaripayattu* With weapons

⁷² Body defence technique without weapons.

disagreements among the *Gurukkanmar* about making a common syllabus for the students.

V.17. *Kalari* Practitioners of other Arts Form

Some traditional art forms including ritual art forms of Kerala are influenced by the foot step of *Kalaripayattu*. Most of these art forms were performed by male members from some particular caste. *Theyyam*⁷³ performers from the *vannan*⁷⁴ and *Malayan*⁷⁵ caste have been influenced by the foot steps of *Kalaripayattu*. Sajil *Gurukkal* said that *Theyyam* performers used to come to practice *Kalaripayattu* to make their body fit and flexible to perform *theyyam*. He added that these *Theyyam* steps have some similarities with the *Kalaripayattu* foot steps. Some of the *Theyyams* are representing martial heroes of that particular locality. *Kathivaroor Veeran Theyyams* and *Thacholi othenan Theyyam* are the best examples of this category”(Sajil *Gurukkal* Personal Interview 2010 October 12).

Karunan *Gurukkal* said that “I have both *kolkkali* and *thacholikkali* teams. These art forms are very much linked to *Kalaripayattu*.” *Paricha muttukali*⁷⁶ and *Vela kali*⁷⁷ and *Sanga kali*⁷⁸ by *Nampoothiri* influenced my *Odichimuri*. Circus people also used to come to practice *Kalaripayattu* for the flexibility of body which is a modern aspect of male *Kalaripayattu* practitioner” (Karunan *Gurukkal*, Personal Interview 2010 August 22).

⁷³ It is a traditional ritual art form in Kerala

⁷⁴ A lower caste caste

⁷⁵ A lower caste.

⁷⁶ Kerala folk art

⁷⁷ Kerala folk art

⁷⁸ Kerala folk art

V.18. Pattern of Dress Style During the Practice and Performance of *Kalaripayattu*

Karunan *Gurukkal* said that during the fifties and sixties children used to practice *Kalaripayattu* with naked body smeared in oil in the *Kalari*. The adult man used to wear a loin cloth on the waist. But after the nineties the dress patterns of the students of the *Kalaripayattu* has changed. Now students wear Bermuda with out the shirt in village *Kalaris*. In medieval *Kalaris* people used to tie *Kacha*, long cloth in their waist to practice *Kalaripayattu* in *Kalaris*.

1961 onwards so many movies were released with themes based on the *Vadakkan Pattukal*. The first movie named '*Unniarcha*' released under the Udaya banner in 1961 with the story of *Unniyarcha* who is one of the heroines of *Vadakkan Pattukal*. This movie portrayed the heroes and heroines in a particular costume style which is completely different from the narration of military and martial people from the travelogues. The hero represent in a *Dhoti* or a long cloth and *kacha* with out the upper cloth. But the same costumes were adopted to represent the male heroes by the following movies based on the themes with different interpretations. Advertisements of the Kerala tourism also pictured the *Kalaripayattu* practitioners in the same costume that inspired the *Kalaripayattu* performers also to adopt the same costume with an upper cloth called *kuppayam* to perform on stage. This is also a new trend with the performance of male practitioners on the stage.

V.19. *Kalari* as a Gymnasium

Karunan *Gurukkal* said that people were health conscious and aware of the healthy body after the 1990s. Mass media popularised *Kalaripayattu* as a traditional indigenous art among the people. Movies also spread a notion of *Kalari* body among

the youth. This also created a notion among the people that *Kalaripayattu* is better than any other western gymnasium, which invited the upper class people also to *Kalari*. Now, there are so many *Kalaris* including the students of different age group (Karunan Gurukkal, Personal Interview 2010 August 22). Sajil *Gurukkal* said that “Now a days people belonging to different age groups used to join *Kalari* in the middle age also to get a fit body.” (Sajil *Gurukkal* Personal Interview 2010 October 12). This has also a changed the nature of the practice of *Kalaripayattu*.

V.20. *Kalaris* and Political Parties

A relationship of political parties and *Kalari* practices is also very noticeable after the 1990. This is the new type of masculinity of the society. This showed the new face of *Kalaripayattu* to help people to maintain their power by using physical power over others. *Kalari* Anil *Gurukkal* said that

We are getting finance support from our party for training the party members to defence the attackers. Moreover we used to do the medical service also to our party members who are attacked by the other party members by the *Kalaripayattu* techniques. Though these *Gurukkanmar* and *Kalari* people used to stress on self-protection and self-defence in the training of their party members, the role of the misuse of the *Kalaripayattu* in making Kerala politics as explosive in its nature is very evident.(Anil *Gurukkal*, Personal Interview, 19 November 2013)

V.21. Practitioners of *Kalari* outside Kerala

Krishna Prathap *Gurukkal* said that,

I have started *Kalari* in Bangalore before fourteen years. He said that we are getting students as in Kerala or more than Kerala *Kalaris*. We are telling *vaiithari* in English while in practice, my students including children, teenagers, youth and middle aged also. Youth and middle aged students use *Kalaris* to get rid of their stress in their jobs. Here also my students are good practitioners and sincere to their every day practice. Here I do not instruct any *Marma* medical practice like Kerala *Kalaris*. Unlike Kerala here we are practicing *Kalaripayattu* in some big halls also. Most of my students are coming to learn *Kalaripayattu* to be healthy and fit (Krishna Prathap Interview 2011 December 12).

Shaji *Gurukkal* from Chennai said that,

“I came to Chennai for participating in Chandralekha’s team. She is the first contemporary dancer used the *Kalaripayattu* in her fusion work. With her help I started a *Kalari* in Chennai. My *Kalari* is a *kuzhi Kalari* and I am following northern style of *Kalaripayattu*. I am doing stage performance also. I have foreign students also. Here this is my profession. I have students belonging to all ages” (Shaji Interview 2011 December 19).

These *Kalaris* were the main source of income for these *Gurukkanmar*. In the metropolitan cities they have students both in Kerala and outside also. *Kuzhi Kalari* or *pit Kalaris* are followed in Kerala for training in northern style of *Kalaripayattu*. But in these cities it is very difficult to build a *pit Kalari*. So the *Gurukkal* trained

Kalaripayattu in big halls. There is another point is that there the *Guru Sisya* relationship is not that much strong. These *Kalari* have their own *Kalaripayattu* teams and they are also used to choreograph some fusion dance with *Kalari*. Here most of the practitioners considered *Kalaripayattu* as an exercise of body and mind.

V.22. Conclusion

Practice and ideology of *Kalaripayattu* and the way of training has changed over time and space. The aim of the practice of *Kalaripayattu* today is completely different from medieval Kerala. In Medieval Kerala *Kalaripayattu* was considered as every day experience of the practitioners. *Kalari* acted as an institution to supply soldiers to maintain the feudal hierarchy of the society. Practice and performance of *Kalaripayattu* practitioner in a *Kalari* used to teach a student how to be loyal to his master and how to claim the power over other sections of the society through the *Guru Sisya* concept of *Kalari*. Ballads and travelogues have substantiated the relationship between the heroic cult and practice of *Kalaripayattu*. It is also interesting to note that *Kalari* practitioners of that period were the protectors of hegemonic notion of masculinity of the society. They were known as soldiers, *Chekavors* and *Chavers* etc. *Chekavor* showed that martial skill could acclaim status to an individual if he did not belong to a noble caste. KKN Kurup says that medieval Kerala society measured a *Kalarigurukkal* in the number of *Kalaris* he owned. In that society, women, land and gold were focussed and protected by the martial group. These martial groups were supplied to the society in the *Kalaris*. There was a custom of Kottayam kings related to *Muzhakkunnu kalari* noticed by K. K. N. Kurup. He observed that a king must have given the sword from the *Gurukkal* of *Muzhkkunnu Kalari* after he was wrested power from his ancestors (Kurup, 2010, 130).

In medieval society these *Kalaripayattu* practitioners were considered as ‘companions of honours’. In colonial Kerala the practice was banned by the British through the laws which showed that the fear of imperial power towards these *Kalaripayattu* fighters. Revival of *Kalaripayattu* witnessed structural as well as ideological changes in medieval Kerala. In the period of the revival, the melodramatic theatre element of *Kalaripayattu* was focussed more than the martial element. This melodramatic theatre element invited the attention of the contemporary dancers to *Kalaripayattu* and inspired them to make some fusion forms of *Kalaripayattu* with other art forms. In contemporary period *Kalaripayattu* became more of an onstage program and the role and practice of the *Kalaripayattu* practitioners has also changed in the society. What can be inferred is that there was a transformation of the masculinity associated with *Kalaripayattu* from its martial form in the medieval times to that of their contemporary role of the ‘companions of honours’ to the theatre artist; this was a reflection of the transformation of masculinity of the Kerala society.

Interviews

Karunan Gurukkal Personal Interview 2010 August 22

Othenan Gurukkal Interview 2011 August 18)

Kunjimusa Gurukkal Personal Interview 2010 September 2).

(Prasad Gurukkal Interview 2010 September 7

Mathu Puthupannam, Personal Interview 2010 September 27

Sajil Gurukkal Personal Interview 2010 October 12

Krishna Prathap Interview 20 December 2011

Shaji Interview 2011 December 19).

Anil Gurukkal, Personal Interview, 19 November 2013

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Chapter VI

A FEMALE DISCOURSE: CONTEMPORARY PRACTITIONERS OF *KALARIPAYATTU*

It has been argued earlier that there is paradoxical situation with respect to the status of women in Kerala. On the one hand there are statistical indicators like favourable sex ratio portraying the better condition of women. At the same time, women are neglected in many other aspects of the life. For example, the relative absence of women in public space is noticeable. The strength of participation and performance of women in *Kalaripayattu* shows that the institution of *Kalaripayattu*, a body art form of Kerala is also not an exception from this paradoxical situation of Kerala society. Participation and performance of *Kalaripayattu* has helped women to come out of their culturally prescribed domains to the public space that was considered as men's space. At the same time, gender roles still dominate the realm of *Kalaripayattu*. In this context, the gender dimension of *Kalaripayattu* deserves an intensive study.

This chapter looks at the construction of gender in the institution of *Kalaripayattu* based on the embodied experiences of various women practitioners and performers of *Kalaripayattu* in Kerala. By doing this, the chapter tries to examine the interrelationships between the gender dimension of *Kalaripayattu* and its linkages with gender inequality especially in the public space of Kerala society. The first part of this chapter discusses about the various debates on the gender, women and body in contemporary Kerala. The second part discusses the narratives of women who practice and perform in *Kalaripayattu* in contemporary *Kalaris* and

the stages, and then observe the relationship between their everyday lives, nature of their practice and performance of *Kalaripayattu* in both *Kalaris* and stages. The chapter explores how society perceives these *Kalaripayattu* women performers and practitioners and how in turn women negotiate with this societal perception in the matrix of the gender performance within the *Kalaris* in Kerala.

The mushrooming of *Kalaris* in metropolitan cities in South India like Bangalore and Chennai, and the wide practices and performances of women in those *Kalaris* are noticeable. It is significant to perceive the factors and benefits which attract these women to join in *Kalaris* and practice *Kalaripayattu*. In this context, this chapter brings out the embodied experience of these women practitioners and performers from these metropolitan cities and try to analyse the similarities and differences in the network of *Kalaripayattu* and the process of recruitment and training of women both in Kerala *Kalaris* and metropolitan *Kalaris*. This comparison between the gender analysis of Kerala *Kalaris* and *Kalaris* of Bangalore and Chennai reflects the gender inequality of Kerala society towards gender performance and female body politics and it reveals how this has affected the practice and performance of women in *Kalaripayattu* a traditional martial and body art of Kerala.

VI.1. Discourse on Women and Body in Post-Colonial Kerala

Kerala was formed as a state under the States Reorganization Act on 1st November 1956. The first election in Kerala gave birth to the first democratic communist government in the world which brought a lot of changes in political, social and economic spheres of Kerala. The 'Kerala model of development' with its favourable female ratio and high percentage of female literacy gave Kerala a unique status among other states of India which created a hyper notion about Kerala as a

gender-sensitive society. By showing various gender indicators, scholars and feminist writers had challenged this so-called 'Kerala model of development'. Sharmila Sreekumar points out that the various statistics reports of Kerala not only show the favourable sex ratio and high levels of literacy, but also the increasing issues of economic impoverishments and low labour participation rates, malnourishments and harassment of women in domestic sphere and work place (Pradeep Kumar cited in Sreekumar Sharmila 2004, 14, 2009, 76). J. Devika noted that in the Kerala model discourse woman and her body appeared either as an instrument of procreation or as an instrument of labour. She also points out the invisibility of sexuality in the Kerala model of development. (Devika J, 2009, 23). Atrocities against women both in and outside the home and the large percentage of female unemployment indicates that Kerala model of development lacks gender equality (Alymma Vijayan and Sandya Pillai cited in 2009, 76).

There exist different opinions among the scholars regarding modern patriarchy embedded in Kerala society. T.K. Ramachandran Nair attributes that gender paradox in Kerala as a result of anti-left movement (Ramachandran TK, 1995, 109-123). Praveena Kodoth challenged this argument by pointing out that the prevalence of intimation of modern patriarchy is present in the mid twentieth century leftist politics in Kerala. (Praveena Kodoth cited in Sreekumar Sarmila, 2009, 37).

VI.2. 'New Ideal Woman' in Contemporary Kerala

The idea of an 'Ideal Woman' was created and developed by the reformists in Kerala society. Devika stated that due to the forceful attempts of the several prominent community reform movements in the twentieth century there were attempts of modernization within the traditional caste groups to reshape marriage

and conjugality in the image of the Patrilineal monogamous nuclear family in Kerala during the twentieth century (Devika, 2009, 25). The new concept of 'Ideal woman' has been developed and clutched around this Patrilineal monogamous nuclear family. In modern Kerala the notion of 'Ideal woman' has emerged with a new face. The 'Ideal woman' was located within the modern home, as overseer of material goods, bodies and souls". Sexual self control became the main characteristics of modern women and men. Ideal monogamous conjugality became the centrality (Kodoth and Devika, 2001, 1676.).

Modern Kerala saw a new doctrine for Malayalee⁷⁹ women that 'Ideal woman' should be the domestic woman who is the provider of progeny and the manager of material and the guardian of souls in the modern home. In the reformist discourse it is difficult for an 'ideal Kerala modern woman' to be an aesthetical woman who cemented modern conjugality through ensuring pleasure (Devika. 2006, 1676). But in developmental discourse aesthetic element is attached to domesticity of elite women, but this aesthetic pleasure is only for her husband and it is strictly connected to maternity. For an 'Ideal woman' domestic element became central and this subordinated the aesthetic elements. "The domestic female body, imprisoned in self control, a mere instrument for procreation and domestic labour, objectified by the dominating husband's lust" (Devika, 2006,1976).

B.A. Prakash observed that by mid 1970s, Kerala witnessed large scale Gulf migration and large flows of remittance that totally changed the poor and industrially backward economy of Kerala (Prakash, 1998, 3123). After the Gulf migration money became a signifier of masculinity and currency became the symbol of the worth of

⁷⁹ The people of Kerala called as Malayali

men in Kerala society. Large inflows of remittance changed Kerala society to a consumer society. In this consumer society dowry also became a fundamental element of the status of both bride's and groom's family. During the marriage ceremony wedding gifts were strictly gendered in its nature. The gifts from the side of bride are gold ornaments and household items especially cooking vessels. The gap between the maleness and femaleness became wide after the gulf migration. (Osella& Osella, 2000, 121-122). In a Kerala family, arranging a marriage is a way for mobility of status through strategic alliance and expenditure. Dowry also became a prestige issue among the families of bride and groom. To conduct the marriage for daughters or 'send away the daughters in marriage' is the prime duty of a modern Kerala family (Osella and Osella, 2000, 81).

Saradmoni argued that married women in post independent Kerala uphold a superior status than the unmarried women in society. She also noted that the married women in Kerala were considered as a 'new caste'. In fact Kerala women lost their individuality and were forced to accept the male domination in the name of 'protection' through the institution of marriage (Saradmoni, 1994, 509). This new meaning of marriage as a protection indirectly ended the custom of bride money and made dowry system as a compulsory payment or a duty of the brides' family. Praveena Kodoth points out that sexual morality subjects women's rights as citizens to the institution of marriage.

VI.3. Higher Female Literacy and the Myth of Women Empowerment

Though Kerala attained higher rate of female literacy that did not help women attain equal participation in the labour force with men. Mridul Eapen has

discussed about the increasing number of women's employment into informal sectors and these are generally casual or contract labours and paid less wage than their male colleagues in the same sectors (Eaapen Mridul, 2001, 2390). High level of female literacy did not help to increase the political participation of women in Kerala. Feminist scholars have underlined the fact that higher rate of female literacy failed to reduce the gender gap between men and women. Seema Baskaran underlined this view by pointing out the fact that demand of dowry is directly linked to the level of education of the groom. The demand of higher dowry is for higher educated men. (Baskaran Seema, 2011, 79)

The formal education system such as the schools and the non formal educational institutions like the *Mahila samajams* (Women's organizations) and women's magazines also rapidly spread the new domestic ideology and the new notions of maternal responsibility in modern Kerala. (Devika, 2009, 26). The 'Ideal woman' in modern Kerala should not be rational but her capacity for reason is to be deployed for the welfare of the family and limited to the domestic space. (Devika, 2009, 26). This same gendered curriculum and idea of 'Ideal woman' of colonial Kerala has been followed by Kerala educational systems for years.

The contemporary magazines are also focussed on the domesticity of a woman rather than individuality and overall empowerment. Like other societies Kerala also focused the maternal body of women, and underestimated the labour capacity of the female body. This is underlined in the calibration of women's education and employment towards the demands of domesticity. Indeed, there seems to be a generalised social commitment to female domesticity in Kerala. "Patriarchy, reconstituted actively through social reform, defines the terms of women's well-

being in Kerala” (Kodothu and Eapen, 2004, 3285). However women who sought salaried work helped themselves to get education and raised their marriageable age and reduced the birth rates. Community development report of 1950s addressed women as care givers of the family (Devika, 2009, 27). Devika noted that women who accepted early sterilization programmes also testified the solidarity of the idea of monogamous ideal that is a woman will have a husband in her life.

The modern women ideals are ‘devoid of sexuality’ (Devika ,2009, 25). Developmental idealism has a great role in the making of *Malayalee* modernity in the mid nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Raju 1995, Rammohan 1996 cited in Devika, 2009, 25). Maternal body and labour body were devoid of sexuality and the sexuality was displaced to the body of prostitute (Devika, 2009, 29). Devika points out the complete silence of the female body and her sexuality in the dominant discourses and literature, since the 1990s.

Sharmila argues that domesticity continues to mobilise a considerable amount of the energies of dominant ordinary women in present day Kerala (Sreekumar Sarmila 2009, 84). Impulsion of women’s bodies manifest in the developmental policies (Sreekumar Sarmila, 2009,117). She point out that the mobilization of marginalized groups such as homosexuals, lower caste women and minority women have not been able to mark a place in the feminist agenda of Kerala (Sreekumar Sarmila, 2009,271)

In 1990 sexuality discourse in Kerala witnessed a terrible abjection of sexuality especially prominent in the sexualisation of female body in its public sphere (Devika. 2009, 24). “The persistence of several gender un freedoms in mobility, sexual choice in and out of marriage, full enjoyment of public spaces and

facilities, and the free circulation of misogynist ideas in public discourse complete the gender paradox” (*Devika* , cited in *Devika* and Kodoth 2001). Devika and Binitha Thampi says

The derogatory term ‘*chanthapennungal*’ (market women) refers to women who get their way through loud and vociferous argument—who work for their livelihood in market-space and reject feminine modesty. The *chanthapennu* is the very antithesis of *taravattilpirannaval* (‘she who was born in an aristocratic homestead’). *Chantha* and *taravad* refers to fairly well-defined physical spaces with distinct caste/moral properties. The concept of the modern *griham* (home), the designated space of a modern woman, differed considerably from these.” (Devika and Binitha Thampi, 2011, 1150)

They argued that the special regulations had a crucial role in the making of feminine oral qualities among the aristocratic families (Devika and Binitha V Thampi 1151, 2011). They point out that the ideological success of *Kudumbasree* policy made changes in the space of women from the ideal notion of *Grhani* to self sacrificing but income earning mother (Devika and thampi Vineetha, 2011, 1160). Women have to keep an altruistic moral image in the society.

Women also sought to politicise the category of “women”, projecting “women” as a group that faced common forms of oppression despite their differences in location and social endowment. This was evident from their demands for greater representation of women in the new political institutions such as legislature (Sukumar Mini and J Devika, 2006, 4470). While conventional indicators

measuring the status of women like literacy, life expectancy, sex ratio, average age of marriage, infant mortality, maternal mortality etc are very favourable, women in Kerala have not fared well in terms of non-conventional indicators such as gender-based violence, mental ill health, incidence of suicide and growth and spread of dowry and related crimes (Eapen and Kodoth 2002; Eapen 2002; Sonpar and Kapur 2001).

Kodoth says, “Women from political families may survive on patronage, requiring compromises on individual abilities and restraint against exceeding norms of femininity.” (Kodoth, 41). Sarmila Sreekumar argues that the feminist agenda of Kerala also ignored the issue of homosexuality and she used a word in her book ‘Normative authentic Malayali women’ to denote the Hindu upper caste and class Kerala women included only in the society of Kerala and the other women groups who were disqualified from being the representatives of female subject of Kerala.

Feminist agendas in India and in Kerala displayed a single lack of urgency in addressing issue of homosexuality. (Sreekumar Sarmila 2009,10) The women who do not belong to the category of the ‘Normative authentic Malayali’ are disqualified from being the representatives of female subject of Kerala. (Sreekumar Sarmila, 2009,10) Some of the critiques point out that the feminine has been historically relegated to the realms of the subjectivity, emotion and experience. (Sreekumar Sarmila, 2009, 37) The resource for self representation and the politics of the personal, the experiential is different for different women. (Sreekumar Sarmila, 2009, 51).

This feminist discourse in the contemporary Kerala society reflects the paradoxical status of the contemporary women in society. While the statistics reports

show the higher literacy and favourable ratio with the highest level of unemployment among women, the high rate of gender violence point to the prevalence of gender imbalance in Kerala society. Feminists perceive that the abjection of the female body and women sexuality are linked to the new concept of 'Ideal woman' of Kerala. Ideal woman should be a married woman and domesticity is her foremost duty. This domesticity subordinates the aesthetic pleasure of women and her freedom. In this context, the study of the participation of Kerala women in the public space is relevant.

Martial arts and performance arts always share and reflect the nature of the public space and the notions on the body of the particular society where it is active. *Kalaripayattu* a traditional martial art and a body art, now is considered as a cultural icon of Kerala tourism which is popular among the people of Kerala for centuries. The advertisements of Kerala tourism always have a picture of two male performers of *Kalaripayattu*. Women performers are always absent in that picture. As a body art, the practice of the body in *Kalaripayattu* connected to the prevailing body culture of the contemporary Kerala society. Gender analysis of the Kerala *Kalaris* help to perceive how the body is constructed by the different notions of Kerala society. Comparative analysis explored through ethnography, comparison between contemporary practitioners and performers from the Kerala *Kalaris* and metropolitan *Kalaris* such as Madras and Bangalore helped this study to interpret the role of gender relations in the practice and performance of *Kalaripayattu* in Kerala society.

VI.4. Experience of *Kalaripayattu* Women Practitioners and Performers

Analysis of the various studies on the Kerala women showed that Women in Kerala have been subjected to oppression and abjection of sexuality and fear of their body. Scripting the lives of the *Kalaripayattu* performers and the practitioners inside the *Kalari* and its influence on their lives are crucial for the study of gender dimension of *Kalaripayattu*. This study used different narratives of women from different age groups and varied economic and social backgrounds as these gets reflected in the self-identity and the experiences of different women. Moreover, the practices of women in *Kalaripayattu* inside and outside Kerala enable the comparison between the experience, practice and performance of the women in Kerala *Kalaris* and the metropolitan cities. It helps to understand about the gender construction and body politics of Kerala society. It is crucial to look at the daily life practices of these women practitioners' dispositions. Habitus of these women is to considered to look at the female representation of *Kalaripayattu* thoroughly.

VI.5. Women Practitioners and Performers of Contemporary Kerala *Kalaris*

Ethnographic data is thematically divided in terms of the conceptual classification that addresses various issues related to the mundane practices of women from different social and economic backgrounds such as religion caste and class.

VI.6. Family and Women Practitioners and Performance of *Kalaripayattu*

Most of these cotemporary women practitioners are from traditional *Kalaripayattu* practicing families. These women have their own *Kalaris*. Generally

at least one of the male members of their family is continuing *Kalaripayattu* as a profession. Most of these women performers used to perform with their family members on the stage. These women performers from the villages are either the wives or the daughters of the *Kalari* male teachers or the *Kalaripayattu* performers of stages. *Vadakkan Pattukal* or 'the Northern ballads of Kerala' showed that the women who were skilled in *Kalaripayattu* in medieval Kerala had also been from the *Kalari* family background. *Unniyarcha*, *Kunjithalu* and *Mathileri Kanni*⁸⁰ were the instances of this *Kalari* female practitioner's family background.

Hemalatha, a forty four years old *Kalari Gurukkal* told that she is from a *Kalaripayattu* family background. She learned *Kalaripayattu* from her father and married a *Kalaripayattu* practitioner. Her husband was a *Kalari Gurukkal* and *Kalaripayattu* stage performer. He encouraged her to continue her *Kalaripayattu* practice and to perform on the stage. She was the co performer with him on the stage. After her husband's death she is maintaining *Kalari* with *Kalari* medical practice also. She said that the teachings of *Kalaripayattu* and *Kalari* medical practice are the only sources of income to her family. She also insisted that family is supporting her to maintain the *Kalari* and society also accepted her as a *Kalari Gurukkanmar*. Family acceptance and society acceptance are interlinked (Hemalatha, Personal Interview 2010 August 20)

Anju, daughter of Hemalalatha, a *Kalaripayattu* performer said that she could learn and continue her practice of *Kalaripayattu* due to the support of her parents who are also *Kalaripayattu* practitioners. She said

⁸⁰ They were the *Kalaripayattu* practitioners and the heroines of northern ballads of Kerala.

I am much influenced by my mother. *Kalaripayattu* help me to learn and perform classical dances also. I had developed a notion about my body from my early childhood. I was the *Kalaripayattu* champion in my school days. My friends consider me a heroine. But I remembered the boys used to tease me by calling *Kalari*. They used to comment “Oh she is a *Kalaripayattu* practitioner so keep a distance from her”. It might be contemptuous comments towards my *Kalaripayattu* practice. But it took that comments in a positive sense. I am confident enough to go anywhere alone because I know a martial art to protect my body. Now my husband is also supporting me to perform *Kalaripayattu*, but he is doing a job in Gujarat. So I am staying there and I could not it practice every day like my mother. However I try to come home for three to four months. For me *Kalaripayattu* is very special and is a part of my life. I hope that it can help me to get a job also. Now I have applied for the vacancy of *Kalaripayattu* teachers that is a new scheme introduced by the government to bring *Kalaripayattu* as a part of the school curriculum lessons with an aim to build up forth coming sport stars. (Anju Personal Interview, 2010 August 20)

Hemalalatha, Ajitha and *Radhika* are the *Kalaripayattu Gurukkanmar* or teachers also shared the same view of *Anju* that the family *Kalaris* helped them to survive as *Kalaripayattu* practitioners after attaining puberty. Among these women, most of them used to perform with their male members of their family.

Radhika a thirty two years old *Kalaripayattu Gurukkanmar* and a *Kalaripayattu* performer told that with out the support of the family members of the family she could not continue the practice and performance of the *Kalaripayattu* as a

profession. In her case her brothers are also in the same profession and they are also performers of her *Kalari* troop. She said that her husband is an Ayurvedic doctor and he is also interested in *Kalari Marmani Treatement* which is considered as a part of Kerala Ayurveic tradition. Moreover she has a joint family and her sister in laws are taking care of her children when she is in her stage program. (Radhika Personal Interview, 2012 July 14)

Another practitioner *Ajitha* also told that

My father is a well known *Kalaripayattu* practitioner named *othenan Gurukkal*. We have a *Kalari* attached to home. I learned *Kalaripayattu* form my father. After attaining puberty I have stoped practicing *Kalaripayattu*. I married one of the students of my father named Rajan. He is also a *Kalaripayattu* practitioner. I had taken a long break that is sixteen years from *Kalaripayattu* practice. Now I came to the *Kalari* again. My husband is very much happy with my come back. I have two children who are also perform with us on the stage. Now we are doing the *Kalari* medical practice also. (Ajitha Personal Interview, 2009 September 14)

Ramani anther *Kalaripayattu* practitioner also said that “I started to go to *Kalari* with my father who was a *Kalaripayattu* practitioner. “After my marriage also I am continuing my practice of *Kalaripayattu* with the help of my husband and his family.” (Ramani Personal Interview, 2009 September 20)

Sanusha, a *Kalaripayattu* performer said that

My sister and I started practicng *Kalaripayattu* with my father who is also a practitioner. After my sister’s marriage my sister stopped practicing and

performing *Kalaripayattu* as her husband does not like to see her to practice or perform *Kalaripayattu* in front of the people. So I want to marry a man who is ready to allow me to continue my practice and performance of *Kalaripayattu* on the stages. I am doing my diploma course in Ayurvedic massage treatment under Karunan *Gurukkal*. I want to take *Kalaripayattu* as profession so that I thought of doing this course that help me to go ahead as a *Kalaripayattu* teacher. Her words imply the importance of the support of the family especially after the marriage for a woman to continue her practice and performance of *Kalaripayattu*”.(Sanusha Personal Interview 2009 September 10)

VI.7. *Kalaripayattu* Women Performers and Marriage System

Turner argued that in a pre modern social system the regulation of body have been bound up with the control of female body by the household authority and the distribution of property under a primogeniture system. (Bryan Turner, 2009, 38). Kerala medieval women were also controlled by their household. It was revealed in oral songs that regulation and control of female body by the house hold and the society was a main hurdle for women to learn and continue her practice and performance of *Kalaripayattu* in pre modern Kerala. Narratives of contemporary Kerala women showed that they are taught as ‘women’ as a gender in their family and their body and sexuality are controlled by the household patriarchy.

Contemporary women *Kalaripayattu* practitioners and performers also shared the gendered experience from their house hold and state that with out the family support a woman could not continue the performance and practice of *Kalaripayattu* after puberty. Role of family to develop the self esteem for an individual is

significant. *Kalari Gurukanmar* or teachers agreed that sudden disappearance of their women students after their marriage is due to obnoxious attitude of their husbands towards their wives' performance of *Kalaripayattu*. Sanusha a *Kalaripayattu* performer told that her sister who was a *Kalaripayattu* performer stopped practicing *Kalaripayattu* after her marriage so that she wants to marry a person who can support her practice of *Kalaripayattu*. She again said that her brother in law does not want to see his wife on the stage (Sanusha Personal Interview, 2009 September 10)

Some women who practiced *Kalaripayattu* before their marriage also shared that their husbands take much care about their body movements. Here the word 'care' indicates the fear of their husbands towards their wife's body and her sexuality. Husbands of these women who had to stop their practice in *Kalaripayattu* told that

This (practice of *Kalaripayattu*) is only suited to small girls not wives, and often this practice of women in *Kalaripayattu* especially on the stage is a contemptuous act and a shame to the family. Some people might be teasing her husband like this "oh can you control your *Kalaripayattu* wife or you could not play with her as she was physically very stronger than you". Other husband whose wives were *Kalaripayattu* performers says

This audience is not good as what you are thinking; they are saying good things in front of us but mocking behind our back. Most of the male audience come not to see the *Kalaripayattu* practice of women but their body. I don't want other men to enjoy watching the movements of my wife." These words showed the power of men on the body of women and her sexuality. Here they are afraid of the female

body and considered her body as the symbol of their family and their morality (Manoj Personal Interview 2009 October 2).

VI.8. *Kalaripayattu* Women Performers and Audience

Most of the women *Kalaripayattu* performers told that they are receiving good support from the viewers. However, sometimes they may face derisive comments from the audience. Arifa and Anju shared that they were nicknamed as ‘*Kalari*’ by the boys at school. Most of the viewers shared that they were much surprised after seeing the performance of the women *Kalaripayattu* performers. Some of the women performers remind the response from the audience towards her performance as ‘amazing ! Women also can do like this!’ (Arifa Personal Interview 2011 July 13, Anju personal Interview 2009 August 10). The response of the audience to the female *Kalaripayattu* body is like something ‘unnatural or super natural women’.

VI.9. Attitude of the Society towards Women Practitioners of *Kalaripayattu*

Varsha, a *Kalaripayattu* practitioner shared her experience, “I started learning *Kalaripayattu* at the age of 23. It came as a surprise to the people who are living around the *Kalari* when I was going to practice *Kalaripayattu*, the neighbours of *Kalari* made some contemptuous comments that “oh! a construction worker is coming” (Varsha Personal Interview, 2012 September 10) These comments point out the intolerant attitude of the society towards women practitioners of the *Kalaripayattu*

Girija also remembered her experience

“When I started to learn *Kalaripayattu* in my twenty fourth year, I was a wonder to the neighbours of my *Kalari*. On an auspicious day at the *Kalari* called *Kalam Maikal* (which is considered as a last day of *Kalaripayattu* practice of that particular year officially in *kuzhi Kalari* system) when I performed *Kalaripayattu* the audience was surprised and all eyes followed my performance. Though I was not an excellent performer in my group, I received more attention from the audience as it was a new thing to them as I am not from that village, I am not coming from a *Kalaripayattu* family and I do not have any blood relationship with my *Kalari Gurukkal* or *Kalari* teacher. There are also some women practitioners but all of them are either daughters or wives of the *Kalaripayattu* practitioner.” (Girija Personal Interview 2012 October 16)

Commercialization of *Kalaripayattu* in the form of a stage perform art mushroomed in a lot of *Kalaris* in the northern Malabar which demanded women performers also. Traditionally also *Kalaripayattu* had a performance element but the martial element was more important in medieval Kerala. But in contemporary Kerala *Kalaripayattu* got the status of a stage performance art and the martial element had come to be used more for the performance elements of the body. Performers became famous and began to be invited to perform at various places inside and outside India which encouraged the people to take up *Kalaripayattu* as a profession. They began to form various *Kalaripayattu* performance troops and they are began to get recognition from the local people also. More over they recognized the importance of the women performers which would fetch a huge audience for their *Kalaripayattu* programs.

Here the comment of the Rajan *Gurukkal* about the return of his wife named Ajitha in to *Kalaripayattu* after a long break is noticeable. “I found it is very difficult to get women performers for my stage programs that forced me to encourage Ajitha to practice and perform *Kalaripayattu*”. Another Gurukkal named Sajil also said that he also prefers a wife who is skilled in *Kalaripayattu*. He said that “My wife is a *Kalaripayattu* practitioner who can help to increase the strength of our *Kalari* troop.(Sajil Personal Interview 2009 September 23)

Kalaripayattu male performers do not ignore the enthusiastic attitude of the audience towards the women *Kalaripayattu* performers. Meenakshi a *Kalaripayattu* performer remembers the excitements of the audience towards her performance on the stage. Here the role of female body is noticeable. (Meenakshi Personal Interview 2009 September 23)

Mass media also gave a huge popularity to *Kalaripayattu* as a symbol of the cultural heritage of martial art. Most of the medias covered women *Kalaripayattu* performers as the followers of *Unniyarcha*, a folk heroine of medieval Kerala. This huge coverage of *Kalaripayattu* by media also inspired the people to learn *Kalaripayattu*. Some *Kalaripayattu* students said that “We will also come to television one day.” ‘*Kalari Marmani* Medical practice’ also became popular in contemporary period. Most of the village *Kalari Gurukkanmar* are experts in this medical practice.

VI.10. *Kalaripayattu* and Women’s Body

The phenomenon of menstruation is associated with various taboos and restrictions regarding women’s body. Women are considered as spiritually and

religiously impure as she has a body that becomes periodically unclean due to menstruation and child birth (Dhruvarajan Vanaja, 2002, 274). Menstruating women are seen as being in a state of pollution. Religious practices such as visiting to holy places like temples and mosques are restricted to the women during their menstruation period by the notion of polluted impurity of the female body. Sources regarding the practice of *Kalaris* revealed the traditional custom of *Kalaris* is that menstruating women have not been allowed to enter in to *Kalaris*. Even contemporary village *Kalaris* are not allowing the women to practice *Kalaripayattu* during their menstruation period.

Kalari Gurukanmar or *Kalari* teachers said that the customs and the *Thachusatra* of the structure of *Kalari* resemble a temple. So *Kalari* should also follow this religious principle and not allow the menstruating women to practice *Kalaripayattu* for seven days. Apart from Hindu *Gurukkanmar*, *Kalaris* owned by *Gurukkanmar* from religions like Islam and Christianity also manifested this custom by saying that “we also consider *Kalari* as a holy place and do some religious practices like *Namas*; that is the only one way to deter the menstruating women away to keep the *Kalari* sacred and clean”. Another notion held by some of the *Kalari Gurukanmar* is that women during their menstruation period are physically weak and they cannot not practice *Kalaripayattu*. Geethi a *Kalaripayattu* practitioner shared her experience in her book titled ‘*Njaanum Kalaripayattutum*’ that women’s body does not suffer from any problems by performing *Kalaripayattu* during the menstruation period; but to take a break from *Kalaripayattu* practice for seven days will be a problem to a practitioner to do *Kalaripayattu* perfectly (Geethi, 2009, 34).

Spiritual or ritual codes serve the function of regulating and controlling body in the society.(Cragan Gate, 12)

VI.11. Dress Code and *Kalaripayattu* Institution

Dress patterns help to know about the social control systems in that particular society that used to express the identity of an individual. Dress codes were used as a gender norm in the traditional societies to reinforce the existing power relations in the society. Dress code acts as a window of culture. Generally the external body of women were strictly controlled by enforcing some strict dress codes. For Turner, men force patriarchal power by controlling the sexuality of women. (Turner Bryan, 1984, 114) . “Body is the most proximate and immediate feature of the social self.”(Turner, 1996, 43). In Kerala various local, cultural economic, social and political factors contributed to determining the particular dress code for women of different social groups in different historical times. There are different discourses to study the dress pattern of women in Kerala. Most of the research studies look on the clothing style of *Malayalee* medieval women. *Malayalee* women were not used to covering their upper part of the body. Generally this dress attire of Malayalee women was linked to caste exploitation of Kerala society, although J Devika claimed that bare-breastedness reformers of Kerala in the twentieth century affirmed the importance of covering the female body in making women as sexually disciplined subjects. (Devikaj 2007, 463). Devika stated the Kerala men are always concerned about women’s bodies as the society always judged them with a moral eye.

The differences between dress codes for boys and girls in *Kalaris* are noticeable. Karunan *Gurukkal* a *Kalaripayattu* teacher remembered that the girls, before attained puberty used to come to *Kalari* to practice in a naked oiled body like

their boys in the 1960s and 1970s. *Kalari* classmates, generally boys use *Kacha* or small loin cloth while the women and even small girls wear long *Churidars* with *Dhuppatta* or *Salwar Shawls*. This dress code is very obvious as gender discrimination in *Kalaris*. *Kalari* teachers said that the *lankoti* or a loin cloth is the suitable dress pattern for practicing *Kalaripayattu*, and it is very difficult to practice *Kalaripayattu* with the long dress pattern. This dress pattern makes some difficulties for women to practice *Kalaripayattu*. This shows that *Kalari* institution itself fear the female body. In stage programs of the villages *Kalaripayattu* troop also follow this type of different dress pattern for the female and male performers. Meenakshi a *Kalaripayattu* performer told that she used to wear pants under the sari when she is performing *Kalaripayattu* on the stage. (Meenakshi, Personal Interview, 2009 October 10)

Most of the *Kalaris* are having a uniform that is a particular colour bordered *Kacha* for male performers but their female members are performing in *Churidars*. Arifa a Muslim practitioner of *Kalaripayattu* told that she used to wear Hijab while she was practicing *Kalaripayattu*. By imposing the particular dress pattern for women, they are forced to retain the local regional, religious and national identities.

VI.12. Notions of Femininity and Masculinity inside the *Kalaris*

Kalaripayattu had a long-aged cultural tradition in Kerala history. *Kalaripayattu* had been organized as an agency of power apparatus in the medieval polity due to its martial nature. In the medieval Kerala *Kalari* was an institution which supplied and produced the soldiers to maintain the power structure of the society. Concept of masculinity is always related to power and hegemony. Not only

is masculinity related to *Kalaripayattu* but it is also attached to the status of the people who are trained in *Kalaripayattu* like *Chekavor*. Oral songs and *Mamankam* festivals revealed the importance of *Kalaris*, *Chakavor* and soldiers and their higher status in the society. But there is no evidence about the women *Chekavor* in the medieval Kerala. Even some of the oral songs referred the name of a few women who were well versed in *Kalaripayattu*. This indicated that medieval Kerala society did not acknowledge the martial calibre of woman. Generally there is a notion that women could not do *Kalaripayattu* perfectly after their delivery. In contemporary Kerala also *Kalaripayattu* is linked to the notion of masculinity and not to femininity. For example, the picture of the *Kalaripayattu* of the two male performers is used as a cultural icon of Kerala martial art and Kerala tourism. The absence of the female *Kalaripayattu* performer in this advertisement is noticeable.

VI.13. Commoditized Masculinities in Modern Kerala

The constant threat of sexualisation makes the woman in public an unstable and volatile presence. Large scale migration happened from Kerala to Gulf, Europe and USA from 1990 onwards. The migration to Gulf countries helped in the integration of Kerala economy into global economy. This incorporation into the global economy produces a cultural politics of globalisation within Kerala on the female body (Lukose Ritty, 2005, 926). Women in Kerala found a new cultural space through the traditional and modernity, through public and private. Female body had been used to build up a masculine society. The concept of ‘new fitness body’ boy is also the result of this commoditized masculinity which inspired a number of youth in to *Kalaripayattu*. Here transformation of *Kalaripayattu* to a modern gymnasium is also noticeable. More over the interest of the foreigners to the

Kalaripayattu also attracted the Kerala youngsters. But the interesting fact is that though the Kalaris are having the foreign women practitioners, it does not influence the participation of indigenous women in the Kalaris.

VI.14. Male Hierarchy in *Kalaris*

Lujendijk noted in his book that he did not find any female *Kalari Gurukanmar* or *Kalari* teachers in Kerala. Moreover he mentioned that the list of sixty four *Kalari Gurukanmar* or *Kalari* teachers of also did not contain any female *Kalari* teacher. However, the recent presence of a few numbers of women *Gurukanmar* was also noticeable.(Lujendijk, 2005, 63) Generally speaking a person who has eighteen years of experience in *Kalaripayattu* attains the title *Gurukkanmar*. This is also difficult for a woman to continue her practice in *Kalaripayattu* without taking any break in learning. Most of these women practitioners of *Kalaripayattu* shared their experience that most of them had to take a break at the time of puberty, marriage or the delivery.

Geethi, a *Kalaripayattu* practitioner point out the fact that to take a break even for seven days would adversely affect the woman's practice of the *Kalaripayattu*. But most of the women stop or take a long break from the practice of *Kalaripayattu* mainly due to fulfil the conventional duty to be a good girl, good wife and a good mother.

Kalaripayattu Gurukanmar underlined the most beneficial factor of *Kalaripayattu* as it helps to maintain the body flexible which is considered as a highest quality of a female dancer. Femininity is linked to dance and flexible body. Some of the *Gurukkanmar* shared their view that *Maipayattu* or the body exercise

can make the body flexible and healthy so the women could get the benefit from this as she need not learn *Ayuthapayattu* or the practice of weapons which is considered as more aggressive.(Kunnji Koya, Personal Interview 2009 August 13)

However a few *Kalari* women *Gurukanmar* or teachers maintain their own *Kalaris* with their male members who are also *Kalari* practitioners. The strength of the female *Kalaripayattu* student in this *Kalaris* is higher than compared to the *Kalaris* owned by male *Gurukanmar* or male teachers. Radhika, a *Kalari Gurukkal* said that “My female students used to say that I am the inspiration for them to join *Kalari* and they feel more comfortable to learn under me than any male *Gurukkal*”. (Radhika personal Interview 2012 July 24).

VI.15. Attitude of the *Kalari* Gurukkanmar towards Female Practitioners

Some *Kalari Gurukanmar* also keeps hold of notions of social constructionism about the female body and their practice of *Kalaripayattu*. Pedagogy of *Kalaripayattu* consists of three steps that are *Maipayattu*, *Ayudhappayattu* and *Veumkali*. *Ayudhappaattu* means the practice or the *Adavukal* with weapons such as knife and sword etc. while *Maipayattu* means to practice only with the body. Generally a traditional notion is that the male body is more suited to practice *Kalaripayattu*. Women cannot be as perfect as men. Some *Gurukkanmar* also supported this notion and they are thinking that women are not efficient to do *Ayudhappayattu* or the technique of using of weapons in *Kalaripayattu*. This is also a gendered statement and this gendered thought of *Gurukkanmar* will also make the gender discrimination in *Kalaripayattu*. The generally notion is that femininity is not associated with weapons. Mereena says that many masters discouraged her from

learning about the pressure points in a body as they thought it was only suitable for a man to know the weak points in a body. “But then many gurus imparted this valuable knowledge to me, and that's how I know,” (Aswany Mareena, 2012).

VI.16. Confidence of Female Practitioners of *Kalaripayattu*

Geethi a *Kalaripayattu* performer assumed that less confidence among the female practitioners also act as a barrier to themselves to continue their practice of *Kalaripayattu*. In her book she says that most of the girls concentrate on their body and not on the practice of *Kalaripayattu*. She said most of the women are used to taking a girl partner in doing *Kalaripayattu* or the boys younger than these women or male members from their family (Geethi, 2009, 65-69). Most of this construction of gender and body develop a low self esteem among women of Kerala society which only made them less confident to over come the obstacles in the way to the practice of *Kalaripayattu*.

VI.17. Notion of the Fitness of Body and Female *Kalaripayattu* Practitioners

New notion of body fitness is the impact of the globalization process in Kerala. *Kalaripayattu* develop physical mental and spiritual health. *Kalaripayattu* became the cultural icon of the contemporary Kerala. This new title helped *Kalaripayattu* to gain popularity among youth. The title of indigenous marital art also welcomed the *Malayalee* people. But the less participation and practice of the female practitioners in the *Kalaris* showed that this new face of the *Kalaripayattu* has not helped to raise the strength of female practitioners and performers of *Kalaripayattu*. But the *Kalaris* in the urban parts of Kerala have marked the slight changes in the strength of female practitioners. Here Radhikha said that nowadays

girls are attracted to *Kalaripayattu* as it will help them to perform dance in the competitions.

VI.18. *Kalaripayattu* and Self-Protection

Kalaripayattu is a martial art and it helps people to be physically strong and protect themselves. Nowadays women are also attracted to *Kalaripayattu* for self protection. Colleges also started to conduct the seminars and workshop for their girl students to learn *Kalaripayattu* for their self protection.

VI.19. Women in *Kalaris* outside Kerala

It is found that two groups of women who are practicing *Kalaripayattu* outside Kerala; first group of women is ICT professionals who belong to upper middle class and the other group is contemporary dancers. With the coming of globalization there are various institutes of performing arts located in the metropolitan cities. Globalization created new forms of dance expression by combining the elements of modern to traditional, the urban to indigenous and secular to spiritual (Shapiro B Sherry, 2008, vii). This also impacted upon *Kalaripayattu* and *Kalari*. This new face of *Kalaripayattu* gave way to mushrooming of *Kalaripayattu* in metropolitan cities such as Chennai and Bangalore.

Practices of women in metropolitan cities such as Bangalore and Chennai are noticeable. Women who are practicing *Kalaripayattu* in metropolitan cities like Bangalore and Chennai share their views and experiences of their practice of *Kalaripayattu* that is different from that of the women practitioners of Kerala *Kalaris*.

VI.20. Contemporary Dancers and *Kalaripayattu*

Contemporary dance performer shared their view that the philosophy of *Kalaripayattu* is also attractive along with its aesthetic element of a performance art. While they agree that even though they are dancers, they all found some difficulties in the earlier days of the practice of *Kalaripayattu*, but later they felt that this practice helps them to be effective in their thoughts and attitude of their life. Contemporary dance theatres are known for their philosophical fusing of classical dance forms and martial arts with therapeutic varieties of dance. They are attracted by the martial performance element of the *Kalaripayattu* and extensively used *Kalaripayattu* in their production of fusion dance. Celebration of human body became the central theme of their new inventions of dance forms. Chandralekha a well known contemporary dancer is considered as the exponent of performance fusing classical dance forms with martial art *Kalaripayattu*. Most of the contemporary dance theatres are offering *Kalaripayattu* lessons to their students.

Interviews of the contemporary dancers show the importance of the relationship between *Kalaripayattu*, body and mind. Most of these contemporary dancers are practicing *Kalaripayattu* for the flexibility of their body. These dancers are used to taking the foot steps of the *Kalaripayattu* to choreograph their fusion dance form. This also gave a wide popularity to *Kalaripayattu* at the metropolitan cities.

Narrative of the contemporary dancers and women practitioners of *Kalaripayattu* about the experience of the *Kalaripayattu* and its relationship with the body is evident.

One of the dancers named Jayabharathi from *Attakkalari* - Centre for Movement Arts narrates

Attakkalari introduced *Kalaripayattu* to me. How physically demanding *Kalaripayattu* is! But also how beautiful this form itself. I was very interested in the idea of body memories, as a dancer how we remember the body movements is not by the brain but how beautiful this make you. In the amount of vigour of training which one goes through, which makes the body memory *Kalari* has some similarities between the postures of Bharathnatyam and Kuchipudi. I found it difficult in the beginning of the practice of *Kalaripayattu*. *Kalaripayattu* as a performance form changes the body and make the notions such as what you are and what you can do with your body. I consider it as a body performance art and body training. I got training *Kalaripayattu* in a one week work shop. I came to *Attakkalari* for learning *Kalari* as I was that much fascinated to this form. I had severe back injury. Doctors suggested me to stop the dance performance. But the *Kalari* performance helped me to cure and return to the world of dance. I am very grateful to *Kalaripayattu*. My teacher used to tell that *Kalaripayattu* as a dynamic yoga. It helps me to generate the energy from my body by myself. Therapeutic value is underlined. My *Gurukkal Satyan* from C.V.N *Kalari* used to tell us mainly men join *Kalaripayattu* than the girls but he found when we look at the body, *Kalaripayattu* as a form suits the female body more as women have more spine curves. It did wonders in my body. I owe to *Kalaripayattu*. I came from the background of Jats and Kathak. It is by the very body experience we get when we do *Kalaripayattu* that we get mentally

transformed at the studio in to the concept of *Kalari*. It is very spiritual also
(Jayabharathi Personal Interview, 2010 December 15)

Janitha Mukarji another dancer says

It helped me to increase the strength of my body in a particular way. For me it is not a dance it is more about how you change your body and how you reflect on your body. Basically it is a meditation form more than a dance. It is some sort of body meditation. It increased confidence also. (Janitha Mukharji Personal Interview, 2010 December 15)

Kavya Disusze another contemporary dancer says that

I did my diploma in *Attakkalari*. It was an opening up for me to the ancient traditional knowledge. This is the first time I am exposing my body for an Indian art. It is physically demanding. It made me confident and stronger as it is a martial art. Traditionally gender is there. Verbally we are calling nothing is impossible to women and women are equal. It is an Indian martial art and is nurtured as a male art. (Kavya Disuza Personal Interview, 2010 December 15)

Anathitha Gosh, another dancer narrates

I am coming from Kathak background, I am very fond of martial art as I was deeply influenced by the movies. But now I know *Kalaripayattu* first I thought that it is a martial art and I could not do it. But it worked on my body. Now I can straightly focus. Before training in *Kalaripayattu* I used to walk in the street with always head down. But now my awareness developed. (Anathitha Gosh Interview, 2010 December 15)

Meghna a contemporary dancer said that “my body has already developed and awareness of body is also developed, basically it disciplined the body.” (Meghna Personal Interview, 2010 December 15). Most of the contemporary dancers said that they are attracted to *Kalari* though its used in dance choreography and later they found the *Kalaripayattu* can make the body flexible and strong.

Martial element of *Kalaripayattu* is also very attractive to the women who are settled in metropolitan cities. Kumudam and Rani who are *Kalaripayattu* practitioners from Bangalore told that *Kalaripayattu* made them bold and gain physical strength to overcome any dangerous situation. Kumudam said “*Kalaripayattu* made me more energetic and developed a cognitive equanimity towards the vicissitudes of my life”. (Kumudam Personal Interview, 2013 December 2)

Kumudam said that

Kalaripayattu make me strong and powerful. To know a martial art is an important thing for the self protection.”The rising number of rapes and molestation cases also makes the learning of a martial art among women in the metropolitan cities important. These cities have witnessed an increased number of women practitioners of *Kalaripayattu*. Kumudam Personal Interview, 2013 December 2)

The glory of *Kalaripayattu* as a holy and indigenous art form also invites the women practitioners from metropolitan cities also. One performer Uma said that earlier she used to go to gymnasium for fitness of the body but she was aware that modern concept of gymnasium was from the west. When she heard about *Kalaripayattu* as traditional aboriginal martial art she decided to quit modern

gymnasium and join *Kalari*. Here she shared her view is that aboriginal martial art is always better and more effective than modern gymnasium. (Uma Personal Interview, 2013 November 8)

Most of these women practitioners of metropolitan *Kalaris* shared that they are not facing any gender inequality in the curriculum of *Kalaripayattu*. *Kalari* teachers are very friendly and treat the students without any discrimination. Most of these women are into other professions but they also the members of their *Kalari* performance team. *Kalaris* in the metropolitan cities are also traditional in its structure and its rituals. But traditional gendered norms and female body taboos are absent in these *Kalaris*. These women shared that “we are economically independent and modern in the notions regarding the values of body and self. Generally these cities also do not have conventional notions regards about the gendered roles which also make the *Kalaris* and the *Kalari Gurukanmar* from Kerala *Kalaris* to think about the reconstruction of the gendered thoughts of the *Kalari*”

VI.21. An Analysis of Contemporary *Kalaripayattu* Women Practitioners and Performers

The differences of the experiences of the women practitioners and performers in the Kerala *Kalaris* from the practitioners of metropolitan *Kalaris* are noticeable. These differences showed the performance of gender both inside Kerala society and the *Kalaris* and how this was interrelated to the participation of women in the Kerala *Kalaris*.

Devika argues that Kerala society has been silence on the female body and women sexuality and she point out the invisibility of the female body in the Kerala model of discourse. *Kalaripayattu* is a body art which need daily gigantic practice of

body. Though the *Kalaripayattu* makes the body more flexible but its traditional ideology is related to masculinity and power. Traditional *Kalari* resembles a temple in structure and its ritual and practices. Hierarchy in the form of *guru sisya* or the teacher student relationship is the base of the traditional ideology of the *Kalaripayattu*. “*Kalari* is a temple and *Gurukkal* or the *Kalari* teacher is the god of the *Kalari*”. Here the absence of female *Gurukkal* or women teachers for the *Kalaripayattu* is significant. Lijuduik told that he could not find out the women *Gurukkal* or the women teacher in his study which showed that the male hierarchy of *Kalaripayattu*. However contemporary study found a few numbers of women *Kalaripayattu Gurukanmar* or the women teachers in the *Kalaripayattu*. *Kalaris* headed by female *Gurukanmar* are having comparatively more members of female students than the *Kalaris* of male *Gurukanmar*. This reflects the importance of the female *Gurukanmar* to maintain the gender equality in the strength of the female *Kalaripayattu* students.

Menstruation taboos related to the female body also prevails in Kerala village *Kalaris* even in contemporary period also. *Kalari Gurukanmar* said that women should not touch the *Kalaris* during their periods as their bodies are impure. Geethi one practitioner shared her experience that this seven days break in the practice of *Kalaripayattu* will adversely affect the practice of women. This concept of impurity of female body in *Kalaris* itself showed its biased attitude towards the female body and their practice *Kalaripayattu*. But this menstruation taboo is not prevailing in the metropolitan *Kalaris*. (Geethi, 2010. 54)

Attitude of the male *Gurukanmar* towards the female students are also noticeable. *Chavitti uzhihial* is must to make a boy's body for the practice of

Kalaripayattu. But this *chavutti uzhihil* is absent in the case of the body of girl student. Geethi remembers that once she asked about the *chavutti uzhiyal* for women to a *Gurukkal*, he answered with question “what is the need of the *chavutti uzhiyal* to a woman?”. *Gurukanmar* themselves think that women could not do *Kalaripayattu* perfectly like men. Some of the *Gururkkal* shared their view that *Ayudha payattu* or the practice with weapons doesnot suits the girls. These gendered thought might affect the female practitioners and especially their practice of *Kalaripayattu*.

It is noticeable that female practitioners are mostly coming from the *Kalari* family. They used to perform with their male members of their family. It is very difficult to see the practice or the performance of the female practitioners of the *Kalaripayattu* with another man who don't have family ties with her. Devika noted that the common practice of the Kerala that the women and men do not intermix together in the public sphere to keep the chastity of the women who entered to the public sphere for (Devika, 2010, 202). But in the metropolitan *Kalaris* women are not bounded by the family relations. They said that they used to practice performances with the male mates of *Kalaris* which is not considered as a problem to their security.

Most of the women practitioners of the metropolitan cities are economically independent, and are from the upper middle class family. Though some of them are married even having children also did not create barriers to practice and perform *Kalaripayattu*. But in the Kerala village *Kalaris* the women used to stop their practice after their marriage. Here the female body of the Kerala women are considered as the property of their husbands and the symbol of the status and morality of their family. Domesticity is the main duty of the ideal women of Kerala.

Some of the practitioners said that they could not get the time to practice *Kalaripayattu* because of the responsibility of their house hold. Most of these women are not employed. They could not make *Kalaripayattu* as a livelihood even it offers job opportunities because of the social barriers.

Most of the women practitioners of metropolitan cities have said that they used the *Kalaripayattu* to form the fusion dance with classical arts and yoga. Some of the practitioners said that they became confident and are bold to focus and go anywhere alone. Some of them said that they could control their body and mind which help them to make their self.

Both women practitioners of Kerala and metropolitan *Kalaris* are aware about a healthy body. In spite of some restrictions, women of the *Kalari* villages shared that they found some freedom in the body while they are practicing *Kalaripayattu* so that they don't want to stop this practice.

While the women practitioners of *Kalaripayattu* in Kerala *Kalaris* are compelled to wear the traditional feminine dress style to practice *Kalaripayattu* women in metropolitan *Kalaris* are not facing any gender partiality in the dressing pattern. Most of the *Kalaris* have same kind of uniform dress code for both men and women. Here these women are not conscious on their body in their *Kalaris*.

Women of *Kalaripayattu* were found to be gaining some self-confidence through some strategies to resists the male dominant ideology of *Kalaripayattu*. They had used some strategies to counter the male monopoly of *Kalaripayattu*. An example is that in Kerala villages women used to do *Kalaripayattu* in sari. Meenakshi said that" I used to wear pants under the sari". Arifa another

Kalaripayattu practitioner said that she used to wear Hijab while she was practicing and *Kalaripayattu*. Most of the *Kalari* teachers agreed that loin cloth or *Kacha* is the most suitable dress to do *Kalaripayattu*. But women are compelled to wear their traditional feminine dress to practice *Kalaripayattu* also. Yet these practitioners said that

We know our dress is making difficulties to us to do *Kalaripayattu* perfectly but we want to continue our practice of *Kalaripayattu*. So we decided to go to *Kalaripayattu* in this dress and show the people that we can play *Kalaripayattu* well in spite of the dress we wear (Meenakshi Personal interview, 2009 October 2& Arifa Personal Interview 2010 July 14)

After marriage Kerala women cannot make any decision over her body and property which has been considered by the property of her husband. Here her body become an object to her husband. In this context, the social and family background of the women practitioners are noticeable. In the institution of *Kalaripayattu* these contemporary stage performers are coming from the family where their husband is also performing *Kalaripayattu* on the stage. Here they are performing *Kalaripayattu* as a helper of their male members of their family and obeying the husbands. Here this performance also became a part of the continuation of her domesticity. Husbands of the women performers said that their wives' performance help to get more audience and reduce their risk to get female performers for their *Kalaripayattu* stage troop. *Kalaripayattu* will make the relationship between the body, mind and person which is absent in the case of female practitioner as women does not have any freedom to take decision on her body and her role in their team owing to their reduced status as menial labourers in their troop.

Globalization created a new link between the female body and *Kalaripayattu*. Here her body became an object on the stage which was justified by the words of the contemporary male practitioners. They said, “people are much enthusiastic towards the female practitioners so it is easy to get more audience if we have female members in our team”. But most of this team are organized and headed by male practitioners. Here women have the opportunities to perform on the stage not as subjects of *Kalaripayattu* but as an object of *Kalaripayattu* to get more audience.

Ratheesh Radhakrishnan argues that various notions of masculinities are constructed and structured the public domain of Kerala.(Radhakrishnan, Radheesh , 2005, 187-208) The abjection of female body and her sexuality is notable in the main stream Kerala discourse. Feminist movements also exclude gender questions like those related to homosexuality and lower caste women. Concept of the ideal wife fully denied the freedom of women on her body and mobility. Domesticity is the main symbol of contemporary women and marriage or ‘sends away’ the daughters became the main duty of the parents of the Kerala society. These all show that the high indicators such as the high female literacy and favourable sex ratio and favourable female health do not help the Kerala woman to break the barriers to mark her participation in the public spaces with men in the Kerala society.

Kalaripayattu and *Kalari* act as the agency of public space of a Kerala society. As a body art in the form of traditional martial art and a contemporary dance, *Kalaripayattu* is popular among the Kerala people especially youth. In Medieval period *Kalaripayattu* had a role of the agency of power and related to masculinity. But in modern Kerala it lost its importance as an agency of power, it has been continuing as a male dominated art. Ethnographical evidence of the Kerala

Kalari and metropolitan *Kalaris* enables one to reflect the fact that the prevalence of gender discrimination is more intense in Kerala *Kalaris* than metropolitan *Kalaris*.

Construction of gendered body occurs through a series of exclusions, denials and significant absences. Kerala society and the institution of *Kalari* is also not an exception from their construction of female body and their absence in the public spaces. The tendency of the exclusion of the women in the Kerala *Kalaris* is interlinked to the gendered practices in the Kerala society which is evident from the observation of a women practitioner named Geethi about the negligible participation of women in *Kalaripayattu* in the Kerala *Kalaris*. Geethi says that girls are very much enthusiastic to learn *Kalaripayattu* till they attain puberty, but on the onset of menarche, they themselves develop fear about their body and stopped practicing *Kalaripayattu*. The body became a barrier to them to continue their practice of *Kalaripayattu* (Geethi, 2009, 68). ‘This fear’ of the girls is not formed simply; it is deliberately constructed by their mundane experiences out of the gendered socialization from the society and family.

Judith Butler argues that gender attributes as performative as gender is an identity constituted through time and constructed through a stylized repetition of acts (Butler Judith, 2007, 175-193). Empirical evidences from Kerala *Kalaris* and metropolitan cities substantiate the fact that gender imbalance prevailing in the realm of *Kalaripayattu* in the Kerala *Kalaris* is so closely associated with various mundane acts which are producing and reproducing gender identity elsewhere in Kerala society.

Interviews

Kunnji Koya, Personal Interview 2009 August 13

Sanusha, Interview, 2009 September 10

Ajitha Personal Interview, 2009 September 14

Ramani Personal Interview, 2009 September 20

Meenakshi Personal Interview 2009 September 23

Sajil Personal Interview 2009 September 23

Manoj Personal Interview 2009 October 2

Anju Personal Interview, 2010 August 20

Anathitha Gosh Interview, 2010 December 15)

Jayabharathi Personal Interview, 2010 December 15

Janitha Mukharji Personal Interview, 2010 December 15

Kavya Disuza Personal Interview, 2010 December 15

Megna Personal Interview, 2010 December 15)

Arifa Personal Interview 2011 July 13

Hemalatha Personal Interview 2010 August 20)

Radhika Personal Interview, 2012 July 14.

Girija Personal Interview 2012 October 16

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Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

This study has tried to analyse the role of body in the construction of gender in Kerala society by looking at the historical and gender practices of *Kalaripayattu*, a martial art form of Kerala. *Kalaripayattu* can be defined as a body performance and marital art; a ritual form and every day healing practice and cultural icon of contemporary Kerala. This study looked at *Kalaripayattu* and its evolution and its various roles in both medieval and contemporary Kerala society. As an active art form, *Kalaripayattu* has been significant in both in medieval and contemporary Kerala society though it played different roles in both periods. It is found that the practice of *Kalaripayattu* has been gendered in nature as the presence of male practitioners and relative absence of other genders in the past as well as the present is noticed. The role of *Kalaripayattu* has been varying in its evolution from medieval to contemporary period. As a body practice, *Kalaripayattu* deserve a detailed study in terms of relationship between gender and body. *Kalaripayattu* is not only a marital art but it reflects the nature of various phases of Kerala society. As a body performance form, *Kalaripayattu* required a gender analysis in its transformation from an agency of power apparatus from the medieval period to a spectacular art on stage in contemporary time.

The origin of *Kalaripayattu* goes back to the medieval period. As shown by many scholars, the medieval Kerala society was feudal in its social structure because of the powerful centralized monarchy and it was politically divided in to small principalities called *Nadus*. These *Nadus* were under the control of *Naduvazhies*.

Absence of the centralized monarchy led perpetual strife between the *Naduvazhies* and which made it difficult to maintain peace and provide security to the people and property. In this society, people used to maintain troops who were well trained in *Kalaripayattu* in order to protect their life and property. These troops were known as *Kaval Changatham* who were appointed by the wealthy individual for protection of his property and family. *Nuttonnuval* or hundred and one and *Anjuttonnuvar* and *Ayirathonnuvar* were the terms used to denote the martial army of *Naduvazhi* based on their numbers to protect them from enemies.

Apart from this kind of martial troop, some individual fighters known as *Chekavor* were also appointed to settle the problems between the upper castes Nair feudal lords. These individual fighters were known as *chekavor* who were trained in *Kalari* and fight each other in a duel called *Anakam* to settle the dispute between the feudal lords. There were other kinds of duels between the families such as *Poith* and *Kudippaka* between the feudal families. *Poith* was a duel among upper cast fighters to settle the quarrel between the two upper caste Nair lords. *Kudippaka* or blood feud was the term denotes the permanent enmity between the two families transmitted through the generation to generation. These kinds of particular practices of medieval Kerala nourished *Kalaripayattu* as a military art and *Kalari* became an institution for supplying soldiers to the society. Thus, *Kalaripayattu* became an agency of power apparatus of the society of the medieval Kerala society.

During the medieval period *Kalaripayattu* acted as a platform for an individual to gain status. *Vadakkan Pattukal* shows that the heroes such as *Aromal Chekavar* and *Aringodal, Kannappanunni* who belonged to the lower caste called *Thiyya* were conferred upon the title '*chekavor*' and was respected by society and

even feudal rulers. As it is mentioned above, the presence of caste was not absent in *Kalaripayattu*. These *chekavor* fought for the upper caste feudal lords to settle their disputes and they were not selected in to the military troop of the local rulers. Once a man become *chekovor*, he cannot remove his title and come back to his individual life and his *Kalari* body became a property of upper caste. Here permanent ‘transformation’ happens in the case of a *Chekavor* and coming back or ‘transportation’ to his ordinary life does not happen. However, this *chekovors* were also considered as ‘companion of honours’.

Coming to the colonial period, *Kalaripayattu* lost its significance mainly due to the colonial interventions. In 1804 British banned *Ankam* by law and the disarmament laws led to the disintegration of *Kalaripayattu* during colonial period. Introduction of new war technology like gunpowder and other laws during the British period adversely impacted the practice of *Kalaripayattu* in the society. Colonial government banned the use of weapons and closed *Kalaris*. *Kalaris*, then was protected in the form of temples and practiced and learnt secretly by some *Gurukkal*.

In the Post-independent Kerala, *Kalaripayattu* has transformed into spectacular performance to appeal audience in the stage. After 1980’s *Kalaripayattu* gained a new momentum in the changed socio-economic circumstance. In 1980s, Kerala witnessed a high rate of gulf migration and it changed Kerala society in to a consumer-oriented society. Cash became a prime thing in the society. Dowry became more powerful and money began to play an important role in determining masculinity. New middle classes emerged with a new kind of gender relationship in the family also. New life style and food culture created an awareness of health

consciousness among the people to think about the gym culture in Kerala. Here people started to practice Kalaripayattu as an indigenous gym. The awareness of the health conscious gave a new impetus in the realm of *Kalaripayattu*. People are recently more attracted in to the practice of *Kalaripayattu* as an indigenous health practice.

After the globalization and the development of tourism in Kerala, *Kalaripayattu* became cultural symbol to attract the tourist. Here *Kalaripayattu* is used as a medical practice also to appeal the people with the performance of *Kalaripayattu* on the stage. Simultaneously *Kalaripayattu* received the larger audience as a Kerala traditional art form both inside and outside Kerala. Contemporary dancers are attracted by the power and beauty steps of the *Kalaripayattu* and incorporated it into the theatre production. This new invention took *Kalaripayattu* to metropolitan cities and became popular among the dancers and common people. Movies also took this synchronization of body, mind and foot movements in the choreography of dance and in the combat scenes, which invited international acclamation to *Kalaripayattu*. *Kalaripayattu* also became a way of Sanskritization by using religious symbols in the practice.

This study tried to analyse the gender dimension of *Kalaripayattu* by locating gender in the above described scenario of history and change. To understand the gender dimension performance theory and theories related to gender and body theory are used in the study. This study argues that *Kalaripayattu* is a performance art as it is a locus of the sequence of relationship linking history, genre, gender and embodied practice.

Coming to the history, there are not much written sources available on the construction of gender history of medieval Kerala. It was important to depend on the oral sources such as folk songs to look at various practices, which prevailed during medieval Kerala, in order to depict the gender relationship in both Kerala and *Kalaripayattu* during the medieval period. Historians and travellers noted different cultural practices prevailed in Kerala such as various marriage systems such as polyandry and fraternal polyandry and system of inheritance called *Marumakkathayam* and matriliney and the caste practices related to the notion of purity etc. Polyandry was also practiced among most of the caste group. Matriliney was another practice that was noticed by the scholars. Matriliney was the backbone of the despotic rule of medieval polity. Matriliney was the base for the *Marumakkathayam* system in which the lineage of family went through the sister's daughters. When this is considered as egalitarian, the practices related to the caste and notion of pollution restrained the women during the medieval period. The notion regarding the impure body related to menstruation was widely prevalent during the medieval period. *Pulaya pedi or Paraya pedi* was the important practice related to the pollution of woman. According to that system women of *Nair* caste would be outcaste if they were touched or seen by men belonging to lower caste such as *Pulaya and Paraya* caste on a special day called *Karthika*.

Moreover, the folk songs narrate the restriction on women to enter public space. There was a fear about female body as their entry into the temple festival is considered as an impure act in the public place during medieval period. Coming to *Kalaripayattu*, though *Vadakkan Pattukal* describes the participation of few women, the relative absence of female warriors and female *chekavors* shows how the gender

inequality made *Kalaripayattu* a male practice. However, narratives of women who struggled against caste and patriarchy depicted in *Vadakkan Pattukal* shows that the women were the main victims of the caste and untouchability that controlled and excluded the women from the public space especially in the realms of the power. *Vadakkan Pattukal* illustrated the story women like Unniarcha and Mathilerikanni who were well versed in *Kalaripayattu* challenged the existing male supremacy for entering in to public affairs. Here these 'heroines' used *Kalaripayattu* as a tool to fight against the men force to protect themselves and questioned the male power. However, these women heroines were not recognized by the society as soldier or *chekavor* like their male counterparts in the society. Women practitioners during the medieval period were not honoured as *Chekavor* or *Chaver* like their male counterparts.

During the colonial period, the British rulers pacified *Kalaripayattu*. Simultaneously gender inequality became more strengthened with the construction of new Victorian ideal womanhood under the reformist initiatives in colonial period. *Marumakkathayam* and the joint family system declined and *Tharavadu* lost its power in the nineteenth century. Chastity of women became the main issue for the demand of the patrilineal system by social reformers. Construction of ideal womanhood in colonial Kerala is linked to the domestic role and wifehood of women. Polyandry reduced the status to promiscuity. Though the social reformers argued for women's entry in to the freedom movement, it did not make any change in to the power structure of the gender relation ship in to the family. It is very evident in the magazines like *Mahila* edited by the women for women as these magazines

focuses on the ideal wifehood. During this period, women were completely excluded from *Kalaripayattu*.

Coming to the post-Independent scenario, commercialization of *Kalaripayattu* allowed women to enter into *Kalaripayattu*. It is found that the increasing participation of female *Kalaripayattu* performers is related to the consumer value of female body under capitalist transformation in society. When *Kalaripayattu* became a stage performance art, female performers became significant to appeal the audience. But performance and costumes of female performers are decided by male interests. Women performers now use body as a vehicle of aesthetic impression and satisfy the desire of men. This commodification of *Kalaripayattu* increased the number of female practitioners in Kerala's urban areas but it did not make many changes in the rural areas in the practice of *Kalaripayattu*. By using Rebecha Schneider theory it is argued that most of the female performance on stage is a 'female representation of masculinity' on stage. Here 'female representation of masculinity' is that females are performing for the male and his fantasies and they cannot possess to act and perform according to their wish. *Kalaripayattu* is also not an exemption from it in the case of female *Kalaripayattu* performers.

The reinforced, rigid patriarchal norms created gender imbalance in the practice of *Kalaripayattu*. In the realm of practice, discrimination like different dress pattern for male and female in the practice of *Kalaripayattu* is noticeable. While a man is practicing *Kalaripayattu* in a loin cloth, his female counterparts are forced to wear traditional dress such as sari or Churidar with Dupatta. Gendered practice of *Kalaripayattu* is visible in the strength of the practitioners and the every day practices of *Kalari*. Though girls are practicing *Kalaripayattu*, after a certain age

they cannot continue their practice. It shows the relationship between the gender performance of society and the gender practices of *Kalaripayattu*. Most of the women *Kalaripayattu* performers have their own *Kalaris* and their male member of the family is the teacher. The narratives reveal that the support from the family is very important to practice *Kalaripayattu* as the family acceptance and social acceptance are interlinked. It is related to the common practice of the Kerala that the women and men do not intermix together in the public sphere due to the anxiety exists in Kerala regarding the chastity of women. Marriage is another barrier to the women practitioners to continue their practice. Domesticity is the prime duty of a woman and wife is considered as a property of husband. The study found that male hierarchy of *Kalaripayattu* is perpetuated through the authority of *Kalari Gurukanmar* or *Kalari* teachers. *Gurukkanmar* underestimates the female practitioners and these gendered attitudes discourage women to excel in practice. The impurity of female body also operates in contemporary *Kalaris* in the form of menstruation taboos. Menstruated women are restricted in to the *Kalaris* for seven days that break the continuity of practice to a female practitioner. This break adversely affects the practice of women.

The study made a comparative understanding of the practice of *Kalaripayattu* in metropolitan cities and the practice of *Kalaripayattu* in Kerala. It is found that women in cosmopolitan cities share a different experience from women practitioners from Kerala *Kalaris*. Most of them shared that the indigenous martial nature of *Kalaripayattu* attracted them into it as *Kalaripayattu* provides fitness with self-defensive techniques. In the metropolitan *Kalaris* in places such as Bangalore and Chennai, women practitioners do not face any gender discrimination from

Kalarigurukal in the teaching methods. Contemporary performers who practices *Kalaripayattu* and uses the elements of *Kalaripayattu* in their choreography in metropolitans do not face any discrimination. Women of Kerala *Kalaris* are facing discrimination in terms of their dress pattern and methods of trainings; they do not have any freedom in their practice. But, in the case of metropolitan women, they have more freedom while practicing *Kalaripayattu*. The narratives of women practitioners in metropolitan cities shows that women are generally having more freedom and economic independence than women who are living in Kerala and it helps them to voice themselves out in all realms of their life including the practice of *Kalaripayattu*.

When looking at the history of the gender performance of *Kalaripayattu*, male partitioners dominate *Kalaripayattu* and women are denied equal participation on par with men. This study showed the relationship between the gendered practices of *Kalaripayattu* and various repetitive, mundane acts of the Kerala society which are producing and reproducing gender identity in Kerala society.

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Appendix A

Glossary

Adavu	- The basic step of Kalaripayattu
Ankam	- Duel in medieval Kerala
Ankathattu	- Ankam Stage
Ankamtari	-Practice with iron weapons
Asari	-Carpenter
Ayudhapayattu	-Practice of Kalaripayattu with weapons
Badrakali	- Mother goddess
Bhagavathi	- Mother goddess of Kerala
Brahmasm	- Land of Brahmins
Chaver king to death	- Kalaripayattu Practitioner who defend the
Chekavor	-The fighters of Ankam
Chuvad	- Steps in Kalaripayattu
Devasam Land	- The land of temple
Dhanurveda	-A veda relating to art or science of archery
Gurukkal	-Kalari Teacher
Kacha practitioner	- The long cloth wrapped around the hip of
Kalari	- The place where Kalaripayattu is practices
Kalaripayattu	- A traditional martial art of Kerala
Kavalchangatham	- Security guards among Kalari practitioners
Kavu	- Temple
Kolthari	-Practice of Kalaripayattu with sticks
Kudippaka	- Family feud

Kuzhikalari	-Pit Kalari
Mai Kannakumpol	- When the body becomes eyes
Maipayattu	- The first phase of Kalaripayattu
Manipravalam	- A literary style in medieval Kerala
Marumakkathayam	- System of matrilineal inheritance
Nadu	- Village
Naduvazhi	- Rules of Nadu
Nampoothiri	- Brahmins of Kerala
Otta sticks	- A dangerous technique of Kalaripayattu with sticks
Payattu	- Practice
Pedi Idi	- A custom at the time of the birth boy child
Poith	- A form of duel in medieval Kerala
Puzha	- River
Thachan	- Carpenter
Thachusastra	- Indigenous knowledge of architecture
Thalikettu Kalyanam	- Mock wedding for young girls
Thirandu Kalyanam	- Ritual function at the time puberty
Thozuth	- Prayer
Vadakkanpattukal	- Northern Ballads of Kerala
Verumkai	- Empty hand combat
Virthi Bhumi salary	-The land given to temple employers in terms salary

Appendix B

Vadakkan Pattukal; Unniyarcha

Unniyarcha, of Attummanammel

One afternoon, in a siesta

Dreamed, it is festival in Allimalarkkavu

And Ayyappankaavu

Women around are going.

Up from the sleep in the early dawn

She tied her jet-black hair up

Dressed herself listening to the crow of cocks.

Pondered Archa,

Women around flocking

To Allimalarkkavu for the festival.

Been long since she saw one

Ever since she left Puthooram.

Sudden flood of desire to go to the festival.

Pleaded Archa to the father-in-law

Of her desire to see the festival

Women are going.

The father forbade her

Jonars abound Nadapuram, said he.

No one treads those streets, for
The robed will be disrobed
The beautiful will be kidnapped.
And you are one.
I do not want to lose my only son
To a duel.
Do not kill him.
Ask the mother.

Pleaded Archa with the mother-in-law
Of her desire to see the festival
Women are going
Who will you go with, asked the mother
My husband, said Archa.
Spare my son
Take Paanan with you, said she.

Women of Puthooram
Never took a Paanan with them.

Pleaded Archa with her husband,
Of her desire to see the festival
Women are going
Kunjiraman denied.

A furious Archa swore on Puthooram

On my father, I shall go to the festival.
Pushed open the eastern courtyard door
Oiled her hair
Dipped herself in the water
Incensed her body
Immersed in the water.

Kohl rimmed eyes
Saffron mark on the forehead
Sandalwood paste on her body
Adorned in jewels
Dressed herself up
Off to Allimalarkkaavu
With Urumi for belt.

Appendix C

Interview Details

Name?

What is your age?

What is your education Qualification?

What is your occupation?

Your marital status?

What is Your caste?

At what age you started your practice in Kalaripayattu?

What are the factors encourage you to enter in it?

What difference it make in your social life, are you feeling more confident in life, are you engaging in things which otherwise seemed impossible in Your day-to-day life?

Why you stopped your practice at a particular age? What are the causes behind it?

In Your family history, any one had practiced Kalaripayattu before you?

What are the difficulties and challenges you face in society because of the practice? What kinds of response you receive from your immediate kin like parents husband etc and wider society.

Why you choose this particular institution as your occupation?

What is the attitude of the society to you?

Are you getting any grant from government?

Is the Kalaripayattu beneficial to female body in any particular way?

What are your training methods? Are any odd methods for women?

Is there any change in the number of women participants in Kalaripayattu when we compared to former years.

Can you say something about the changing notion of body in Kalari and body in choreography?

Do you think that a movement of your body is distinct from you as an object/subject of those movements?

Do you approach body as an ultimate instrument and form of expression?

Is body conveys an unspoken language or knowledge?

How do you perceive the interaction between time, space and body in your experiments with movement art?

What difference does it make when you bring Kalari into your movement art?

What is your experience as a Performer?

List of the people met in the field.

Kalaripayattu Practitioners and Performers

Relatives of the Kalaripayattu practitioners

Kalaripayattu Academy Members.

Kerala sport council Members.

Contemporary and classical dance Performers.

Folk Art Performers

List of the people interviewed

Name	Age	Place	Role	Period of data Collection
Abdhul Khader	54	Kannur	Gurukkal / Kalari Teacher, Kerala Kalaripayattu Association Vice president	November 2010
Arun	14	Vadakara	Kalari Performer	November 2010
Arun	25	Vadakara	Kalaripayattu performer	December 2010
Adarsh	32	Vadakara	Kalaripayattu Performer	December 2010
Adarsh C	19	VadaKara	Kalaripayattu Performer	November 2010; December 2012
Adil P	20	Villiyapalli	Kalaripayattu Performer	October 2010
Ajitha Rajan	40	Vettilakkodi	Gurukkal/ Kalari Teacher	September 2010
Alaka	18	Vadakara	Kalaripayattu Performer	November 2010

Allu	17	Vadakara	Kalaripayattu Performer	December 2010
Anil Chandran	45	Vadakara	Kalaripayattu Performer	November 2010
Anadhan S	34	Vadakara	Kalaripayattu Performer	November 2010
Anjana	17	Vattoli	Kalaripayattu Performer	September 2012
Anil Gurukkal	40	Kozhikode	Kalaripayattu Performer	November 2013
Anju	8	Vadakara	Kalaripayattu Performer	August 2010
Anjusha	20	Balussery	Kalaripayattu P[Performer	September 2010
Anindita	34	Chennai	Contemporary Performer	December 2010
Arifa Haneefa	15	Malappuram	Kalaripayattu Performer	October 2011
Ajitha	21	Kannur	Kalaripayattu Performer	September 2009
Haneefa	53	Malappuram	Kalaripayattu Performer	October 2009
Hemalatha	42	Baluserri	Kalaripayattu Gurukkal	July 2010
Hayath	19	Malapauram	Kalaripayattu Performer	November 2010
Kannan	61	Vadakara	Kalaripayattu performer	November 2010
Kanaran	72	Vadakara	Kalaripayattu Performer	August 2010
Karunan	70	Vadakara	Kalaripayattu	October 2010

			Gurkal	
Karunan Gurukkal	78	Vadakara	Kalaripayattu Gurukkal	August 2010
Krishna Prathap	42	Kannur	Audience	December 2011
Kujimusa	52	Villiyapalli	Kalaripayattu Gurukkal and Kalari medical Pratitioner	September 2010
Kunjali	35	Villiapali	Kalaripayattu performer	December 2010
Laxmanan	43	Kozhikode	Kalaripayattu Gurukkal	December 2010
Kunjikkoya	52	Kozhikode	Audience	August 2009
Lijish	31	Vadakara	Kalaripayattu Gurukkal	November 2010
Lijish	22	Vadakara	Kalaripayattu Performer	September 2010
Liju	27	Nadapuram	Kalaripayattu performer	October 2010
Madavan Nambiar	42	Kasargod	Kalaripayattu Performance.	October 2010
Majil	29	Vadakara	Kalaripayattu Perromer	December 2010
Mani	44	Vadakara	Kalaripayattu Performer	November 2010
Manoj	35	Kannur	Audience	October 2009
Manjula	33	Vadakara	Kalaripayattu Performer	September 2009
Mathu Puthupanam	46	Vadakara	Kalaripayattu Gurukkal	August 2010

Meenakshi	68	Vadakara	Kalaripayattu Gurukkal	September 2009
Othenan Gurukkal	80	Vettilakkudi	Kalaripayattu Gurukkal	August 2011
Panikkotti	75	Vadakara	Kalaripayattu Gurukkal	September 2011
Prasad Gurukkal	62	Kannur	Kalaripayattu Gurukkal	September 2010
Pranav	23	Kannur	Kalaripayattu Performance	October 2011
Radhika	32	KozhiKode	Gurukkal	July 2014
Rajan	45	Vettilakkodi	Kalaripayattu Gurukkal	November 2010
Ramani	32	Kannur	Kalaripayattu Gurukkal	September 2009
Rani	19	Kochi	Kalaripayattu Performer	October 2011
Rajitha	22	Ernakulum	Kalaripayattu Performer	September 2010
Reji	36	Vadakara	Kalarari Medical Practitioner	November 2010
Rubi	34	Vadakara	Kalaripayattu Performer	September 2010
Sajan Kurian	27	Kannur	Audient of Kalaripayattu	October 2010
Sajil Gurukkal	31	Vadakara	Kalari	October 2010

			Gurukkal	
Shaji	33	Calicut	Audince	December 2011
Sreya	18	Kottayam	Kalaripayattu Performer	December 2011
Sona Krishna	16	Vattoli	Kalaripayattu Performer	October 2010
Soniya Hoseph	18	Kottayam	Kalaripayattu Performer	November 2010
Sojan	32	Chavakkad	Kalaripayattu performer	November 2010
Sunisha P	19	Vattoli	Kalaripayattu Performer	2009 September
Suredran	29	Vadalkara	Gurukkal	October 2010
Thilakan Nambiar	51	Kannur	Kalaripayattu Performer	December 2011
Varsha Pattola	24	Palakkad	Kalaripayattu Performer	2012 September

Contemporary dancers and *Kalari* performers outside Kerala

Name	Age	Place	Period data collection
Anathitha Gosh	25	Bangalore	December 2010
Janitha Mukharji	23	Banglaore	December 2010
Jayabharathi	24	Bangalore	December 2010

Kavya Disuza	29	Bangalore	December 2010
Megna	23	Bangalore	December 2010
Kumudam	48	Bangalore	December 2010
Uma	28	Chennai	November 2010
Padmini	40	Chennai	November 2010
Sadandhan Menon	64	Chennai	November 2010
Shaji	32	Chennai	November 2010
Aparna S	19	Chennai	November 2010
Anupama	23	Chennai	October 2011
Neeraja	16	Chennai	October 2011
Arpitha Sahu	26	Chennai	October 2011

Appendix D



Figure 1: Shaded are the districts where Kalaripayattu is widely practiced in Kerala.

Appendix E



Figure 2: Vaalpayattu



Figure 3: Kolthari



Figure 4: Those who are practicing *Kalaripayattu*



Figure 5: Kalari Poothara



Figure 6: Simhavadivu (Lion Posture)



Figure 7: Gajavadivu (Elephant Posture)



Figure 8: Valinjamarnnu