

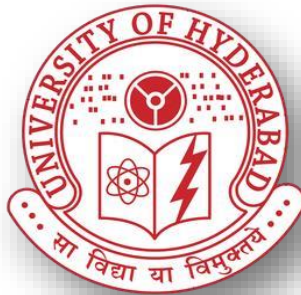
**Diaspora and Transnationalism: A Study of *Theyyam* in the
Indian Diaspora**

**A Dissertation Submitted to the University of Hyderabad in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Award of Degree of**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

**In
Indian Diaspora**

**By
Surabhi K.**



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June 2021



DECLARATION

Center for the Study of Indian Diaspora University of Hyderabad

I, **Surabhi K.**, hereby declare that the research embodied in the present dissertation entitled “**Diaspora and Transnationalism: A Study of Theyyam in the Indian Diaspora**” is carried out under the supervision of **Dr. Ajaya Kumar Sahoo, Centre for the Study of Indian Diaspora, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad**, for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in Indian Diaspora, is an original work of mine and to the best of my knowledge no part of this dissertation has been submitted for the award of any research degree or diploma at any University. I also declare that this is a bonafide research work which is free from plagiarism. I hereby agree that my thesis can be uploaded in Shodhganga/INFLIBNET.

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Part of this thesis have been:

A. Research Papers published in the following publications.

1. Sahoo, A. K. & Surabhi, K. “Diaspora, Religion, and Identity: The Case of *Theyyam* in the Indian Diaspora.” Asian Ethnicity, February 2020. Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group. ISSN: 1469-2953.
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Surabhi K.

Glossary

- *Aniyal*- elaborate elegant and heavy attire worn by the performer from head to toe.
- *Anthithiriyar*- the one who lights the lamp in the shrine.
- *Anushtanam* - solemnization and practicing of rituals and fasting with dedication and faith.
- *Arayoda*- *Theyyam* costume that is tied around the waist made of palm leaves.
- *Ayudam*- arms and weapons; in this context as a means of enacting the myth
- *Chendakaran*- drummer of *Theyyam* performance. He accompanies *Theyyam* during the performance and plays a major role in the vibrant movement of the *Theyyam* performer with his drum beats.
- *Dakshina* - honorarium given in the form of fee, fruits or attire to show respect.
- Devadasis- temple dancers who enjoyed esteemed social status but later reduced to just sex slaves or child prostitutes who are dedicated to temples when they are very young.
- *Embron* or *Embronthiri* - the priest of the shrines.
- Janmi system- huge land owned by the upper caste of Kerala as their birth right.
- *Kalaripayattu* - martial art form of Kerala
- *Kalayakaaran*- one who gives toddy to *Theyyam* during the *Theyyam* performance.
- *Kavu*- sacred groves or shrines in the villages that are mostly found in Malabar where local deities reside. *Kavus* are different from temples which is a seat for Brahmanic gods whereas in *kavu* various *Theyyam* deities are prayed. These are very small roofed shrines without elaborate ornamentation. *Theyyams* are performed in front of these *kavus*.
- *Kodakaaran*- one who handles the umbrella during *Theyyam*.
- *Kola/ Kolam*- heroic character or deity the *Theyyam* performer represents.
- *Kolakaran/ Koladhari* - one who performs the *Theyyam*.

- *Kolathiris* -The ruling house of *Kolathunad*. They were descendants of the Mushika dynasty and became one of the major political powers in the Kerala region, after the disappearance of the Cheras of Mahodayapuram and the Pandyan Dynasty in the 12th century AD.
- *Kolathunad*- was one of the most powerful kingdoms on the Malabar Coast during the arrival of Portuguese Armadas to India. The other three powerful kingdoms were Zamorin, Kingdom of Cochin and Quilon.
- *Komaram* or *Velichapad*- the ceremonial dances of the shrines and the major oracles are announced by *Komaram* or *Velichapad*. He is a mediator between the deity and the devotees who comes to houses of Kerala at a particular season and also plays its part in the rituals held in temples.
- *Kottayikaaran*- one who manages the affair of the *Arai*.
- *Kulathozzil*- caste based labour. Caste based works done by members of every caste.
- *Kurikodukal* -the last stage of *Theyyam* performance where the performer gives his blessings to the devotees.
- *Kuruthola* -thin tender strands of palm leaves
- Malabar- Malabar was the name of the district in Madras Presidency during British rule. Today it comprises districts of Kasargod, Kannur, the Mananthavady taluk of Wayanad district, Koyilandy and Vatakara taluks in the Kozhikode district of Kerala and the entire Mahé Sub-Division of the Union Territory of Puducherry.
- Malayalam- the language of Kerala
- *Manar padi* and *Pulaya padi*- the social practice where a Nair lady would be outcasted by throwing stones if she happens to see a *Pulaya* or *Mannar* (lower caste) in the afternoon of

Karthika day.

- *Marachal* - vibrant turns and twirls by the *kolakaran*
- *Marumakkathiyam* - matrilineal system of inheritance which was prevalent in Kerala and property was passed on only through females in the family. The inheritance goes through the sister's children in the female line and not through son of the family.
- *Meleri*- pyre for *Theyyam* performers to jump on it as a part of the ritual.
- *Muchuttukaran*- the one who holds the light in the *kavu*.
- *Mulamantram*- prayers related to *Theyyams* which are strictly studied by the *Theyyams* artists alone.
- *Mundu*- white garment wrapped around the waist mostly by men in Kerala.
- *Murikku* - Indian coral tree.
- *Nairs*- the gentry of *Kolathunad*, and have no other duty than to carry on war, and they continually carry their arms with them, which are swords, bows, arrows, bucklers, and lances. They all live with the kings, and lords of the country, and with the salaried governors and with one another. They are very smart men, and much taken up with their nobility.
- *Nambiar*- the upper caste in Kerala who were the feudal landlords in Malabar.
- *Namboodiri*- the name *Namboodiri* has been variously derived. The least objectionable origin seems to be *nambu* (sacred or trustworthy) and *tri* (a light). The latter occurs as an honorific suffix among Malabar Brahmins, and other castes above the *Nairs*. The *Namboodiris* from the socio-spiritual aristocracy of Malabar, and as the traditional landlords of Parasu Rama's land, they are everywhere held in great reverence.
- *Ola*- locally called for palm leaves in Kerala.

- *Paradevata* or *Kuladeivam* - deity of the clan
- *Prasadam*- Religious offerings which may include sweets, flowers, fruits etc. In Hindu rituals, the religious rituals end with giving away of offerings by the temple priest or members of the family if happening in a house which are usually sweets, fruits, flowers, sandal paste etc. In case of *Theyyam*, the *Theyyam* performer as a metamorphosed deity gives away offerings and blessings to the worshippers which is a turmeric powder to be smeared on the forehead.
- *Pulayas* - The word *Pulaya* has two meanings where *pulam* means the paddy field and *Pulaya*, therefore, means man of the field, a man who belongs to the mud.
- *Sadhya*- A feast consisting of variety of traditional vegetarian dishes of Kerala served on a banana leaf.
- *Sambandham* -The younger men of the *Namboodiri* Brahmins seeks marital alliances with the women from other matrilineal castes lower to them like *Nairs*, *Amabalavasis* etc. as the elder ones were only allowed to marry to keep the inheritance intact. The children born out of this relationship has no claims upon their father's property as per the matrilineal system of inheritance.
- *Saree*- a lengthy cloth draped by Indian women.
- *Savarna*- term used for the elite upper classes in Kerala.
- *Stanam*- The place where the deity resides in the *kavu*. The auspicious space where the *Theyyams* are to be performed. A place of worship, where the deity is propitiated through *Theyyam* festival. This is a small structure of wood or stone with a small entrance.
- *Tantri/ Karmi* - officiating person at the *kavu*. The priest who does the rituals in the *kavu* during *Theyyam*.

- *Taravad*- ancestral home in Kerala.
- *Theyyattam*, *Kaliyattam*, *Theyyamkettu*, *Thira*, *Kolamkettu*, *Thirayattam* - another colloquial terms for *Theyyam*.
- *Thiyyas*- They are the toddy-drawing castes of Malabar, Cochin and Travancore. *Thiyyas* are also known as *Izhuvans* or *Iluvans*.
- *Thottam*- narratives accompanied by songs related to the deity which includes myths and legends of the particular deity. They are similar to invocations with the background narrative integrated with directions for performance.
- *Thudangal*- *Thudangal* means the beginning of the *Theyyam* ritual with the invocation of deity. It begins when the person in the *kavu* maintaining abstinence takes five betal leaves, areca nuts, rolled tiny cloths to be lighted each along with turmeric powder, few rice and places them on a plantain leaf with 5 wicks. The wicks are then used to light and the plantain leaf and the things placed on it is given to the performer which indicates that the divine power of the deity in the *kavu* is transferred through the plantain leaf where all the divine power has been captured, stored and then restored in the performer. It is through *Thudangal* the power of the deity first gets in to the performer with the legendary ballads sung in the background.
- *Vannans* - *Vannans* of Malabar are also called *Mannan* or *Bannan*. They are a low class of Malabar washermen, who wash only for the polluting castes, and for the higher castes when they are under pollution following births, deaths etc. It is believed by the higher castes that such pollution can only be removed by wearing clothes washed by *Mannas*, though at other times this cause pollution to them. The washing is generally done by the women, and the men are exorcists, devil dancers and physicians, even to the higher castes. Their women

are midwives, like those of the *Velakkatalavan* and *Velan* castes. These castes should not be confused with the *Mannan* hill tribe of *Travancore*.

- *Vathyakaran*- the trumpet player of the musical troupe. The performers accompanying *chendakaran* with other musical instruments. Also known as *Vathyam*.
- *Velak* - oil lamp for illuminating with a wick of fire
- *Velattam*- second stage of *Theyyam* performance after *thudangal* where the artist performs some rituals. *Vellattam* stage has certain rituals and is always performed with facial makeup and no elaborate headgear or body dress ups by the *Theyyam* performer. He is accompanied with his accomplices who sing *thottam* and play instruments along with him.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Cultural appropriation is the theft of icons, rituals, aesthetic standards and behaviours from one culture or subculture by another, generally by a 'modern' culture from a 'primitive' culture. This theft often occurs without any real understanding of why the original culture took part in these activities, converting religion and spirituality into 'meaningless pop culture' (Mannarakkal, 2012).

The religious practices of the past are the fundamental aspect of the continuation of religion. With diaspora and transnationalism, various native cultures and traditions are transported to new places. These diasporas take various adaptive strategies to re-create their religion which includes rituals, practices, folklore etc. The re-establishment of religion includes physical construction of the place of worship, creation of religious leaders, practice of religious rituals in domestic and public spheres, creation of religious organisations and religious enclaves etc. Religion in the diaspora is practiced both at home and outside as a community. There are weekend visits to temples, churches and mosques. The diasporas give more attention to standardisation and institutionalisation of religious doctrines, rituals and ceremonies. Various native festivals and ritualistic practices are core in re-creating a religious space in the diaspora. Some of the famous religious organisations in the diaspora are *Vishwa Hindu Parishad*, *Voice of Hindu*, *Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA)*, *Malaysia Hindudharma Mamandram*, *Hindu Maha Sabha in Fiji*, *The Singapore Hindu Sabai*, *Sri Sathya Sai Baba Centre of Singapore*, *American Federation of Muslims from India (AFMI)*, *Federations of Hindu Associations in Chicago (FHA)* and so on so forth.

Diasporics construct their home away from home based on their needs. The older diaspora had a complete break with the homeland because of lack of communication technologies and financial support to make a journey back to the homeland. The homeland thus remained in the memory of

those whose journey was only one way. The return to the homeland is only virtual and through imagination. So, the diasporas found a way to return to the homeland by remaining in the foreign land by constructing various religious institutions. As Vineeta Sinha rightly points out:

.... the growth of new solidarities among widely scattered religious communities is possible through new forms of technology and communication. The internet is creatively appropriated by communities of the diaspora in the service of religion. This is as true for traditional religions as it is for new religious movements. Cyberspace allows individuals with similar religious sensibilities and sentiments, otherwise globally scattered, to find each other and build a renewed and often heightened religious consciousness and identity (2007: 101).

According to Avtar Brah (1996), 'home' "is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination; it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of 'origin'. It is also the lived experience of a locality. Its sounds and smells, its heat and dust, balmy summer evenings, or the excitement of the first snowfall, shivering winter evenings, sombre grey skies in the middle of the day...all this, as mediated by the historically specific every day of social relations" (188-189). However, 'Home' does not connect them "with any one location, but rather with a space filled with different local and transnational references" (Sackmann, 2003: 8). According to Makarand Paranjape, "a homeland can be anything; a nation, a region, a linguistic area located in South Asia or a language, ethnic, or religious group originally from South Asia or a combination of both... Homelands and diasporas are structurally interdependent as homelands give rise to diasporas; diasporas also can create homelands and, thus, identity" (2001: 162). Collective identities are created and recreated in social processes of communication, cultural transmission and contestation, and their existence and character cannot be separated from these processes. Many group culture or national culture that is not necessarily

part of collective identity, for instance, stocks of knowledge, many values and norms with no specific relation to the life of a particular community, patterns of individual identity, elements of expressive or aesthetic culture: music, literature etc. which may not carry meanings that relate specifically to the community. Some of these elements are shared with other communities, and some may be special. The composition of the whole cultural repertoire and its patterns of distribution among the membership make up the cultural profile, the peculiar cultural character of a group (Sackmann, 2003). The distinct strands of their lives merge to create a new type of culture or a hybrid culture.

Religion functions to form and preserve personal and group identity (Williams, 2007a: 144). There emerges new appropriated forms of festivals and new places of worship, especially when one is away from the homeland, which creates a commodified appropriated religious performances and rituals. According to Joanne Punzo Waghorne (2014), London has temples that Tamilians and other South Indian people patronise, for instance, *Highgate Hill Murugan*, *Ganapathy of Wimbledon*, *East Ham Murugan*, *Mahalakshmi*, *Mariyamman of Tooting*, *Rajarajeswari Amman of Stoneleigh*, and *Kanaga Thurkkai Amma of Ealing* etc.

...Hindu sacred spaces are composed and ‘made’ in the public domain, in structures denoted as ‘temples,’ and ‘shrines’ as well as the historical emergence of bhakti and puja and their manifestation through domestic Hindu spaces and practices (Sinha, 2011: 69).

East is always believed to be a very pure cultured world, and West as a very modern, hybrid world. We live in an age of globalization, where everything is modernised and hybrid. However, we are all obsessed with authenticity. So, diasporas are in a run to achieve this authenticity and naturality. In this process, cultures are marketed outside for ‘making’ and ‘placing’ the diasporas in place. In such a situation, cultures are seen as commodities and moulded to hybrid cultures as the art form

undergoes cultural appropriation. It has then changed substantially, incorporating new trends to awe the Non-Resident Keralites (NRKs) and the foreigners along with its tribal characteristics. The art forms are sent to perform for the diasporas where it is less sacred as a performing religion, and when performed on the stages, they are totally unsacred. The essence, meanings, contexts, history of ritualistic art forms like *Theyyam* is very seldom carried along with the performers overseas, and when performed on the stages, they become a mere object to be performed for money.

The thesis tries to bring forth how, as a result of globalization, there is not only the free flow of capitalism, goods or nation-state but also rituals and traditions. This flow of traditions and rituals, adapting more of traditions, adding and subtracting them, led to the commodification of traditions and rituals. The thesis would focus on all these aspects, particularly of *Theyyam*, the North Kerala ritualistic art form which is slightly appropriated in a foreign land to feel at home for the diaspora and purely drained out of its sacredness when performed on a stage, further making into pop culture. *Theyyam* is believed to be much more than a mere ritualistic dance art, and the thesis would clarify the same aspect of how and why *Theyyam* loses its autonomy and essence when performed on stages and outside the native land.

***Theyyam* and Cultural Appropriation**

Migration is a natural phenomenon and is a part of the evolution of societies and cultures. It is a movement of living beings from one place to another. People move from one place to another for various reasons. It can be due to pull factors as well as push factors. People more often move to earn a better fortune, better education, a better job or for better standards of living.

Migrants are imagined to be groups with special preferential social relationships, with a collective identity, with a different culture. Immigrants are perceived as groups of people who are culturally different. Immigrants perceive themselves as members of some social category with unequal status. This might become one particular element of collective identity (Sackmann, 2003: 2).

To create a collective identity and a sense of belonging, migrants often try to plant the rituals and traditions in the new land. *Theyyams* go abroad, and there is marketing of cultural-specific folk-art forms in the foreign land, and the sacredness is partially erased while performing in the diaspora and completely erased when performed as a dance form on stages.

Theyyam is a popular ritual dance form in North Kerala, especially in the Kannur and Kasargod districts of Kerala state in India. *Theyyam*, or the ‘other God’, is a combination of dance, music and religious worship. There are about 400 *Theyyams* and many of these *Theyyams* are being sent to the diasporas like Singapore, Malaysia, France, Poland, South Korea, Germany, Muscat etc. The performance of *Theyyam* outside its homeland is very recent.

The word *Theyyam* is evolved from the word ‘*Daivam*’, which means God in Malayalam¹. According to Damodaran (2009), *Theyyam* is ascribed as ‘Devil Dance’ by foreigners, whereas in the homeland, it is believed to be the divine lord who has metamorphosed himself from the dancer to the deity during the performance. It is the earliest form of human worship to the man who transforms himself into god. *Theyyams* are not the ‘Brahmanic’ or *savarna*² gods that Hindus worship in temples, but they were the real people of flesh and blood of ancient village of Kerala who had sacrificed their life for the sake of the villagers and had raised their voice against the then

¹ The language of Kerala.

² Term used for the elite upper classes in Kerala.

landlords of Malabar³ and were beaten up or killed or driven from the village by the upper castes. The legend of *Theyyam* is told in the long narrative called *thottam*⁴ during the performance. *Kathivannur Veeran*, a very vibrant *Theyyam*, was a common man called *Magattu Manappan* who had in the past sacrificed himself and emerged as a divine figure for his sacrifice by the villagers of Kannur. He had fought in various warfares and had married outside his caste to a very lower caste woman despite many objections from the landlords. He was the first one who married outside his caste, breaking the caste system. *Kudalithara Kunjiraman (Kurikkal Theyyam)* and *Muchilottu Bhagavathi* are other *Theyyams* of these sorts. *Muchilottu Bhagavathi*, who had vast knowledge in all subjects despite being a Dalit and a woman, is said to have killed by the then landlords of Malabar. Such details would be further discussed in chapter two, giving a more comprehensive picture of the same.

There are four stages of performances in *Theyyam*. The initial stage is called *Thudangal*⁵, where *thottams* are sung usually by the drummers. The performer does not wear any makeup except for a small headdress at this stage. The second stage is called the *Vellattam*⁶, and after a brief interlude,

³ Malabar was the name of the district in Madras Presidency during British rule. Today it comprises districts of Kasargod, Kannur, the Mananthavady taluk of Wayanad district, Koyilandy and Vatakara taluks in the Kozhikode district of Kerala and the entire Mahé Sub-Division of the Union Territory of Puducherry.

⁴ Narratives accompanied by songs related to the deity which includes myths and legends of the particular deity. They are similar to invocations with the background narrative integrated with directions for performance. According to Shrihari Nair (2002), the term is derived from the Sanskrit word *Stotram* which means prayer. The vocabulary of the songs varies from archaic Malayalam, Tamil and Sanskrit and these *thottams* have a significant contribution to Malayalam folk literature.

⁵ *Thudangal* means the beginning of the *Theyyam* ritual with the invocation of deity. *Thudangal* begins when the person in the *kavu* maintaining abstinence takes five betal leaves, areca nuts, rolled tiny cloths to be lighted each along with turmeric powder, few rice and places them on a plantain leaf with 5 wicks. The wicks are then used to light and the plantain leaf and the things placed on it is given to the performer which indicates that the divine power of the deity in the *kavu* is transferred through the plantain leaf where all the divine power has been captured, stored and then restored in the performer. It is through *Thudangal* the power of the deity first gets in to the performer with the legendary ballads sung in the background.

⁶ *Vellattam* stage has certain rituals and is always performed with facial makeup and no elaborate headgear or body dress ups by the *Theyyam* performer. He is accompanied with his accomplices who sing *thottam* and play instruments along with him.

he appears in an elegant costume and heavy facial makeup called *Mukhathezhutu*. Then the headdress is put on the performer when he is seated in front of the shrine. *Vellattam* is not performed in the case of certain *Theyyams* where the *thottam* is very long. The third stage is called the *Mukhadarshanam*- 'seeing of the face'. At this moment, the performer becomes the deity as he sees the small mirror held in his hand. It is not the case of possession, but the performer loses his physical identity in its frenzied trance. His eyes widen with the image of the transformed divine figure in the mirror, and a very dynamic *Theyyam* comes with an elegant speedy motion in front of the worshippers to dance, and the latter gives *prasadam*⁷. This stage is called *Kurikodukal*. *Theyyam*, at this moment, hears the worshippers about their problems in life or disputes. Each *Theyyam* has its unique style of performance and style of outfits and the *thottam* that is sung. *Theyyams* are usually performed in front of *kavus*⁸ or ancestral houses, open to all flora and fauna and all strata of people in the respective villages. They are done to bring prosperity, the well-being of the family or the village, or prevent some disease or ailments. Unlike the *savarna* gods in the temples, these *Theyyams* are non-vegetarians and can eat fried fish and meat during certain rituals in their performance. So, this is a different kind of god worshipped by the locals of Kannur, unlike the mainstream *savarna* gods.

Before the performance, the artist undergoes much preparation, which involves fasting and prayers for around forty days, twenty-one days or three to seven days which may vary for each *Theyyam*.

⁷ Religious offerings which may include sweets, flowers, fruits etc. In Hindu rituals, the religious rituals end with giving away of offerings by the temple priest or members of the family if happening in a house which are usually sweets, fruits, flowers, sandal paste etc. In case of *Theyyam*, the *Theyyam* performer as a metamorphosed deity gives away offerings and blessings to the worshippers which is a turmeric powder to be smeared on the forehead.

⁸ *Kavu* are sacred groves or shrines in the villages that are mostly found in Malabar where local deities reside. *Kavus* are different from temples which is a seat for Brahmanic gods whereas in *kavu* various *Theyyam* deities are prayed. These are very small roofed shrines without elaborate ornamentation. *Theyyams* are performed in front of these *kavus*. There are various *Sarpa* (snake) *Kavu* found in Kerala.

The performances are sometimes very dangerous as they put their life at risk. They are surrounded by burning wicks tied around their waist, as in *Puthiya Bhagavathi* and exposed to burning heat for more than four hours. Some *Theyyams* throw themselves on the heap of fire embers. So, adequate practice and self-control are essential for a *Theyyam* performer. They are required to distribute their weight to different parts of the body and are given tough training in *Kalaripayattu* ‘martial art’ of Kerala, a unique blend of physical, mental, and spiritual practices. *Theyyams* do not resemble each other, and mastery over the *thottam* and dance is mandatory for the performers.

All these show the uniqueness in ordinary villagers’ lives where all sections, class and caste people come to watch the performances and get blessings, though the lower caste people perform it. It represents the agriculturally based commoner’s life in Malabar, where *Theyyam* and *kavu* reflect their life. *Kavu* is a small shrine of worship that belongs to a particular family, caste or village and *Theyyams* are performed in the *kavu*, unlike in temples where the arts like *Mohiniattam*, *Kathakali*, and *Bharatanatyam* have been performed. *Kavu* is not as sophisticated and big as the temples, nor do they belong to the Brahmins. Countless numbers of deities are worshipped in *kavu*. The chief person in charge of a *kavu* is called *uralanmar*, which means those who rule the *uru* (village). Each community has its *kavu* and its *uralan*. They discuss all matters regarding the community. *Kavu* is usually found where there are trees⁹ (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020).

Theyyam rituals are held in such high esteem that each portion is specialised and performed by people chosen and recognised by the community. The shrines of folk-gods and goddesses of each community have their own traditional priests and officials hailing exclusively from that particular community. The officiating person at *kottam*, *kalari*, *kalakam* or *mundya* (other names for *kavu*)

⁹ In South Kerala, *kavu* is normally associated with snakes (Sita, 1996).

is known as *Tantri* or *Karmi/ Kalyatantri/ Kundiyan*. *Kolakaran/ Koladhari* is the one who performs the *Theyyam*, the one who dons the *kola/kolam*¹⁰. The drummer is known by the title *thudikaran* or *chendakaran*. The one who holds the light is known as *muchuttukaran* (Marar, 2010). The place where the deity resides is called *Stanam*¹¹, where *Theyyams* are performed.

“There are also *Mappila* (Muslim *Theyyams*) like *Mappila Chamundi*, *Aali Theyyam*, *Mukri Poker Theyyam* and *Ummachi Theyyam*, who performs with the Hindu *Theyyams*. This depicts the communal harmony prevailing in the village folks, but when sent overseas, the troupes are purely caste-based. *Theyyams* now quits the fasts and prayers and enter into professional *Theyyams* who are toured and marketed outside by various agents” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 5). Now the art form is a mark of luxury, often sent to perform at various associations and club programs in the diaspora and perform for various stage programs from purely sacred performances of villages to less sacred in diaspora and purely commodified performances on stages. *Theyyam* performances can be divided into three levels 1) village level (very sacred), 2) at the diaspora (less sacred and less commodified) 3) on stages as mere dances (purely commodified). The Little Tradition passing on to Great Tradition and what I have termed ‘Appropriated’ Tradition is the primary argument in the thesis.

Representations and values through these art forms are not the same in the diaspora. When performed away from native places, it is often devoid of important ritual, costumes and materials attached to the performance, and the whole performances, including all levels, lasts for only two hours in the diaspora and five to ten minutes on stage events, paving its way in making Little

¹⁰*Kola/Kolam* is the heroic character or deity the *Theyyam* performer represents.

¹¹ The auspicious space where the *Theyyams* are to be performed. A place of worship, where the deity is propitiated through *Theyyam* festival. This is a small structure of wood or stone with a small entrance.

Tradition into Great Tradition and then to Appropriated Tradition. It is not a single man's performance; "it is the performance of a group, but they are just weird and demonic tales for the West and criticised for being superstitious, cynical, devoid of morality and ethics" (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 6) without knowing the essence of it when showcased on stages makes it an Appropriated Tradition out of a very scared Little Tradition.

In the native, the shrine dominates over the stage, whereas in the diaspora and stage performances, the stage dominates over the shrine that they construct. Various agencies appropriate them: the government institutions, the tourism, fashion and advertising industries, media, academia, intellectuals, political parties, cultural organisations etc., and silences the culture of the native land (Mannarakkal, 2012).

During the colonial period, *Theyyam* faced criticism from both foreign and native. *Theyyam* were considered as a barbaric ritual filled with superstition. It faced criticism from the English East India Company and there was also a ban on *Theyyam* which was only partially observed. This ban was removed in the 1900s due to various reasons. The colonial administrators and other officials of the British empire in India condemned *Theyyam* (Anurag, 2017:40).

According to Anurag (2017, 41), *Theyyam* was looked upon as an evil cult by many until the 20th century as imposed by the West. With the emerging educational institutions and modern thought and education, *Theyyam* was seen as outdated and superstitious when some rituals of *Theyyam* had cock sacrifice. These educated people tried to reform such rituals, which was also a revolt against the Brahminicized Hindu religion.

In the 1960s and 70s, *Theyyam* Kolams were introduced as part of left-wing rallies. In the 1980s, *Theyyam* was first performed outside the Kavu on a stage as part of entertainment in a left-wing organized meeting. In 1968, *Theyyam* Kolams appeared during a stage show organized by the Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Academy. The academy organized the first seminar on *Theyyam* in 1977 and

published the first books on *Theyyam* in 1978. In the 1990s, *Theyyams* started to appear as part of temple festivals across the state. The left-wing parties aimed to separate *Theyyam* from its caste context (Anurag, 2017: 41).

Performing *Theyyam* in a foreign land is not just a simple act of crossing land or sea to another but also taking away “the essence of the cultural-specific art form. It becomes just a puppet show with no *kavu*, *karmi*¹², *chendakaran*¹³, ancestral house or village folks” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 14). Even though the ambience can be created like the village in the host land, they cannot construct a *kavu* or an ancestral house where it can be performed. Instead, *Theyyams* are performed in diaspora and on stages to awe the viewers without knowing the context of the specific art form. “Thus, *Theyyam* becomes only a dance form to be performed according to the interest of the foreign settlers and this transition of *Theyyam* involves abandoning one’s social and cultural setting and entering and inculcating a new one” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 14).

The social system that has kept the *Theyyam* artists bonded and submissive has made their way in the general marketing of cultural goods. *Theyyams* are thus packaged, customised and fetishised into a cafeteria format to cater to the customer’s demands, where the performers trade their spirituality and culture for money. Miniature versions of *Theyyam* are produced on demand without any restrictions of time and space. The structural effect of this process is that *Theyyam* loses its ritualistic anchorage and is made into an exotic spectacle that could be performed by anyone at anytime and anywhere (Mannarakkal, 2012).

In these shifts from village cult to regional or national heritage, and to theatrical performances abroad, drastic changes are operated by these mediators, not only in scale but in the very nature and meaning of

¹² The priest who does the rituals in the *kavu* during *Theyyam*.

¹³ Drummer of *Theyyam* performance. He accompanies *Theyyam* during the performance and plays a major role in the vibrant movement of the *Theyyam* performer with his drum beats.

what is performed: the power of a particular deity is no more the issue, while traditions of artistry are extolled at the cost of a complete reconfiguration of the practice itself. Such a transformation has often been termed ‘commodification’ (Tarabout, 2005: 200).

Importance of the Study

The study on *Theyyam* is of great interest which involves various socio-religious aspects of the northern part of Kerala. There are various socio-cultural and economic dimensions of this art form. No doubt, this art form has influenced the life and culture of North Kerala and has a lot to tell about the same. In the age of globalization with the flow of religiousness, there has been a ‘home’ made for the diasporas and through such traditions reaching out there, but it has at the same time made the folk-art forms meaningless and mere objects to be sold. Though several studies have been done on *Theyyam*, very few, have focused on how this art form is appropriated in the diaspora. Since this art form includes several socio-religious aspects and is not a mere art form to be performed to get applause, this study is of great importance.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the present thesis are:

- To examine how globalization has led to the flow of religious traditions like *Theyyams* to the diasporas.
- To examine the commodification of *Theyyams* and refashioning of *Theyyam* performances in the Indian diaspora.

- To identify the struggles that the *Theyyam* performers face while performing in the diaspora.
- To examine the mythological and spiritual aura created for the *Theyyam* when performed outside the homeland and how new religious spaces are constructed in the diaspora.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks for the thesis have been derived from various social science perspectives, especially from the interdisciplinary studies of religion and globalization by Peter Beyer; religion and diaspora by Steven Vertovec; religion and transnationalism by John R. Hinnells; and religion and commodification by Pattana Kitiarsa. Besides, it also derives from sociological theories of Functionalism by Talcott Parsons, and Alan Dundes and Krishna Iyer's study of Folklore and Myth. The thesis also looks at how *Theyyams* are performed at various stages- Little Tradition (very scared), Great Tradition (less scared) and purely commodified traditions which I call Appropriated Tradition.

Religion and Globalization

Religion is an integral aspect of globalization. "With globalization, the global includes its defining polar opposite, the local, such that when religion appears as the local, it is thereby also global, or better glocal" (Beyer, 2007: 98). The theoretical framework for this study is derived from Peter Beyer's *Religion and Globalization*, where he says that "the global system corrodes inherited or constructed cultural and personal identities; yet also encourages the creation and revitalization of particular identities as a way of gaining control over systematic power" (1994: 3) through which religion leads in the development, elaboration and problematization of the global system.

According to Berger, religion is “the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established” (1969: 26), which is distinct from the mundane and helps human beings cope with the crisis of existence. The sacred, according to Berger, means;

quality of mysterious and awesome power, other than man and yet related to him, which is believed to reside in certain objects of experience. The sacred does not necessarily exist on different cultural and cosmological platforms, separated from the mundane routines of everyday life. It is only ‘sticking out’ of ordinary occurrences. Activity, experience, or thing become sacred when they are ‘convinced of as being infused in one way or another with sacred power’ (Berger, 1969: 27, as cited in Kitiarsa 2008: 2)

Scholars such as Marshall McLuhan, while opines that globalization leads to the formation of a ‘global village’ (1964), Roland Robertson going with the same opinion, thinks of becoming “a single place” (1987: 43). According to Robertson (1992), globalization works with the binaries of utopian promise and dystopian menace, especially the spatial distinction between the global and local, centre to the periphery or between universal and particular.

Peter Beyer in ‘Globalization and Glocalization’ argues that,

While modernization excluded various ‘others’ that were deemed either pre- modern/ traditional or only on the way to modernization, globalization includes us all, even our ‘others’. Modernization temporalized its universalism: eventually all would/ could become modern. Globalization spatializes it: the local has to come to terms with the global. It (re)constitutes itself in the way that it does this. The reverse side of this mutual relation is that the global cannot be global except as plural versions of the local. Hence globalization is always also glocalization (2007: 98).

In such a context, “traditional religions that are very closely tied to particular cultures express the wholeness of societies. So, if particular cultures are to survive in altered form in the modern global

context, the religious traditions associated with them will also survive but facing serious challenges of relativization” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 6).

Globalization is a result of modernization. Globalization leads to the relativization of personal and group identities. For Beyer, “the religious dimension of globalization points to another basic probability: to reorient a religious tradition towards the global whole and away from the particular culture with which that tradition identified itself with the past” (1994: 10).

Religion and Diaspora

Diaspora religion is “the religion of any people who have a sense of living away from the land of the religion, or away from ‘the old country’” (Hinnells 1997a: 686, as cited in Vertovec, 2000:10).

Diaspora has arisen as part of the postmodern project of resisting the nation-state, which is perceived as hegemonic, discriminatory and culturally homogenizing. The alternative agenda – now often associated with the notion of diaspora – advocates the recognition of hybridity, multiple identities and affiliations with people, causes and traditions outside the nation-state of residence (Vertovec, 2000: 5).

“Religion and diaspora are connected through the assumption that migration means diaspora, migrants practice religion, and therefore diaspora implicates religion” (Gerrie ter Haar 1998, as cited in Vertovec, 2000).

According to Steven Vertovec (2000), apart from the common features of the diaspora which Safran (1991) had put forward, “diasporas have a triadic relationship between 1) collectively self-identified ethnic group in one particular setting, 2) the group’s co-ethnics in other parts of the world, and (3) the homeland states or local contexts whence they or their forebears came”.

Diasporas take their religion wherever they migrate to feel at home and to create their communities. They travel and settle down with religious traditions, practices and beliefs with them. The

diasporas thus spread their traditions with them as they migrate and settle. With their religious views and beliefs, the communities establish religious, socio-cultural, commercial organisations and practices. Those belonging to the same place of origin, caste and religious group forms a family, maintaining transnational links with distant relatives and global religious networks. However, at the same time, the immigrants have reappropriated and reconstructed new traditions and practices according to the new space. Immigrants, when settling in a new environment, tend to organize collectively various religious organisations to revitalize faith. They remember the past through replication of old ethnic-religious community in a new setting. Diasporas maintain a religious relationship with their spiritual homeland. In this struggle for religious belonging and cultural reproduction, many practices and traditions are often modified according to the new migration settings and new generational trends. Religious identities are refashioned and adopted in a slightly new form, or rites and rituals are invented with regard to the new social space. Many rites are remodelled to appeal to the diaspora-born young generation to form a collective religious identity.

Steven Vertovec (2000) discusses if religions can be diasporas. He explains religions at best as posing phenomena ‘cognate’ to diasporas as religions often span more than one ethnic group spread worldwide, and religions usually do not seek to return to or recreate a homeland. Religions do not constitute diasporas themselves, but they bind a diasporic consciousness. He puts forward that the study of diasporas and religion is important because, firstly, it gives us insights into general patterns of religious transformation. Secondly, diasporas might affect the development of religion in the homeland: the wealth, education and exposure to foreign influences transferred from diaspora might significantly affect organisation, practices, belief etc. Thirdly, the significant incidence of diasporas in the modern world results in multiethnicity.

Religion and Transnationalism

Transnationalism is referred to the various trades and transactions that migrants create and maintain between their homeland and their hostland. With global capitalism, there is increased interest in people to lead transnational life. They are rooted in various nation-states and get to know and connect to various people and their trade. However, when these people move, they take their social and cultural histories with them, which are a part of them and forms their identities.

Religion in the new world is being reconstructed. Religion plays a central role in forming ethnic group identity, and the families strive to reproduce cultures in a new context. The networks are not only between the old and the new country but between all the new countries. Ethnicity is thus transformed, reconstructed in the diaspora, and diasporic members became aware of multiple dimensions to their identity, and different aspects are emphasized in different contexts (Hinnells 2007).

... there are commonalities in the patterns of South Asian religions experiencing reconstruction in the move from the old to the new country, as they make the 'there and then', 'here and now', as they seek to pass on knowledge and understanding from one generation to another. Furthermore, as the various religions become transnational what happens in one country impact other countries (Hinnells 2007: 2).

Religion forms and preserves the personal and group identity of the immigrants because it is the force that provides a transcendent grounding for identity. There is always an attempt to bring about a new cultural and religious space that interacts with the new space with new forms. According to Geaves, with this, there is also a loss of richness and diversity that generations of tradition have established as part of the religion (2007:25).

Social and religious groups construct complex boundaries of language, rituals and codes that create identities for both groups and individuals. Religion becomes an important maker of identity, but not the only one. Immigrants must be adept at integrating elements of several identities and using them to their best advantage in different social settings, both in the native place and in the new place of residence. (Williams 2007a: 144).

Rapid mobility and electronic communication create transnational families and religious groups and call for a new transnational approach to the study of migration, which according to Glick Shiller (1992: 1- 24), studies migrants “who develop and maintain multiple relations- familial, economic, social, organizational, religious and political- that span borders... and take actions, make decisions, feel concerns, and develop identities within social networks that connect them to two or more societies simultaneously” (as cited in Williams 2007a: 144- 147).

Social networks and religious networks are developed and maintained with transnationalism. Immigrants with transnational relations maintained forming several identities, and they are often expressed during religious gatherings. Immigrants are mostly insecure about being in a land that is not theirs due to various uncertainties in the global economy and future immigration policies. This forces them to develop various options in maintaining more than one setting of their own. According to Schiller et al. (1992: 112), one way to do this is to use the “wealth, social ties, and status gained in one location to develop status and capital in another” (as cited in Williams 2007a: 150), both to make their own place secure and to enable family members to move to the most promising location.

Religion and Commodification

According to The Oxford English Dictionary (1989), the term commodification was coined and used in the English- speaking world only in the mid 1970 despite its linguistic forbear of

commodity having existed since the fifteenth century. Commodification is defined as “the action of turning something into, or treating something as, a (mere) commodity; commercialization an activity, and so on, that is not by nature commercial” (OED: 563). The objects within this market-oriented process when the term was first introduced include art works, labour, land and healthcare (Strasser 2003: 7-8, as cited in Kitiarsa: 2008: 7).

The phrase ‘...not by nature commercial’ means that commodified goods, activities, or services that are not originally or usually conventional ‘stuff’ in the consumer market are now commodified. Doing such commodification and selling them as a commodity is not accepted culturally and traditionally and can be viewed as valueless and against the rule. Such an activity of selling religion which is ‘not by nature commercial’, can never be justified even if it happens in a new environment or in the intensively postmodern cultural contexts (Bauman 1998 and Lyon 2000, as cited in Kitiarsa: 2008: 7). “With such ‘not by nature commercial’, these commodification processes have transformed the key symbols and potent artefacts of Asian religions into economic goods and objects of religious desire in the market of faiths. The religious commodifications have operated in the market that has rapidly manifested itself in a burgeoning ‘symbolic economy’ of spectacular monuments and ‘global economies of charisma’” (Kitiarsa: 2008: 7-8).

Commodification turns religion into a marketable commodity that goes through a process of market transactions. Selling religion thus becomes selling of the sacred.

Religious commodifications are complex historical and cultural constructions, notwithstanding their obvious commercial features. They are produced in specific cultural contexts, and thus, require an understanding of cultural frameworks in order to unlock their symbolic and socio-economic significance. Commodifying processes are highly inventive and specifically embedded in the local-global trajectories of the market economy and post-modern religious explosions. Religious

commodifications do not necessarily lead to religious malaise or produce new religious forms and movements that oppose the institutionalized beliefs and practices of religions organizations (Kitiarsa: 2008: 1).

According to Berger (1999: 2), “modernization necessarily leads to the decline of religion, both in society and in the minds of individuals” (as cited in Kitiarsa: 2008). Berger also opines that modernity makes a ‘homeless mind’ by undermining all comfortable assumptions about the world by uprooting us mentally and physically (Berger 1973, as cited in Weller 2008: 17). With the society being modernized day by day with modern technology and higher literacy, “people tend to be enchanted or re-enchanted by their committed faiths” (Kitiarsa: 2008: 4). Religion thus has become a consumer commodity to be sold to any place.

‘Religionization’ creates more than ever the intimate processes in which religious meanings and their sacred aura have become commodities being manufactured, exchanged and consumed through the market mechanisms (Kitiarsa: 2008: 7).

Little Tradition and Great Tradition

Robert Redfield studied Little Tradition and Great Tradition in the 20th century to describe the cultural practices of peasant societies. According to him, the whole tradition does not remain constant; it keeps changing. He brings forth the terms ‘Little’ Tradition and ‘Great’ Tradition according to the behaviour of the traditions. Little tradition is the indigenous, internal traditions of the village, folks and peasants living in the rural which are in its pure form whereas Great tradition is the traditions of the elite, urban people whom Redfield calls ‘reflective few’ who make it a bit modified from its purest form. He says both traditions are interlinked and continuously interact with each other, making the tradition change and grow continually.

McKim Marriot and Milton Singer have followed this research Robert Redfield have taken up. According to them, Little tradition is the local customs, rites, rituals, dialects and Great tradition are the legitimate form of all these. McKim Marriot further found that when the 'Little' tradition and 'Great' tradition interact with each other, there are upward movement and downward movement. Marriot calls it 'Universalization' when there is a movement of 'Little' tradition upward and 'Parochialisation' when there is a movement of 'Great' tradition downwards.

I have further used the third form of tradition derived from the Grounded theory method, which is called 'Appropriated' Tradition after the 'Little' and 'Great' Tradition, which will be explained further in the final chapter.

Functionalism by Talcott Parsons

According to Talcott Parsons, every social system has a function to perform. The structural parts of society coordinate with each other just like a human body where institutions in society work like human organs, interdependent on each other. These social institutions make society work with social stability and continuity. Through socialisation, the individual achieves social cohesion and social control. Talcott Parsons combines both micro and macro and gives importance to both of them, unlike early Functionalists.

Just like various social institutions, for instance, family, education, marriage have a function to perform, the function of religion is to help society in dealing with their emotional stress, social stability, social integration occurring at various crises in their lives. Various beliefs and rituals in religions comfort the bereaved, and people as a society associated with the beliefs and rituals lead to a feeling of Cathartic (Catharsis), promoting social solidarity and social stability.

Aristotle uses Catharsis in his *Poetics* in his definition of tragedy which means purgation or letting out of any emotions. According to Aristotle, watching a tragic play will help people release emotions from negative feelings like pity, fear and anger. It is derived from the Greek word catharsis, which means ‘cleansing or purging’ which would help an individual and a society. Sigmund Freud was the first psychoanalytic theorist to use it as a theory. Talcott Parsons uses the term Cathartic derived from Catharsis in his study on Functionalism.

Rituals are a medium of social interaction. Rituals are not similar to religion though religion inculcates many rituals. Rituals are behaviours defined by any section of people. “Another meaning of ritual which is commonly used by psychoanalysts and the like is the non-rational or formalised symbolic behaviour of any kind as distinct from pragmatic, clearly end-directed behaviour that is rationally linked to empirical goals. Here ritual is contrasted to ‘science’ and even to common sense. Religious rituals are equated with neurotic compulsions and its symbols to psychological complexes or genetically linked archetypes” (Pallath, 1995: 9). This is very similar to the trance state of *Theyyam*; it transforms during the performance. This behaviour has no explanation in ‘science’ and even in common sense. These ritual acts have a significant role in imparting values and emotions, a collective conscious making them a unifying community. The ritual indeed acts as a strong emotive force leading to Catharsis.

Parsons talks about pattern variables where a traditional, macro-oriented society has Diffuseness in terms of its interaction with people, Affectivity and Particularism in contrast to a modern, micro-oriented society with Specificity, Affective Neutrality and Universalism. This can be seen in the traditional folk rituals of villages and the modern appropriated folk rituals in the diaspora and stage performances.

Folklore and Myth:

Folklore is the linking factors for the people in the diaspora through which they reconnect to their homeland. According to Alan Dundes, the term 'folk' refers to any group of people who share at least one common factor. The linking factor could be a common occupation, language, or religion but what is essential is that a group formed for whatever reason will have some traditions which it calls its own. In theory, a group must consist of at least two persons, but generally, most groups consist of many individuals. A group member may not know all other members, but he will probably know the common core of traditions belonging to the group, traditions that help the group have a sense of group identity (Dundes, 1965).

Although folklore is probably as old as mankind, the term 'folklore' is of comparatively recent origin. The term originated in the work of Grimm brothers in 'household tales in 1812.' Later by William Thoms in 1846 where he defined folklore, manners, customs, observances, superstitions, ballads, proverbs and so forth. During the middle and later portions of the nineteenth century, however, the discipline of folklore as it has developed in the twentieth century began to appear. The increasing awareness of folklore was closely associated with the nineteenth-century intellectual currents of romanticism. (Dundes, 1965:4)

Folklore is the lore of the people. Folklore is a part of the culture but does not form the whole culture. It is carried on by tradition through one generation to the other orally, by rituals and practice like folktales, folksongs, riddles, proverbs etc. Folklore is an integral part of culture as there is no culture without folklore.

It may be that in studying 'preliterate' cultures, subcultures, and dominant cultures we may find that the function of folk literature varies. In the dominant culture folklore, whether revived or surviving, has a nostalgic role (though nostalgia is a function). In the subculture the connection between actual belief in

the superstition and its persistence in folk literature is closer. In the true 'primitive' culture (though one without acculturation from neighbor or colonial is nowadays hard to find) folk literature is probably a more integral part of the isolated ethnic pattern... (Dundes 1965: 21).

Major concerns of folklore are:

1. The social context of folklore
2. The relations of folklore to culture
3. The functions of folklore

There is only a fine line of difference between mythology and folklore. All folklores have mythology with them.

In former times, mythology and history were closely mingled, and many of the speculations of natural form have been embodied in mythical form. The body of myths making up tribal mythology contains accounts of creations, tales about gods and heroes, moral precepts, etc. Tribal mythologies show more or less individuality in form and incident. Otherwise, they are generally similar. In subject matter, they generally resemble each other in recounting the exploits of culture heroes and in the predominance of animal stories, the animals in most cases being endowed with human traits (Iyer, 1968: 154).

Myths are stories that are true or false that form a ritual based on mythology or vice-versa. Some myths do not involve a ritual but are passed orally. Ritual based myths are always religious. Myths are believed to teach a moral being of society through rituals and practices. With scientific advances, myths are negated as superstition.

Myths are thought fossils which teach us, in allegories and symbols, the story of ancient cultures and civilizations and of the attempt of primitive man to solve various human problems. As reason and science advance, myths lose much of their religious and dogmatic character, but are not discarded entirely as futile. It seems safe to conclude that myths include both facts and fiction. Every Indian cave and temple,

and idols and frescoes will bear testimony to the extent Indian mythology has influenced art (Iyer, 1968: 155).

Methodology

The study is qualitative in nature. Primary data and secondary data are used for this study. As the study of *Theyyam* is a social and religious art, more primary sources are focused. Informal interviews and indepth interviews are taken for the study. A list of 25 questions was prepared to which both open-ended and close-ended questions were included in the interview schedule. The data for this ethnographic study is derived through the help of snowball sampling, observation and indepth interviews. People connected with *Theyyams* and *kavus* were of great help in collecting knowledge on this art form.

Methods of Data Collection

The Grounded theory is a generation of a theory grounded in data and then developed from data by systematically collecting and analysing data. Thus, the already ‘grounded’ theory is analysed with the data collected. This theory usually begins with a question or data from qualitative research. This is an inductive methodology that follows collection of data, synthesizing and analysing it, and then conceptualizing qualitative data aimed at theory development. The data is conceptualized rather than the real data according to the hypothesis that is formed. Common methods of Grounded theory are Participant Observation, Interviewing and Collection of Artifacts and Texts.

Ethnography

Ethnography is basically studying a culture. Ethnographic research is a qualitative research where the researcher involves in large groups of people to observe and interact with them to understand that particular group and their social practices. It is a way to study people's lives. Ethnography can have two perspectives: Emic and Etic. Emic is considering a native's point of view of a particular culture. They look in to the study through the communities' point of view rather than applying theoretical study. Etic perspective looks at the culture through theoretical framework to the study. A researcher mostly includes both perspectives to the study. This study used ethnographic research where I had to involve both Emic and Etic perspectives to understand what is performer's point of view and then analysing it with the theoretical framework.

Observation

Theyyam happens usually in the Malayalam month of *Thulam- Edavam*, (September to May) every year. But the frequent performances happen from December to February. They do not mostly happen in the rainy seasons. *Theyyams* are observed from my childhood, being very much awed by it, but a close observation has been done for three years during my research period whenever *Theyyam* happened in the nearby *kavu* or shrines. The different stages in the performance have been observed. Also, the *kavu* and the people associated with the performances have been taken care of. A close observation on the makeup and the attire has been looked upon to know about the subject more. The photographs of the *Theyyam* in the native land has been taken to show the performances of the *Theyyam* in the native land with villagers all around. The colloquial terms for each material they wear on their head and body for *Theyyam* performance have been noted. Makeup has been closely observed when I got an opportunity to visit two makeup artists of *Theyyam*. One was a performer and a makeup artist. The makeup on the face figures they make to

sell has been observed very well. None of the respondents owned a big house with all facilities. They were straightforward people, who were daily labourers and donning *Theyyam* was their primary profession when its season comes.

Indepth Interview

The interviews were direct interviews, and questions were directly asked to the respondents. The respondents were asked to fill the questions asked in a paper, and others were directly asked. The questions, as mentioned before, were both open-ended and close-ended. Twenty *Theyyam* performers, including the ones whose relative had performed overseas, were interviewed. The data was written down on a paper and recorded in the phone recorder at the same time. The photographers of the respondents were taken. The photographs and certificates of their performances abroad were collected as evidence. The performers had also shown the passports of their travel abroad unhesitant. The respondents except one or two were quite happy and privileged being interviewed and photos being taken. They had welcomed with tea and other home-made snacks.

The interviews in total took around three months. It was not done consistently for three months together but with a gap in between. I had contacted various villagers associated with *Theyyam* who could give information about the *Theyyam* artists who performed abroad and on various stages. Tracing them was a little tricky because some lived in a very interior part of the village. Some were very easily accessible. The artists were spread from the areas in *Kannur* to *Pazayangadi*.

Purposive Sampling

Purposive Sampling is a Non-Probability Sampling in which subjects are selected, taking into account the researched area. The subjects selected are based mainly on the research investigation.

The purposive selection of the informants was taken into account by choosing only the *Theyyam* artists who performed in the diaspora and on various stage events outside Kerala. The native land performers were in plenty but were not required as per the study. Interviewing the respondents required during the *Theyyam* season was not a good idea because they would only come to the house day after their performance to sleep and take a bath and get ready to leave in the evening for another performance in the night. Getting their free time for an in-depth interview during the season time was very difficult. Some shied away, saying they are not free, and some very hesitant to give any information. Taking interviews during the *Theyyam* performance and after the performance made the helpers and artists a little annoyed.

Snowball Sampling

Snowball Sampling is a Non- Probability Sampling where a respondent is asked to provide referrals to other study subjects, leading to more respondents, thus rolling like snow. The first step requires identifying someone who meets the criteria for the study and then moving it forward to other subjects for the study. It is also called ‘Chain letter’ or ‘Nominated Sampling’ as one subject nominates the next subject. This sampling is useful when the study subjects are inaccessible or hard to find. The respondents would be few in the beginning and later added more members.

The *Theyyam* performers who performed abroad were not looked at very well by many *kavu* authorities and some villagers as they point them responsible for selling the culture and the ritual that they believe to be only their possession and pride. Thus, finding them was a little difficult because many hesitate to mention others’ names. The *Theyyam*’s caste authorities banned one of the *Theyyam* performers who had donned a particular *Theyyam* for selling it and making it impure in the diaspora. Reaching out to that respondent was challenging, and also, he was not much

interested in responding. Still, it was only through one respondent that I could reach out to the next respondent to form many respondents that could be helpful to my study.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed through qualitative data collected during indepth interviews with the respondents. The data was thoroughly looked upon to gradually analyse the Little Tradition from a purely scared form to a less scared form in the diaspora, making it to Great Tradition and to a wholly commodified form to be performed on stages with passing years. Religion and globalization, religion and diaspora, religion and transnationalism, religion and commodification, Functionalism, Myth and Folklore are the major theories for data analysis. All these elements are looked at, taking religion as the common thread to analyse them. The theories of Peter Beyer, Steven Vertovec, John Hinnells, Pattana Kitiarsa, Talcott Parson, Robert Redfield etc. on religion is looked upon for the analysis.

Reporting

The Reporting is descriptive in style with the help of photographs and other evidence collected during the interviews. As *Theyyam* is an ancient, local art form, there is much colloquial term associated with it. Finding an English equivalent for the vernacular terms which the readers can easily understand was very difficult. Since many Malayalam terms had to be used, a glossary is added at the beginning of the thesis.

For secondary data, articles, newspapers, journals, books, and magazines on Malayalam and English have been used. Materials have been collected from the CDS (Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum) library and Folklore Academy in Chirakkal of Kannur district. IGML library of the University of Hyderabad was of immense help. Besides, the internet is an essential source for secondary data collection.

Limitations of the Study

Theyyam is a very complex art form, and as it involves socio-religious aspects, there are limitations to the study. *Theyyam* artists, in most cases during the fieldwork, hesitate to give all the details about the art form and especially the marketing trends in the diaspora. The exploitation and income they receive are seldom mentioned in any of the *Theyyam* literature. Moreover, there are more than 400 *Theyyams* in North Kerala; hence sampling was a challenge for the researcher, especially to find out who has been to the diaspora and stage events in the foreign land. Also, due to the time limit in submitting the thesis and also due to the lack of financial support to carryout fieldwork in the diaspora, this study mainly relied on *Theyyam* returnees from the diaspora through snowball sampling.

Chapterisation

This thesis includes five chapters. The first chapter is an introduction to my work which focuses on the scope and relevance of the study. It deals with the objectives, importance, methodology, limitations of the study and most important theoretical framework of my thesis. It also has a brief introduction to the *Theyyam* art form and significant aspects of my thesis. The second chapter deals

with a brief history of Kerala, Malabar focusing on Kannur district. This chapter would also detail all the famous folk-art forms of Kannur and Kasargod districts of Kerala and a detailed look into *Theyyam*; it looks at how *Theyyams*, *kavu* and folklore play a significant part in Malabar and forms the history of Kerala. The third chapter throws a glimpse into the diaspora, religion, transnationalism and Catharsis. It focuses on the casteist aspects of *Theyyam* in selected novels and documentaries. There are also detailed literary representations of *Theyyam* in selected novels. The fourth chapter would deal with the Malayali diaspora, the associations among them and mainly focuses on the globalization of religion and transnational marketing of art forms and religion in the diaspora and its stage performances. It contains fieldwork carried out of 20 *Theyyam* artists who had performed in the diaspora and various stage events in foreign countries. It talks about their aspects of religion, globalization and transnationalism, their experiences, exploitations, cultural appropriation and the marketing trends in the new land. The last chapter, i.e., chapter five of the thesis is the conclusion and suggestion for future studies.

Chapter- 2

MALABAR, KAVU AND THEYYAM: READING HISTORY

The previous chapter was an introduction to the thesis, which looked into *Theyyam*, globalization and commodification briefly. It deals with the objectives, methodology, and theoretical framework of the thesis. This chapter deals with Kerala, Malabar and its folk-art forms; it reads Kerala history as a ‘text’ in understanding *Theyyam*. It looks at how *Theyyams*, *kavu* and folklore form Kerala’s history, which always remain in the conscience and forms the memory of the land and people. *Theyyams* make the socio-cultural imaginary of the land— Kerala and religion are an inherent part of Kerala’s society from the beginning.

The study of *Theyyam* and associated religious space will not be complete without setting it in the context of its land – Kerala, especially North Kerala (Malabar) and its caste composition as the history of any place and people are linked to its culture and traditions. The study of rituals, folklore, ballads, traditional dance forms etc. builds the history of a land.

Separated from the rest of India by the towering laterite mountain walls of Western Ghats, the wet, green and tropical slither of coastline stretching along the south-west flank of the Indian subcontinent is perhaps the most fecund and bucolic landscape in India- ‘God’s own country’, as the *Malayali* call their state (Dalrymple, 2009: 33).

Kerala: A Brief History

According to Theodore Gabriel (2010), the word ‘Kerala’ literally means land of coconut trees, ‘Kera’ meaning coconut. The land is abundant with coconut trees all around. The land was also called ‘*Malayalam*’, in the medieval period, the same name with which their language is known.

This word too means ‘hills and valleys’. Malabar, the northern part of Kerala also means the same which gives an apt topography of the state. Kerala is also known as ‘Cheralam’, Cheras’s land from which might have derived *Keralam*.

... the term keralam which is the Sanskritised form of *Cheralam* (*cher+ alam*) itself means a reclamation or addition to the land from the sea. The term *cher* or *chernta* means ‘added’ and *alam* means ‘region’. This would make *cheralam* (later *keralam*) the land which was added on from the sea to the existing mountainous or hilly country (Menon 1979: 10).

The early history of Kerala is still questioned. The myth says that the land stretching from Goa to Gokarnam was reclaimed by Parasurama (*avathar* of Vishnu). The theory of Parasurama’s creation was brought out by *Keralolpathi* and *Kerala-Mahatmyam* which was supposed to have been written in the 16th or 17th century and considered by eminent scholars as a ‘farrago of legendary nonsense’ (Kareem, 1971).

Though the Parasurama legend lacks historical validity, it embodies the geographical truth that the land of Kerala arose originally from the sea as the result of the operation of certain volcanic or seismological factors (Menon 1979: 10).

It is said that the Aryans invaded into Kerala and destroyed the Sindhu civilizations and the Parasurama myth says the same.

Sangam age forms the first significant epoch in the social and cultural history of Kerala. It is comprised of the first five centuries of the Christian era. Kerala was not a separate cultural and political entity at that time. Kerala was then a part of *Tamilakam* (Tamil country). The major political powers during the Sangam age were the early Cheras who had their capital at *Vanchi* (*Karur*) in Central Kerala, Ay kingdom in South Kerala with its capital at *Aykudi* in the *Podiyil* hills and the kingdom of *Ezhimala* (*Mount Eli*) in North Kerala (Menon 1979: 46).

The early Tamil works in the Sangam age reflect on Kerala's society and culture, for instance, *Pattittupattu*, *Purananuru*, *Agananuru* etc. The famous *Silappadhikaram* was written post-Sangam age authored by the Chera prince Ilango Adigal who is believed to be the brother of the Chera king Senkuttuvan. This epic work deals with the story of Kanaki and Kovalan¹⁴ (Menon 1979: 46).

The early Sangam age is believed to be very organized and a casteless society before Aryanisation. According to historians, all the advanced Hindu castes of Kerala, for instance, *Namboodiris*¹⁵, *Nairs*¹⁶ and *Ezhavas* were immigrants from Nepal or Ceylon. But modern research finds that South India was part of that vast continent known as 'Lamoria', which consists of Australia, Africa, Ceylon and South India (Kareem, 1971: 8-9).

According to Menon, even in the ancient period, Kerala formed an arena where Indian and world religion met. Native religions like Jainism, Buddhism, Hinduism and foreign religions like

¹⁴ Kanaki and Kovalan are the central characters of *Silappadhikaram* by Ilango Adigal (100-300CE). They are a couple who belonged to Chola region who lived happily but the story finds a twist when Kovalan, the husband falls for a dancer, Madhavi. He spends all the money he has for the lady and when he returns home penniless, Kanaki accepts him and gives her anklet to be sold to start a new life in Madurai, a capital of Pandya, leaving Chola region. In Madurai, Pandya king wrongly accuses Kovalan of stealing queen's anklet and sentences him to death. Kanaki comes to the court and breaks open the anklet that was seized from her husband to show rubies in the anklet as opposed to the one the queen owned which possessed pearls in it. Shocked and devastated of delivering wrong justice the king commits suicide and Kanaki curses the entire city of Madurai to be burnt. Kanaki is later worshipped as the goddess of chastity in South Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The literature is of prominence for it depicts the arts, cultures, lifestyle, trades, cities, religions of that era (Subramanyam, 1977).

¹⁵ The name *Namboodiri* has been variously derived. The least objectionable origin seems to be *nambu* (sacred or trustworthy) and *tri* (a light). The latter occurs as an honorific suffix among Malabar Brahmins, and other castes above the *Nairs*. The *Namboodiris* from the socio-spiritual aristocracy of Malabar, and as the traditional landlords of Parasu Rama's land, they are everywhere held in great reverence.

¹⁶ The *Nairs* are the gentry, and have no other duty than to carry on war, and they continually carry their arms with them, which are swords, bows, arrows, bucklers, and lances. They all live with the kings, and lords of the country, and with the salaried governors and with one another. They are very smart men, and much taken up with their nobility.

Christianity, Judaism and Islam came to the land of Kerala (2007), which focusses on the aspect that religion plays an integral part in tracing the history of Kerala from the very beginning.

After the first five centuries of Sangam age came the Aryans who immigrated from the north to Kerala in the 6th, 7th and 8th centuries which led to significant Aryanisation of the land from being Dravidian. The first batch of Brahmin immigrants is said to have come to Kerala in the third century BC soon after the arrival of the Jains and the Buddhist monks which was complete by 8th century with a massive influx of Brahmins to the land. These immigrants formed 32 *gramams* (villages) in Kerala and their domination over the land and its people. They soon owned land of their own, cultivation and people under their supremacy. Caste system soon found its way on Kerala's casteless land with *Chaturvarnya* (social division of Hindus based on four castes) (Menon 2007).

As mentioned before, Jainism and Buddhism came into Kerala in the 3rd century before the Christian era, and some of the minor kingdoms of Kerala like Ay and the Mushakas followed non-Vedic religions. It was the Brahmins who came later and imposed their Hindu or Vedic religions on the natives. There were religious conflicts between Brahmins and Jains, and Brahmins and Buddhists as each religion tried to establish its gods and practices. New temple arts and festivals were created to popularize Aryanisation. The Brahmins formed 'new Aryan missionaries' to destroy the non –Vedic religions that came their ways like the 'Buddhist Viharas and images' and established Hindu temples (Menon 2007). There was also the inclusion of non- Aryan deities and practices into Hinduism due to religious conflicts. For example, the Dravidian Goddess *Kottavai* was accepted in the form of *Durga*, *Kali* and *Bagavathi* and absorbed into the Hindu pantheon (Menon 2007) as a result of the religious conflict.

Before the Brahmins attained power and people were divided into caste, there was only one community called *Cherumans*¹⁷. It was the designation given to the emperors of Kerala as *Cheruman Perumal*, to denote *Perumal* as the leader of the *Cherumans*. Later on, the Cheras formed its kingdom, and gradually they lost the power to the Cholas, Pandayas and Pallavas (Kareem, 1971: 9). In the 9th century, the Chera kingdom became dominant, known as the ‘Second Chera Empire’ and their dynasty as ‘Kulashekaras of Mahodayapuram’. The thirteen rulers of the Chera empire became the ruler of the entire Kerala which was later invaded by the Cholas who ruled it for some time; again, regained by Rama Varma Kulasekhara (AD 1090- 1102) and, Cholas were thrown out. Hinduism became a dominant religion with Aryanization in his period. There was the construction of temples in every corner of the village. Art forms like *Kuthu* and *Kudiyattam* originated in the 9th century AD under the patronage of Kulashekaras of Mahodayapuram. Malayalam became the language for the Keralites in the same century (Menon 1979: 46). Festivals like Onam and Vishnu began to be celebrated. There were promotions of learning and the emergence of educational institutions called *salais* made way for it. There also began progress in the field of trade and commerce. The economy was agrarian, and the Hindu feudal lords, the Jewish and Christian communities’ chiefs enjoyed privileges through dues from the tenants. The state also enjoyed sales and vehicle tax and revenues from customs duties which were a significant revenue source (Menon 1979: 46).

In the 11th century, Kerala was invaded by Cholas after the Chera- Chola war. During this reign, Kerala witnessed the breakdown of central authority, economic decay and the empire broke up to form minor principalities with independent chieftains (Menon, 2007). The country was also

¹⁷ *Cheruman* or *Cherumakkal* (*cher* meaning mud and *makkal* meaning sons) means ‘the sons of mud’; and *cherumakkal* also means, ‘little children’ where *cheru* denotes small (Pallath, 1995).

divided into smaller units looked after by the local chieftains called the *Desavazhis* and *Naduvazhis*.

Namboodiris, the Brahmins in Kerala were benefitted after the war as they helped in mobilizing resources in the war, having occupied a higher position in the land. They thus enjoyed ownerships of lands, and as a result, the *Janmi*¹⁸ system came into power. Most of these *Janmis* or the landlords belonged to advanced castes of Kerala like *Namboodiris* and *Nairs*. According to Philip Cherian (2006-2007), they had lands known as *Jenmom* (birth) lands, which are the owners' private property and originally tax-free and some subjected to light tax. The *Janmis* (landlords) for cultivation, leased the lands to the tenants maintaining complete ownership over the land. *Marumakkathiyam*¹⁹ system of inheritance and *Sambandham*²⁰ was introduced in this period. *Devadasis*²¹ were given high status in the Chola reign. According to Renjitha V. R. (2012), the epigraphic reference to *Devadasis* in medieval Kerala dates from 892 A.D. of Vikramadithya Varaguna, which records Murukan Chendhi, a royal lady and a daughter of Lord of Thenkanadu who was consecrated as *Devadasi* of Thirunanthikkara Temple. She was given 32 measures of paddy field and lands as a part of consecration by the king as recorded. This ritual which started in the 9th century, continued till the closure of the medieval era in Kerala. There were practices like

¹⁸ Huge land owned by the upper caste of Kerala as their birth right.

¹⁹ Matrilineal system of inheritance which was prevalent in Kerala and property was passed on only through females in the family. The inheritance goes through the sister's children in the female line and not through son of the family.

²⁰ The younger men of the *Namboodiri* Brahmins seeks marital alliances with the women from other matrilineal castes lower to them like *Nairs*, *Amabalavasis* etc as the elder ones were only allowed to marry to keep the inheritance intact. The children borne out of this relationship has no claims upon their father's property as per the matrilineal system of inheritance.

²¹ Temple dancers who enjoyed esteemed social status but later reduced to just sex slaves or child prostitutes who are dedicated to temples when they are very young.

Manar padi and Pulaya padi.²² There was the emergence of four powerful kingdoms – Venad and Cochin in Southern Kerala, Calicut and *Kolathunad* in Northern Kerala.

Kerala was known to the Egyptians and Phoenicians, as is evident from the numerous references in the Hebrew texts. Therefore, it is clear that Kerala and her people were steeped in hectic commercial and cultural activities with foreign countries even before the Aryans entered into India. Parasurama legend, the symbolic representation of the Aryan infiltration to the south therefore does not hold water (Kareem, 1971: 8).

Foreign Trade and Commerce through Sea

Sea trade was born with the opening of seaports like Calicut, Quilon, and a new harbour of Cochin with Muziris port's blockage due to the year's Periyar flood. Vasco da Gama stepped in Kerala in 1498 and with this Portuguese, Dutch, British and later French came to Kerala through the sea for trade. Ports like Quilon, Calicut and Cochin helped foreign powers carry out trade in Kerala. These ports tempted foreign traders to invade Kerala.

Various resources in Kerala have always attracted foreign communities from primitive times. Many have gone to this place in quest of ivory, sandalwood, spices like the Phoenicians, Arabs, Portuguese, the French, the Dutch and later on the British (Iyer, 1968). The native had then adapted various cultures and religions from them. Sea was the major trade route.

For many centuries Kerala was the Indian terminus of the Spice Route, and the most important trading post in the great medieval trading network which stretched from Venice through Egypt down to the Red

²² It is the social practice where a Nair lady would be outcasted by throwing stones if she happens to see a *Pulaya* or *Mannar* (lower caste) in the afternoon of Karthika day.

Sea and across the Gulf to India. The ancient trade in the spices and pepper that for centuries grew- and still grow- so abundantly here brought generations of incomers to this part of India....(Dalrymple, 2009: 33).

The Greeks and Romans shipped to Kerala with Muziris²³ and Barace²⁴ as the chief ports. There are no traces of Greek's landing in Kerala, but the traces of Roman trading are evident. This was followed with the arrival of Jews in the first century AD after the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, which led them to be expelled from their country. Many of them settled down in *Cranganore*²⁵, *Palur*, *Mala* and *Polloth*. *Cheruman Perumal*, the then ruler of *Cranganore* welcomed him as their leader. The Black Jews who were driven from King of Assyria from Israel escaped to Calicut and later to *Cranganore*. The White and Black Jews found shelter in Malabar until the arrival of Portuguese and later drove to *Cochin*, *Ernakulam*, *Parur* etc. The Jews enjoyed their stay in Kerala until Portuguese forced them to escape from Cranganore, but the White Jews soon came to Kerala forming significant commercial community in Central Kerala under Dutch and British rule. The White Jews helped the monarchs of Kerala in communication during foreign contacts. They could act as interpreters between the Greeks, the Romans and the Keralites (Iyer, 1968: 4). A vast population of Jews from Kerala migrated to Isreal in May 1948 after their country's formation until Kerala enjoyed religious and commercial freedom (Menon, 2007). According to William

²³ Ancient harbour and urban centre at the Malabar coast. Muziris is situated in present day *Kodungallur* but the exact location of Muziris and Barace is not known. The harbour was an interaction spot between South India and Persia, the Middle East, North Africa, and the (Greek and Roman) Mediterranean region. Spices like black pepper and *malabathron*, stones like pearls, diamonds, sapphires, ivory, Chinese silk, Gangetic spikenard and tortoise shells were exported from the harbour. Gold coins, peridots, thin clothing, figured linens, multicoloured textiles, sulfide of antimony, copper, tin, lead, coral, raw glass, wine etc. were brought by Romans

²⁴ Another important centre for trade situated to the south of Muziris. It was the port of the river *Pampa* which was a convenient port for foreign ships (Menon, 2007).

²⁵ Also known as *Kodungallur Fort* or *Kottapuram Fort* situated in Thrissur District in south Kerala.

Safran (2005), for many centuries, diaspora dealt only with the expulsion of Jews. It refers to the exile of the Jews from the Holy Land and their dispersal to several parts of the world.

The earliest to arrive were the Phoenician sailors who came to Muziris. Cotton stuffs, silk, pepper, algum, pearl, ivory, peacock, and peacock feathers were among the leading exports. They also took Malabar teak, and it is said that the temple at Eridu at the head of the Persian Gulf was made of it. According to Bosworth Smith the gates of the city of Carthage were made of sandalwood imported from Malabar. The other exports from Malabar were mainly spices, coral, flint, glass, brass, and lead. The people of Kerala accepted these immigrants with open arms. They left no impress of their sojourn on Kerala (Iyer, 1968: 2).

Chinese were the next in series to enter Kerala for trading in the early 15th century. They came to the Cochin Harbour which was formed as a result of a massive flood in *Periyar*. They had immense contribution to Malayalam literature and fishing industry. The Arabs came to Kerala in 7th, 8th or 9th century A.D who owned lots of ships. They flourished their trading in *Quilon* and *Cranganore* (Iyer, 1968: 6).

The Keralites were modest in welcoming the traders who did not indulge in oppressive taxes. The traders owned land mainly in Kerala for cultivation.

The now- vanished Keralan port of Muziris, described by Pliny the Elder as *Primum Emporium Indiae*, was the spice entrepot to which the Roman Red Sea merchant fleet headed every year to buy pepper, pearls, spices and Indian slave girls for the Mediterranean market. The Arabs followed the Jews and the Romans. Then on 18 May 1498, the Portuguese mariner Vasco de Gama reached the Malabar Coast from Europe, intent on wresting the spice trade from the Moors. The beach where Da Gama landed, a little to the north of Calicut is today marked by an obelisk (Dalrymple, 2009: 33).

Malabar had numerous chieftains among whom Zamorin²⁶ was the mightiest. The Zamorins fought against Portuguese but in 1503 in the *Battle of Cochin*, the Zamorins were defeated. Portuguese established a maritime empire which led to continuous pressure on India's economy for many years. They also closed all sea routes to India ceasing other maritime sailors to occupy Kerala (Iyer, 1968: 8). Portuguese were out thrown with the arrival of Dutch and also by the resistance of the Calicut fleet under the Muslim admirals of Zamorin, Kunjali Marakkars. The Dutch power was also shattered by Marthanda Varma's encounters (AD 1729- 1758) which was called the *Battle of Colachal* (AD 1741) after which Dutch flew to East Indies. Then came the Mysore Sultans in the latter half of 18th century who shook conservative Kerala; the upper caste Hindus were persecuted with the crumbling of the feudal system and with that the lower caste enjoyed freedom. *Janmi* system ended with land tax being collected directly by the tenants.

In 1784, Tippu Sultan wanted all Hindus to embrace Islam, but it failed with British taking over them in 1792. In 1792, East India Company set a stable government in Malabar after the *Treaty of Seringapattanam*²⁷ maintaining the local religion and traditions. They soon came into power from 1757- 1947 AD, and the trade and commerce and economy were all under Britain rule. After the Mysore war in 1792, the British occupied Malabar and Zamorins and local chiefs as their pensioners. The British supremacy was accepted by Cochin and Travancore but challenged by Kerala Varma Pazhazzi Raja in the north and Velu Tampi in the south. Unfortunately, their rebellion did not succeed, and Kerala came under British rule. This reign saw the abolition of

²⁶ Rulers of the kingdom of Calicut which became an important trade centre under the rule of Zamorins (Haridas, 1998).

²⁷ *The Treaty of Seringapatam* is also known as *Srirangapatnam* or *Srirangapatna*. This treaty was signed in 18 March 1792 to end the conflict in South India between the Kingdom of Mysore and the East India Company and its allies, Maratha Empire and the Nizam of Hyderabad which was known as *Third Anglo-Mysore War*.

slavery, feudal levies, conversion of a much lower caste of Hindus to Christians to find equality and numerous social reforms. The period includes the abolition of *Marumakkathayam* in the 1970s, permission for temple entry for Harijans, ownership rights for the tenants under various social leaders like Chattampi Swamikal (1853-1924), Sri Narayana Guru (1856- 1928), who raised voice against the caste system, prevalent customs and lifestyle improvement of backward communities. They came with various organizations like Sree Narayana Dharama Paripalana Yogam (S.N.D.P.), Nair Service Society (N.S.S.) for campaigning against the rude system that was prevalent. The period also witnessed to increase in English education and introduction to the adult franchise. In the span, Malabar became a part of Madras Presidency under British India in 1800, and the princely states of Cochin and Travancore (Venad) came under the East India Company. As the different Malayalam speaking regions were divided into three administrative units of British- Malabar, Travancore and Cochin and some regions like Kasargod, a part of Presidency of South Canara, there were movements to unite different Malayalam speaking regions to form a single unit- *Akiya Keralam* Movement (United Kerala) in the early 20th century. After independence, princely states of Cochin and Travancore retained their identity by treaties with the East India Company and formed as a separate state. Malabar and Kasargod which was then under British were later added to the Travancore- Cochin to make a new state called Kerala on November 1, 1956 which was organized on linguistic basis (Menon, 1979).

The final political pattern that emerged in the 19th century was the British district of Malabar (which formed part of Madras State), and the Indian state of Cochin and Travancore. Travancore and Cochin were integrated into one unit, with the Maharaja of Travancore as Rajapramukh in 1949. In November 1956, Kerala State was born as one administrative unit, with a Governor as its head. The southern taluqs of Travancore and part of Shencottah were added to Madras. Kerala now extends from *Kasargod* in the north to Parsala in the south (Iyer, 1968: 6).

The Communist Party of India (CPI) began its revolutionary line in 1948 and CPI moved towards an engagement with parliamentary communism, and in 1957, Kerala became the first state in the world to elect a communist government to power.

Menon (2007) says Kerala from the early times followed Dravidian religious practices, a mixture of primitive rites and practices though Jainism, Buddhism, Brahmanism came to Kerala and formed its worshippers before the beginning of Christian era. They worshipped totem gods, various spirits who live in rivers, trees, hills etc. The Dravidians worshipped various deities by offering food accompanied by dance and music. The Chera kings and their subjects made various sacrifices to the War Goddess *Kottavai* (Dravidian Durga) to appease her. King Palyanai Sel Kelu Kuttuvan had offered meat and toddy to please the goddess just like the way *Theyyam* is appeased today, but there are no traces of Naga worship in Kerala in the Sangam age. The Naga or Snake worship and Bagavathi worship as a Hindu god prevalent today in Kerala came with Jainism. Jainism which came to Kerala in the 3rd century BC. is believed to be brought down to South India by the great Mauryan Emperor, Chandragupta Maurya (321- 297 BC.) who was accompanied by the Digambara Jain Saint Bhadrabahu and his followers reaching the extreme south, in Kerala to popularize Jainism. Jain temples present today in *Waynad*, inscriptions of Jainism and Bagavathi temple near *Edakkal Caves* are proofs of Jainism, and its religious impact in Kerala started declining from 8th century AD. when Saivite and Vishnavite movements appeared in Kerala. Buddhism, which also came in 3rd century BC., began to decline from the 8th century AD. from Kerala, but it has made its imprints with images, processions, and *utsavams* associated with Buddhism. There are few Jain families in Waynad and Kasargod districts of North Kerala and few Gujarathi businessmen in Alleppey and Mattancherri following Jainism (Menon, 2007). The famous god of Kerala *Ayyapan* in Sabarimala is believed to be a Hindu version of Buddha by

scholars with traces of Buddhist influence where vegetarianism, non-violence, and worldly pleasures are banned during fasting. The famous Ayurvedic treatments and spread of learning and literacy in Kerala have also come down from Buddhism. Aryanisation began by 3rd century BC. after the advent of Jains and Buddhism was complete by 8th century AD. made the Brahmin population stronger, forming the supremacy with Vedic faith. The dietary habits of Brahmins who until then used non-vegetarians were considered a social stigma. The class system denied the lower castes from education and many taboos. Menial jobs were put on the lower castes marking a decline in the working-class status and women who enjoyed high social status during Sangam age (Menon, 2007).

In case of Christianity, it came to Kerala when Apostle St. Thomas landed in 52 AD. at *Maliankara* near Muziris and converted many Brahmins into Christianity. The Christians got prominence gradually in trade and commerce during the Second Chera Empire (800- 1101AD.) (Menon, 2007). Religion had an impact due to diverse cultural influences. The early Christians after St. Thomas to come to Kerala were Syrian Christians as they followed Syrian liturgy. In the medieval period the Latin Christian Missionaries came to Quilon and introduced Latin religious rites which became more assertive with the arrival of Portuguese in 1498. After the decline of Portuguese power and the emergence of Dutch power in the 17th century a part of Christian power under the Pope of Rome became independent under local Bishops and when British rulers came to Kerala in the 19th century, the Syrian Church and Church Mission Society (C.M.S.) Missionaries of London worked in co-operation. They later broke away from each other and worked on their own. New Anglican Church was formed. Priests of Syrian Church who were influenced by the C. M. S. Missionaries tried to replace Syriac language into Malayalam as the language of worship in the Syrian Church. This was not very well taken Bishops and Clergy of Syrian Church; thus, a new church was formed

by the reformers known as the Marthoma Syrian Church. Thus, there were Jacobite Syrian Church (Orthodox Syrian Church), the Anglican Church and the Roman Catholic Church which follows three different languages- Syriac, Latin, and Malayalam. The Christians assimilation in Kerala shows them adopting habits of a Keralite yet adopting foreign religious values.

The Jews, as mentioned before, came to Kerala to escape religious execution in 68 AD. There are no religious traces of Jews in Kerala today except for in *Chowgat* and *Madayi*. The Islam religion came to Kerala in full fledged with the arrival of Arabs for commercial purposes. They too settled down in *Cranganore* spreading the Prophet's religion, which has been popularized by the traders who came in the 7th/ 8th century AD. The last of Chera Emperors (*Cheruman Perumal*) has converted to Islam who also went on a pilgrimage to Mecca paving the way for Muslim religion in Kerala with Mosques' constructions. The Zamorins also highly patronized Muslims who gained the trust of the Zamorins. The Zamorins' Admirals, Kunjali Marakkars' courageous exploits, and Muslim men of Zamorin's navy all caused the Zamorins to trust the Muslims blindly. The Zamorins also had ordered Hindu fishermen to be converted to Mappilas (Muslims of Malabar) to gain more navy members making way for the higher Muslim population in *Calicut* and *Malapuram* districts of Kerala.

In Kerala's coming of all these religions through various spice trades, religious expansion, religious expulsion, escaping prosecution paved the way for a varied socio-religious-cultural Kerala that we witness today.

The Significance of Cultures and Rituals in North Kerala

Kerala has attained its cultural background by the influence of various traders in the past like Rome, Greece, Arabia, China etc. Aryans, Brahmins, Jains, and Buddhists from other parts of India had a major influence in Kerala's social and cultural upbringing. The mingling of the natives with the foreign cultures led to variant cultural practices of Kerala.

These factors also played a major role in transformation from the cultural styles of simple self-sustaining ethnic groups to the complex societies; and again helped their coexistence and interaction and long process of practices of continuity and change. In the wake of socio-economic transformation from tribal life to agrarian settlements representing an admixture of various cultural traits, the religious ideologies themselves underwent major changes along with the cultural traditions (Koyyal, 2016:21).

The next section would begin with the description of Malabar, peculiarly Kannur and Kasargod regions where folk-art forms like *Theyyam* and similar folk ritualistic arts are carried out to have a broader understanding of the history of folk culture in Malabar.

Malabar

Malabar. Al Biruni (A.D. 970- 1039) appears to have been the first to call the country by its proper name Malabar. Before him, Kosmos Indikopleustus, the Egyptian merchant, who, for purposes of trade made some voyages to India, mentions a port named Male, 'where the pepper grows,' on the West Coast, which, he says, was most frequented on account of its extensive trade in that spice. Dr Roberstson, the historian, is disposed to derive the word Malabar from Male. He says that the Malabar means the country of pepper (Padmanabha Menon, 1982: 1).

Old northern Kerala was known as *Kolathunad*²⁸. The northern *Kolathiris*²⁹ were not powerful until the latter half of the 18th century. North Malabar was split into numerous independent principalities. *Chirakkal* only had its supremacy, and *Cannanore/Kannur* was an independent kingdom under its Muslim chief Ali Raja. The chief of *Kadathanad*³⁰ ruled between the *Mahe* and *Kotta* rivers and the English, and the French held their factories in *Tellicherry* and *Mahe* respectively. Later on, Mysorean army, under Haider Ali Khan entered Kerala in 1766 and occupied *Kolathiri* kingdom. By 1792, there was significant political, social and economic upheaval in Kerala with the death of Marthanda Varma and Rama Varma, popularly known as ‘Dharma Raja’ of Travancore into the throne. He took help from the East India Company in case of war with the Mysore and asylum to the Rajas of Malabar. They employed all means to flee away from the Mysorean power and soon came under the English East India Company in 1792 after the *Treaty of Seringapatnam* (Kareem, 1971) as discussed previously.

Kannur: The Hindu Lower Caste Composition and Religious Engagements

Kannur is the largest region of the Malabar, North Kerala. It has its splendid culture, rituals and history and is often named the land of looms and laurel. It was named *Cannonore* during the British rule in India and named the same in official terms. *Kannur* was the trading centre for the Persians

²⁸ *Kolathunad* was one of the most powerful kingdoms on the Malabar Coast during the arrival of Portuguese Armadas to India. The other three powerful kingdoms were Zamorin, Kingdom of Cochin and Quilon.

²⁹ The ruling house of *Kolathunad*. They were descendants of the Mushika dynasty and became one of the major political powers in the Kerala region, after the disappearance of the Cheras of Mahodayapuram and the Pandyan Dynasty in the 12th century AD.

³⁰ Geographically situated to the south of *Thalassery* district and north of *Koyilandy* district in the North Malabar. The area is very near to Vadakara district of Kerala which is now known as *Puduppanam* in *Vadakara*.

and Arabs in the 12th century and became one of the third largest British India cities by the eighteenth century (<https://www.britannica.com/place/Kannur>). As mentioned above, Kannur was ruled by the *Kolathiri* Rajas and some parts by the Muslim ruler called *Arakkal* and was under the *Chirakkal* Taluk of Madras state under British rule.

Northern Kerala, *Kolathunad* included the northern portion of Malabar between the territories of *Vijayanagara* and *Calicut*. Traditionally it was the land lying between *Perumba* “river in the north and *Putupattanam* river in the south, *Kudakumala* in the east and the Arabian Sea in the west” (Menon, 1979). The then rulers of the areas were called *Kolathiris* or *Kola* kings. *Kolathunad* was a powerful feudal kingdom of the Malabar like the Zamorins of Calicut and Quilon when Portuguese Armadas arrived in India. *Ezhimala*, a present place near *Payyanur* of Kannur was the then capital of *Kolathunad* ruled by *Kolathiris*. *Kolathiris* were the descents of the Mushika kingdom (*Ezhimalai* kingdom, *Eli-nadu*). The Mushikas had descended from the Cheras, Pandyas, Cholas and the Ay and were called *Kolathiris*. The Mushikas had the powerful king Nanan, and the supremacy later carried forward by other kings till 12th century and 13th century (E.B. Kumar, 2008). *Kolathunad* rose to its fame and socio-cultural uniqueness only after the Cheras were disappeared entirely in the early 12th century. After this, the history of *Kolathunad* is obscure.

Kerala’s religious composition consists of Hindus in excess and no lesser number of Muslims and Christian populations. The Hindu populations have numerous castes and sub-castes. There are no castes as *Kshatriya* and *Vaishya*, but the higher castes consist of the *Namboodiris*, *Nambiars*³¹ and the *Nairs*. The *Nairs* belong “mainly from the Princely families of *Kolathiri* (*Chirakkal*) in North Malabar, and the *Perumpadappu* of *Kochi* and *Venad* of *Tiruvithamkur*. Moreover, they are not

³¹ The upper caste in Kerala who were the feudal landlords in Malabar.

warriors in the sense the Vedic Kshatriya are but left the martial activities of the Nayars who were specially trained in the arts of fighting and warfare” (Gabriel, 2010: 3).

The Gramas or villages of Nambudiries were called ‘Talis’ and the Nair villages were called ‘Taras’ which had their own chieftains. There is mentioned in *Keralolpathi* and *Keralamahatmyam* that there were 18 Perumals who ruled over the country. Each Perumal lasted for 12 years (Kareem, 1971: 10).

These upper castes are *savarnas* and the lower, the *avarnas*. Each caste has their occupation imposed by the caste (Gabriel, 2010). The lower the caste, the work done by them would be menial. The descending order of the caste hierarchy and the work attributed to each caste determines how polluted they are. For instance, the lowest of them, the *Pulayas* deal with dead animals and scavenging. Higher to *Pulaya* community would work fewer polluting occupations than them. For instance, caste like *Vannans*³² cleans the dirty clothes of other higher caste communities. Much higher to them would be the *Thiyyas*³³, who are toddy tappers from coconut trees. There are many more castes and sub-castes and their respective caste occupations. The *Namboodiris* are the highest among the Brahmins. Brahmins are of various types, like the *Embranthiri*, *Potti*, *Unithiri* and *Pushpakas*, *Moosads* and *Elayatus* who are not allowed to do the ritual inside the temple premises but to assist the *Namboodiris* in their rituals. They are called *Ardha Brahmins*. The lower caste includes the *Vanaan*, *Malayan* and *Pulayan* etc.

³² The *Vannans* of Malabar are also called *Mannan* or *Bannan*. They are a low class of Malabar washermen, who wash only for the polluting castes, and for the higher castes when they are under pollution following births, deaths etc...It is believed by the higher castes that such pollution can only be removed by wearing clothes washed by *Mannas*, though at other times this cause pollution to them. The washing is generally done by the women, and the men are exorcists, devil dancers and physicians, even to the higher castes. Their women are midwives, like those of the *Velakkatalavan* and *Velan* castes. These castes should not be confused with the *Mannan* hill tribe of *Travancore*.

³³ The *Thiyyas* is also known as *Izhuvans* or *Iluvans*. They are the toddy-drawing castes of Malabar, Cochin and Travancore.

In North Malabar Hindus and Muslims live side by side, the majority being Hindus. The Hindus are divided into endogamous caste groups. Some of the important caste groups or *jatis* in this area are *Brahmins*, *Nairs*, *Maniyani*, *Mukkutti*, *Kakkutti*, *Kusavan*, *Chaliya*, *Vania*, *Tiyya*, *Malaya*, *Vannan* and *Pulayas*. Brahmins and *Nairs* are considered to be high castes (*Savarna Jati*). There is hypergamous relationship between these two groups. Others are low castes (*Avarna Jati*), of which *Pulayas* are considered to be the lowest (Pallath, 1995: 35).

Theyyam, the traditional folk dance of *Kolathunad* is performed in the houses of the upper castes but are only performed by the lower caste community of Kannur like the *Pulayan*, *Malayan*, *Velan*, *Vannan*, *Kopppalan*, *Mayilan*, *Vettuvan*³⁴ etc.

The *Pulayas* and the tribals were the aborigines of Kerala who involved in the primitive means of food gathering and hunting till the 8th century AD but after the Aryans came to the land, there created a hierarchical caste structure in Kerala as discussed previously. The *Pulayas* were then enslaved by the immigrants and became untouchables (Pallath, 1995).

In the ancient times, people had their work, and each caste had their job to be done known as *kulathozzil*³⁵. The *Pulayas*³⁶ were supposed to be working in the field (*pulam*) thus known as *Pulayas*. The word *pula* also means pollution, so it means polluted people. They were considered so polluted that the shadow and the water they served were considered polluted by the other caste.

The *Pulayas* mostly involved in inland fishing in ancient times and became agricultural labourers when the immigrants came with new agricultural tasks and enslaved the *Pulayas*. A large group of

³⁴ Lower caste communities of Kerala, the original inhabitants of Kerala.

³⁵ Caste based labour. Caste based works done by members of every caste.

³⁶ The word *Pulaya* has two meanings where *pulam* means the paddy field and *Pulaya*, therefore, means man of the field, a man who belongs to the mud.

Pulaya women involved in weaving mats and basket making. They had no land of their own and inherited no land from the ancestors as they only had to work in higher castes' land until the land reform in Kerala³⁷. A few *Pulayas* was given land those who served as mistresses to the landlords. The land reforms "...has brought about drastic changes in the land system in Kerala society, mainly due to the abolition of landlordism and tenancy, and conferment of ownership rights on the cultivating tenants of the lands leased in by them" (Radhakrishnan, 1983: 143).

Before the land reforms, the lower caste community was made to adhere to social practices of subordination by the *Namboodiris*. They had to adhere to the custom of seeking the landlord's permission for conducting important religious ceremonies like the *Theyyams*, which requires vast land for performance. The lower castes who own no land of their own sought permission from the landlords to celebrate religious rituals. There were many instances where the landlords would end the *Theyyams* abruptly for no reason. With the abolition of landlordism and tenancy, there came an end to the religious domination of the *Namboodiris*, and many tenant households performed *Theyyam*, especially the *Thiyya* community (Radhakrishnan, 1983).

The landlords honoured *Pulayas* with various titles like *Polla*. Family quarrels and community disputes were often settled in front of the chieftains and other high caste people. The community's issues were often discussed at the place of worship like *kottam*, the structure where deity was enthroned (Pallath, 1995).

³⁷ The implementation of the Kerala Land Reforms (Amendment) Act of 1969 has led to ownership rights to cultivating tenants and homestead rights to hutment dwellers (Scaria, 2010) where until the reformation the land rights were concentrated only on the upper caste section, *Namboodiris*. But the land reform has not done much to the Schedule Castes of the society as cultivating tenants for instance, the *Ambalavasis*, *Nairs*, *Maniyanis*, *Vaniyas* and the *Thiyyas* gained a marked benefit from it (Radhakrishnan, 1983).

The *Pulayas* perform *Theyyams* only for themselves not in any high caste *Theyyams* whereas other caste *Theyyam* performers from *Malayan*, *Vannan* perform *Theyyams* for high castes like Brahmins and *Nairs*. The *Pulayas* perform *Theyyams* like *Kalichan* (*Kalichakon*). *Kalichakon* is performed for the protection of cattle and crop.

After independence with coming of Christianity by which many *Pulayas* converted to Christians and later the legal abolition of untouchability, the *Pulayas* sought some land position. The present Kerala *Pulayas* have much land of their own and enjoy many benefits from the caste reservations. They have their *kavu*, and their god and goddesses worshipped situated in the fields. They have their *Theyyams* which are worshipped in the *kavu*, made of dried coconut fronds with a small roof.

Velan is one of the lower castes of *Kannur* who performs *Theyyam*. *Velans* are also known to be *Munnutton* and *Anjutton* in some places of *Kannur*. “A traditional story about these sects shows that they were excommunicated *Nair* appointed to play *Theyyams* and *thiras*³⁸ by the ruling Chieftain of *Kottayam*. It is believed that the *Velan* and the *Velir* community have a common origin” (Kurup, 1973: 26). There is a legend of *Velir* coming from *Tuvarai* mentioned in Tamil commentaries on Sangam works. These commentaries trace the migration of *Velir* from *Konkanam* and *Tuluva*. The *Velan* caste at Malabar also traces their origin from the country surrounding the Subramaniyan temple in *Puthur* taluk of South Kanara. They hold the deity Subramaniya as their *Paradevata* or *Kuladeivam*³⁹. It is believed that they settled in Malabar migrating through Mangalore. *Kottu-Koppalar* a sect of *Velan* community in *Tulunad* and *Kolathunad* also conduct *Theyyams* of *Kurathi* and *Kunrur Chamundi*. According to Sangam tradition, *Kunrur* and *Mathur*

³⁸ Another colloquial term for *Theyyam*.

³⁹ Deity of the clan

were two ancient places of *Velir* Chieftains. The *Theyyam* of Kurur Chamundi by *Velan* well known with the place name may be tracing this tradition. It is believed that *Velan* community has a prehistoric origin. Some scholars believe that the *Velan* tribe can be traced even to Harappan and Mohanjadaro civilization. The names of *Murukkan*, *Cey* and *Aruminkatatalan* pointed out by Russian and Finish scholars as depicted in the Indus Valley seals, highlight the uninterrupted cultural heritage of *Velan* community. As a class of priests in folk worship, they still preserve their individuality in the folk dance of *Kolathunad* (Kurup, 1973).

Malayan and *Velan* are lower caste people of Kannur. These communities are known by their caste name or village name instead of their family name. *Malayan* community adopts patriliney as the mode of inheritance whereas *Vannan* community adopts matriliney⁴⁰.

Kurup (1973) says there is a tradition related to the origin of the *Malayan* community. The story describes Vishnu and Siva having an ‘evil eye’ on their bodies and eradicating this trouble of evil eye; the saint Narada was incarnated as *Tummurun Narada Parvatha Malayan*. The five heavenly damsels, Urvashi, Menaka, Arundhati, Chithira and Lekha, were incarnated as *Malayan* women to help Narada in his rituals. *Malayans* perform *Teyyattams*⁴¹ of *Raktachamundi*, *Vishnumoorti*, *Madayil Chamundi*, *Rakteshwari*, *Potten* and *Kuttisashthan* in their performances women from the same caste used to recite *thottams* in the background of the performance. This kind of recitation by *Malayan* women is not prevalent in the *Theyyam* performances by *Vannan* caste.

⁴⁰ Kinship or descentance of property through female line or a person’s mother.

⁴¹ The performances of *Theyyam*. *Theyyattams* are the other name for *Theyyam*. I have used the spelling *Theyyam* in my entire thesis except for when I have quoted from other sources who have used *Teyyam* or *Teyyattam*.

The performers are given titles and appreciation by the ruling chieftains and the chief priest of *Perinchellore* (present *Taliparamba*) temple. They also take 101 fanams⁴² or the amount fixed in regular intervals if the authority of a particular *Stanam* wishes to award a title to the *Theyyam* performer. For *Malayans*, the chieftain presents a gold bangle, and for the *Vannans*, the chieftain awards $1 \frac{3}{4}$ measures of rice. The titles or the 'Acharaper' after such performances by the *Malayans* are *Panikkar*, *Godavarman*, *Parappen*, *Mutukutan* and *Perumalayan*. The titles by *Kolathiris* were the supreme authority and not of the local chieftain. The title received from the *Kolathiris* were not counted in *Perinchellore*, and the title was given by the chief priest of the temple of *Perinchellore*. The *Vannans* are given the titles *Peruvannan*, *Karna Murthi*, *Nenikkam*, *Manankkatan*, *Chinkam* and *Muthanisseri* (Kurup, 1973).

The other lower castes are *Koppalan*⁴³, *Mayilan* and *Vettuvan*⁴⁴. These primitive tribes perform *Theyyams* to worship their ancestors and tell their story to the lot.

In the medieval period, the caste rigidity was so rigid that the lower castes were forbidden from entering temples and worshipping the Aryan gods. The religious activities and rituals of these lower castes are strictly limited to the *Stanams*. In the history of the evolution of religious practice and worship of *Kolathnad*, the *Stanams* of *Arais* have a significant place. The worship of hero stones and *Masati* stones in Sangam age gradually developed to the worship of deities at *Stanams* and then with the influence of Brahmanical ritualism, the temple worship was established. Although the system of *Theyyattam* and *Stanam* can be placed at the second stage of religious

⁴² Currency in the shape of small silver coins issued by the Madras Presidency until 1815 after which coins of rupee currency was issued.

⁴³ The *Koppalans* or the *Kottukoppalans* are a division of *Velan* community discussed before.

⁴⁴ *Mayilan* and *Vettavan* as being the early inhabitants of *Kolathunad*, they were the class of rulers but soon perished their name and fame with the conquest of Aryan immigrants.

evolution, it continues to exist in the village life of *Kolathunad* and has not been washed away by the domination of temple worship (Kurup, 1973).

The Importance of the Study of Folkarts

The study of folklore has been of tremendous interest in recent times with the increasing threat of losing folk traditions and cultures, which takes back to one's village history. Folk arts and folklore bind people together through religious traditions and rituals and serve as an interaction within society. According to Koyyal (2016), social scientists had taken this into account and make efforts to analyse it, but the rituals and ritual- performances serve as an effective tool in analysing and interpreting the social behaviour of each society.

“Malabar is known for its various folk-art forms. The culture of villages, agricultural life, village life and the folk community embodies folk arts. There lies a story behind the myths and legends associated with the folk arts. Each folk art has its music which is culture-specific to the community, and its subject varies from heroic tales of the past warriors, welcoming of seasons, agricultural activities, festivals, birth of legends etc. Some of the folk dances have minimal steps, and some are full of energy like *Theyyam*, *Padayani*, *Mudiyettu*, etc.” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 1). “All these folk art forms are believed to be in earlier times an attempt to fight against the then social injustices and inequalities” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 1) which chapter 3 will be dealing with- a status reversal through performances of folk arts. *Potten Theyyam* is an example of status reversal. In this, the performers satirize the social injustices and find it a platform to say all the injustices that are happening to their people. “Mostly, the rituals are religious and are performed to gather confidence

and strengthen the community's unity, though some can be criticized as superstitious" (Sahoo & Surabhi 2020: 1).

Rituals in Kerala have carried a stamp of close connectivity with the belief system of the society; serving a variety of purposes like – Gaddika, Kanneru, Pakanarpattu, Kanipattu (to keep away evil spirits); Kothamuriyattam (fertility), Kolkali (entertainment), Kurathiyattam (social criticism) and *Potten Theyyam* (protest against caste practices). With the social development, advancement of literacy and medical facilities, etc. today such purposes of the rituals do not stand good. However, the folk continues to practice many of the rituals and ritual related performances (Koyyal, 2016: 23).

Now there is a discussion on the various folk arts of North Kerala and their myths to get a more comprehensive picture of the life and beliefs in North Kerala.

Various Folk Arts of North Kerala

Some important folk arts are categorized based on the themes it carries like the following:

The Only Female *Theyyam* Performer:

Devakoothu: *Devakoothu* is the only *Theyyam* dance performed by women. It is performed at the *Thekkumbad Tharavaad* (an ancestry house), situated in *Mattool* village of *Kannur* district. The history says that there were fights between *Neeriyottam* and *Kolathiri* rajas for the supremacy of this area. This *Theyyam* art form is also called *Valliyammakoothu* or *Malayi Koothu*, which means dance of the *Malayans*. The female members of this particular family *Vadakkankooran* of *Kannapuram* belonging to a *Malayan* community are supposed to perform the *Theyyam*.

Tayakkavu in *Thekkumbad*, *Kannur*, was once a picturesque island on the *Pazhayangadi* with *Mattool* village on the river's other side. Legend has it that when goddesses once descended on

the bewitching *Thekkumbad* island to collect rare flowers, one of them lost her way in the forest and ended up in a bower. She came to be known as *Valli* (literally a bower) and began to be worshipped by the local inhabitants who conceived of a *koothu* (dance) narrating her story (Koyyal, 2016).

Devakoothu means dance of the goddess. It is performed by the women of the *Malaya* community past their menopause, married to any of the three *Malayan* families with the titles *Palliyara*, *Mootha Cherukunnu* and *Elaya Cherukunnu* are allowed to perform *Devakoothu*. *Devakoothu* is different from all other *Theyyams* as it has elements of *lasya* unlike vibrant *Theyyam* performances. It is more similar to *Nangiarkoothu*, *Mohiniyattam* and female roles of *Kathakali*. The performance begins where the performer appears behind a red curtain held up by two women.

As mentioned, it is the only *Theyyam* performed by women and men are musicians who beat *chenda* (percussion) and *ilathalam* (cymbal). The narrative style is also different from that of *Theyyams'* *thottam*. The performer goes into 41 days of strict penance and comes from the other side of the river in a specially made country-boat accompanied by a women-only entourage. At the *Thekkumbad* island where the performance happens, she has to stay in a hut made of nine stalks of coconut leaves and people from outside are not allowed to enter the shack. The performer can only break her penance with a fish meal after the performance.

Fertility and Wellbeing:

***Kendronpattu*:** This particular ritual is done to drive away evil eyes on pregnant women in the past. It was majorly performed in the villages of Kannur and Kasargod. However, with the coming of new medical techniques, the ritual gradually disappeared from the villages of Kerala. The ritual

is performed by the community of *Vannans* for the upper caste pregnant women. The lower caste performs the rituals for their women by the members of their community.

Koyyal (2016) says that the *Neekkal* (removal) ritual is conducted by floor drawings and songs. *Theyyams* like *Gandharvan* (*Kendron*), *Kanni*, *Kaman*, *Neelakeshi*, etc., are performed as a part of the ritual. Performances like *Mayyilon*, *Mavilathi*, *Mappila*, *Chutala* etc., are conducted among the *Pulaya* community. The collection of songs used for the performance is known as *Kannal-pattu*, *Kannal* or *kalam-pattu*. A *pandal* is constructed as part of the ritual and decorated with coconut fronds and certain other sacred things. Floral drawings are also done in the *pandal*. The ‘affected’ woman is called *Piniyal*, and she is made to sit in the *pandal*, in front of the floral drawings. Offerings in the form of songs to *Ganapathi*, *Sreekrishnan*, *Shivan* and *Saraswathi* are sung. A different set of songs are sung as part of this ritual. *Uzhichal* (massage) is also done using rice. The relatives of the *Piniyal* do this, and certain magical rituals are also conducted afterwards. Once such rituals are over, *Theyyam* performances take place. By then the *Piniyal* reaches a stage of trance. The rituals prolong for the entire night. It concludes with *Polipattu*, which is performed in the early morning hours.

Malayankettu: The *Malayan* community of Malabar performs this ritual. It is also known as *Pillatheeni* and *Malayarattu*. The ritual aims at protecting pregnant women from evil spirits. They perform various magical acts to drive away evil spirits. The women take part in these acts, along with their husbands. The rituals happen at the house of pregnant women. It is very similar to *Kendronpattu*, where the women on whom rituals are performed are called *Piniyal*. Pandal and drawings are made similarly. Various *Theyyams* are also performed like *Pilla-theeni*, *Bhairavan* and fowls are being sacrificed as part of the ritual.

Belikala: This is a practice prevalent in Calicut district of Kerala to drive away the evil spirits from pregnant women. This ritual is also known by the name *Gandharvan-thottam*, *Velikkala* etc. The ritual is mainly conducted to protect women from evil spirits and performed by male members of *Pana*. This ritual occurs for a whole day where floral paintings with wheat powder and other natural products are drawn on the ground called *Kalam*. *Piniyal* is made to sit at the centre of the *Kalam* who sings songs. *Theyyams* like *Gandharvan*, *Bhadrakali* etc...are also performed during this time. Like the *Theyyam*, the woman seated at the center of the *Kalam* reaches a point of trance and starts dancing.

Purakali: *Purakali* is the main event in the *Puram* festival of Kannur and Kasargod districts. It happens in March- April for nine days. The ninth day is the last day of the Malayalam month and the next day is auspicious to Keralites, the new year, *Vishu*. These are performed in the *Bagavathi kavu*. *Puram* is unlike the festival that happens in Central Kerala as this is a festival where *Kamadev* (God of Love) is prayed to by the young girls. The young girls worship the god by putting flowers on the *Kaman* idols made of cow dung and soil. On a ninth day, *Kaman* is sent off along with the flowers. It is put under a jackfruit tree singing the song “*Iniyathe kollavum nerathe kalathe verane kama...*” praying *Kaman* to come early in the upcoming year. Men solely do the performances with vivid masculine vital steps. Most communities dance but the communities of *Thiyya* and *Maniyani* indulge more often.

The steps and rhythm of *Purakali* are to be remarkably intact, and significant effort is to be maintained during the performance with lots of energy. The performers sing and clap in rhythm while they perform. The group leader is known as *Panicker*, who would lead the song, and the performers sing and dance together as the chorus. The performers take various divisions in *ragam* during the performance, and these are called *Niram*.

Agriculture:

Eruthukali: This art form is performed by the *Mavilan* community of the Kannur and Kasaragod districts. They were the lower caste community and worked for the upper caste landlords. They did agricultural work and fishing mainly in the past. The term ‘Eruthu’ of *Eruthukali* means ‘Ox’. The ox plays the main character in this art form. An ox form is cut out from bamboo pieces and decked with a cloth and hey. The character called *Marameedan* takes part in the art form where he sings and dance in the rhythm. The performing group visits the whole village and are given presentations. A similar art form is performed in Indonesia, where an ox structure carried by people visits the whole village to give away their blessings to the villagers. *Eruthukali* begins every year on the Kerala month of *Thullam* 10 (September, October), and various agricultural works on the farm begin to happen, giving importance to animals that help in the farm.

Martial Arts and Ballads:

Kalaripayattu: The word *kalari* means ‘the centre of learning’, *payattu* means ‘practice or training of the learning acquired’. In the ancient educational system that existed in Kerala. *Kalari* served as meeting places for scholars to acquire knowledge on various subjects ranging from mathematics, language, astronomy, theatrical arts, etc. The *kalari* metamorphosed into a center that allowed for and encouraged strenuous martial arts to practice later for reasons lesser known. *Kalaripayattu*, Kerala’s martial art form, is regarded as one of the oldest and most advanced scientific martial art forms globally. *Kalaripayattu* was spread to other parts of the world, especially countries like China, Japan etc. through Buddhist priests who had practised this martial art for self-defence. It was well known in the 9th century and gave rise to various *Kalari* centres (Koyyal, 2016:88). Kerala had many *Natturajyams* (principalities or princely states) those days. These principalities fought against each other. Different *kalaris*, which functioned as warrior clans,

gave unconditional support to the rulers. There existed a practice of going for a one-on-one duel, which was known as *ankam*. *Ankam* was also conducted to decide various issues. Such fights were conducted on a temporary platform called *Angathattu*. The so-called suicide fighters were called *Chekavar*, were held in high esteem in the society for their valour. They included both men and women. Some of them are *Thacholi Othenan*, *Aromalunni*, and *Unniyarcha* mentioned in *Vatakkannappattukal*. Later, when the British came to power in the 19th century, *Kalaripayattu* lost its status in Kerala (Koyyal, 2016:90). The British, who considered martial arts an unavoidable danger to them, completely stopped it from being performed. They officially banned martial art, but people practised it unseen. Later the martial arts took its turn back in the 1920s, and in the coming years, *Kalaripayattu* emerged as an influential martial art of Kerala, and the foreigners come to learn it (Koyal, 2016).

***Vadakkanpattugal*:** These are the Ballads of North Kerala. ‘Vadak’ means north, and ‘pattugal’ means songs. These songs include folk songs, love stories, family feuds, historical exploits, war, victory, and tragedies in North Kerala. It praises the legends like *Aromal Chekavar*, *Thacholi Othenan*, *Kannappa Chekavar* etc. The praises of heroines for their heroic deeds are no lesser. The exploits of *Unniyarcha*, *Karoli Thacholi Kumba*, *Erumbath Kunhipatty*, *Kavil Chathoth Cheeru*, *Velluva Kotta Kunhi Kanni*, *Kotumala Kunki* are some of them. The ballads tell the life of these warriors and their excellence in martial arts, *Kalaripayattu*. These warriors belonged to either *Nair* or *Thiyya* community. The language used in the ballads is straightforward. There is no hardcore jargon language used and very much close the North Kerala’s spoken language.

***Thidambu Nritham*:** *Thidambu Nritham* is popular in the Kannur and Kasargod districts of Kerala. The Brahmins perform these in an elegant dance movement withholding a deity figure called *thidambu* on their head. The performance happens in the temple. The deity figure to be kept on the

head is kept near the temple's idol for *pujas* and then decorated for the dance with fresh *tulsi* leaves and flowers. According to Koyyal (2016), red flowers are used for *Bagavathi* and white flowers for Lord Krishna. The performers have to do much training called *tala* in the beginning. They have to train with the *thidambu* on the head. Regular body massage with ghee and medicated oil is done as part of the training. The trainee initially undergoes the training of steps with heavier loads on the head. A sense of *thala* (rhythm) and body flexibility is required for becoming a talented *Thidambu Nirtham* performer. The *Marar* community does musical accompaniment, and the *vilakku* (lamp) is carried by *Varrier* community. The origin of *Thidambu Nirtham* cannot be easily traced. Tulu Brahmins, who migrated to the North Malabar during *Kolathiri* reign, might have introduced this dance from Karnataka, where a dance called *Darsana Bali* was in vogue. There are different stories circulated about the origin of this ritual dance. One such story is related to *Akrura* and Lord Krishna. According to the legends, *Akruran* went to meet Lord Krishna. Once *Akrura* was sure that he would be able to meet Krishna, he could not control himself and started dancing in ecstasy. It is believed that *Thidambu Nirtham* is performed to commemorate this event.

Social Inequalities:

Kothamuriyattam: This ritual of Kannur and Kasargod districts is performed during the post-harvest season in September – October. It is usually performed by the *Malayan* community where young boys of this community put on a cow mask made of wood on their waist. He is accompanied by singers and drummers, and stalks characters called *Paniyan*, who wear a mask on his face. They wear a mask made of areca nut and a waist dress made of tender coconut leaves. They perform light movements with comical gestures. They speak about social injustice and about the caste system that prevails. There are dialogues among the *Paniyans* which has sexual remarks as well. The performance is a mixture of dance, song and dialogues. They perform even at landlords'

houses for a long duration and is believed to bring riches and prosperity to the houses they visit. They sing the songs which tell the story of goddess *Annapurneswari*, a deity in the *Cherukunnu* temple of Kannur. As Koyyal (2016) puts it, *Annapurneswari* is believed to have come from *Aryanadu*, which means the place of Aryans. She was born in the land of Aryans and had a dream to visit the *Kolathunad*. She then immediately embarked on her journey to come to the *Kolathunad*. A country- the boat was arranged which was filled with rice and other pulses. The migration took place from the cultural zone of the north of *Tulunadu* and to fulfil her dream, and as mentioned above *Annapurneswari* took the sea- route in a wooden country- boat (*marakkalam*) and embarked on a journey to *Thekkumbad*, presently in *Mattul* village panchayat, an island on the western end of *Cherukunu*. A temple was built at *Cherukunu*, and the deity was given a permanent settlement there. *Annapurneswari* is treated like a goddess of prosperity. *Kothamuripatu* or songs related to this performance are simple in language and has a colloquial touch which is popular in Kannur district.

***Chimmanakkali*:** The word *Chimmanam* means humour and *kali* means to play or dance. This folk art takes place in the districts of Kannur by the people of the *Pulaya* community. Humorous speeches and songs known as *Chothiyum pidiyum pattu* is sung during the performance. Folk art aims to satirize the evils of society. This performance is also seen in events like marriages, where some eleven people take part. They are *Chothi* who are three in number, *Kannan*, his wife, *Thampuran* and *Karyasthan*. This particular art form has a resemblance with *Theyyam* as it takes place in an open space and leaves are used to make the costume of the dancers, and for music, an instrument named *thudi* is used.

The above section discusses various prominent folk art forms of North Kerala, especially in Kannur and Kasargod districts. These folk arts have been divided into categories based on their

performances like gender, social inequalities, agriculture, literacy, fertility, martial arts and ballads etc. The following section will discuss *Theyyam* in detail.

Theyyam: The Religious Art of North Kerala

Theyyam is performed in the Malayalam month of *Thulam- Edavam*, from September to April-May every year. However, the most hectic period of *Theyyam* is from December to February. June, July, August months are the lean months for the celebration of *Theyyams*. *Theyyams* like *Muthappan* are performed every day at the *Parassini* temple. The fixing of the dates of *Theyyam* is called *Thekkuri Nischayam*. These are performed by the lower caste community like the *Malayan, Pulayan, Vanaan, Velan* etc. The high caste people sponsor *Theyyams* except for the *Pulayans*, who perform for themselves and are not sponsored by any caste. The *Pulayans* do the makeup and the performance for their *Theyyams* except for the music which the Malayans play.

The entire expense of the *Theyyam* is taken care of by the higher caste or the landlords in the past. Each caste and community would have their *kavu*, a shrine in the present. The higher caste people would sponsor the *Theyyam* and the lower caste *Theyyam* artist would perform for them in their shrine or house. *Kavu* or shrines were the earlier places of worship, but with the migration of Aryans to *Kolathunad*, the worshipping places transformed into more sophisticated temples. *Kavu*, as discussed in Chapter one, are open to all flora- fauna forming a great bond between nature and humans. *Theyyams* are the lords of *kavu*. It has its own rules and regulations. It does not allow human-made fences or concretes around it. It had a wide veranda previously but later cut down to a small area with a small *kavu* because men took away the rest of the land. The shrines of *Theyyams* are a small single chamber structure amid a ground surrounded by trees and bushes. The chamber

is called *Arai*. When *Theyyam* is performed in a house, an *Arai* is made by constructing a small temporary cottage known as *Path* where there are no deity images, but a wooden stool (*Peedam*) and a sword covered by a red cloth are made. The one who lights the lamp in the shrine is called an *Anthithiriyar*, one who handles the umbrella and one who gives toddy to *Theyyam* during the *Theyyam* performance is called *Kodakaaran* and *Kalayakaaran* respectively, one who managed the affair of the *Arai* is known as *Kottayikaaran*, and the priest of the shrines are the *Embron* or *Embronthiri*. Many *Kazhakams* have its *Arai* and its deity. The ceremonial dances of the shrines and the major oracles are announced by *Komaram* or *Velichapad*.

Also, there are different kinds of facial makeup for *Theyyams* like *Anchupulli ezuthu* (five dots makeup), *Parunthuval ezuthu* (Eagle's tail makeup), and different body paintings like *Nagam thatal* (snake-like makeup), *Sankezuthu* (shell shape), *Prakezuthu*, *Vairezuthu* etc. No *Theyyam* is similar to each other. Each *Theyyam* is different in its makeup and *mudi* (hair that is tied). The stories of the legends in *Theyyams* are the real social reformers. They come decked up like god and reach the believers to soothe them out of their miseries. Even though the then lower caste had no access to education and wealth, the *Theyyam* performers are real scholars of Kerala's history. *Kavu* is now a luxury mark where each caste tries to make their shrine look better with fences and an attached auditorium.



Figure 1. *Kavu* (shrine) where deity resides and *Theyyams* are performed. This *kavu* is situated at Pariyaram, Kannur. (Source: Surabhi K.)

The dance movements are in the rhythm with the drumbeat, which is slow in the beginning and gradually speeds up all energy. It is also known by various names like *Kaliyattam*, *Theyyamkettu*, *Theyyattam*, *Thira*, *Kolamkettu*, *Thirayattam* etc.

Etymologically, it is explained, *Theyyam* is a linguistic corruption of daivam (God). Attam means dance. *Theyyattam* or *Theyyam* means dance of God. Chandore (1978:25) says that these synonyms represent different stages in the development of *Theyyam*. *Kaliyattam* (the dance of Kali) is thought to be the most ancient and belonging to Kerala's aborigines. *Theyyam* is a modified version of *kaliyattam*, influenced by the immigrant from the *Bhoottas* (a similar folk art from Karnataka), probably brought by the Tiyyas

of North Malabar. *Theyyam* can, therefore, mean attam of Tiyyas, the dance of Tiyyas, caste migrated to Kerala from Karnataka (Pallath, 1995:59-60).

Theyyam originated in South Karnataka, *Tulunadu* is known as *Bhutharadhane*. Migrants carried this from *Tuluva* like *Kotukoppalar*, *Mayilar* and *Velar* who settled down in *Kolathunad* (Kurup, 1973: 2). It is still prevalent in South Karnataka as *Kola* or *Kolam*, which means worship of *bhutas*. *Theyyam* has a similar costume, makeup and *thottam* and dance moves like the *bhutha kolas*. These *kolas* donned in the villages of Karnataka are believed to be the guards of the villages. The deities are believed to be staying in the fields and forests. The *kolas* have similar legendries where the elites punish or kill the downtrodden, and the latter emerge out to take revenge on them. They have their native heroes and heroines like *Koti*, *Chennayya* and evil spirits like *Kalkuda*, a well-known *Theyyam* known as *Kuttychathan*. Some *Theyyams* have similar names like that of *Bhuta kolams*, and the rituals are also very similar.

...Many *Teyyam-s* and *Bhuta-s* bear the same names even though there are no similarities between them either in terms of physical appearance or in the stories connected with them. One *Bhuta* in south Canara, interestingly enough, is called *Malayala- Chamundi*. Also, references to *Tulunatan Vidya* often occur in *Teyyam* rituals (Nambiar, 1982: 65).



Figure 2. *Agni Kandakarnan Theyyam*. The *Theyyam* is tied to its huge yellow *mudi* (hair) before the performance. (Source: Surabhi K.)



Figure 3. *Puthiya Bagavathi Theyyam*. Backside image of the *Theyyam* during her performance with fire wicks around huge rounded *mudi*. (Source: Surabhi K.)

The lower castes like the *Theyyam* are the performers of this art form, but the elites and the upper castes would come to pray to the *Theyyams* despite the caste hierarchies. There are *kolas* which are prayed by a childless couple, people having family disputes and those suffering from diseases. Like *Theyyams*, some of the *kolas* have hen sacrifices and have toddy and meat. The only difference from *Theyyam* is that *bhutharadhane* are performed in the villages' interiors, and access to the place is challenging, unlike *Theyyam*, where a huge crowd gathers to witness it. The *kola* is said to have performed in 2009 after fifty long years due to some disputes among the organizers after which it happens once every three years. *Bhuthakola* is on the verge of disappearance when

people construct buildings and flats in all field lands and forest areas. The village organizers are heard to put posters requesting ‘a little land for Devi’ to carry on the art form. The ancient *Kolathunad* and *Tulunad* share the same traditions, such as the matrilineal system of inheritance called *Marumakkathayam* in Kerala and *Aliakattu* in *Tulunad*. The cults are also similar to the *Nagaradhane* in *Tulunad* and *Sarpam Thullal* in Kerala. The language spoken in North Kerala has similarity to the Tulu language. *Bhuthakola* and *Theyyam* both are performed in some regions of Kasargod.

It is believed that *Bhuta* and *Theyyam* have existed much before the invasion of Aryans in India.

...Around the eighth century, Shakti puja became associated with the Bhuta- *Theyyam* cults and towards the later half of the thirteenth century Vaishnavism of Madhvachar exerted some influence on them. The worship of the mother goddess- the fertility cult- was in existence prior to the influence of Shakti Puja and its association with the Bhuta cult from about the tenth century is known. The majority of shrines both in south Canara and in north Kerala, are devoted to the worship of the Saptamatrikas-s (Nambiar, 1982: 65).

The origin of *Theyyam* is obscure. It is said to be a 300-year-old ritualistic performance. It is believed to have started from the year nearing 1675 (Somashekharan, 2014). According to Sreekanth, the Mushika kingdom’s palace has no trace of *Theyyam* in the *Mushika Kavyas*. After the Mushika kingdoms and reign of *Perumaal*, *Kolathiri* or Chirakkal kingdom emerged and gave *Theyyam* its recognition (2013: 21). Tamil literature is of the view that *Theyyam* emerged about 1500 ago during the Sangam age, and were then appropriated various times. During the time, Malayalam emerged as a language with the emergence of *thottam* as part of the *Theyyam* rituals.

In the legend of the origins of *Kolathiri* kingdom in North Malabar, it is said that three women – one Shaktriya and two Sundras- came in a ship and got stranded in the sea. The king Cheruman Perumal

married them all. The son in the Shaktriya woman was made king of Eli under the title Elibhupan (King of Eli kingdom). Arrival of women in a ship is the common myth of the place and all the castes trace their relation to this immigration myth (Pallath, 1995: 205).

The earlier version of *Theyyam* is believed to have evolved from the tribal people who flooded their emotions with dance expressions. Social gatherings, funerals, celebrations and illness were cured by the lower castes praying and dancing for the elite upper class. Duarte Barbosa⁴⁵ talks of this sect of a community called *Panue* who took up witchcraft. When the king is sick, *Panue* comes to cure the king. They make a tent and space for the king, where two of them pour colours and rice powder on their body to walk and jump on fire embers with minimal clothes and feet. This happens for three days with drum beats where women sing aloud, *kolams* are made to cure the diseased king (Somashekharan, 2014).

It is believed that *Manakkaadan Gurukokal*, was the connoisseurs of ritual dance who began this performance process. It was then elevated by the then king of *Kolathunad*, *Kolathiri*. *Manakkaadan Gurukkal* is believed to have performed 35 *Theyyams* on a single night before the king (Sreekanth, 2013).

According to Sreekanth (2013), the myth of how this dance form occurred is when a mother who did not cry upon her daughter's death was called hard-hearted and was ordered by the *Kolathiri* to walk with a burning cockle (a small furnace or stove) on her head. When the mother was making the trail, she fell into a canal and drowned to her death. After that, her spirit started creating troubles

⁴⁵ A Portuguese writer and officer from Portuguese India between 1500 and 1516. He was a scrivener in a factory in Kannur, and an interpreter of the local language, Malayalam. Barbosa wrote the *Book of Duarte Barbosa* in c. 1516, one of the earliest examples of Portuguese travel literature (<https://artsandculture.google.com/entity/duarte-barbosa/m04zccz?hl=en>).

in the *kovilakam* (palace). The king consulted some astrologers who advised him to pay homage to her as a *Theyyam* to end her vengeance. *Manakkaadan Gurukkal*, the famous *Theyyam* artist of *Vanaan* community, was summoned to make a *Theyyam*. He formed a *kolam* that incorporates the figure, shape, *thottam* songs, and drowned woman's rituals.

In order to test the *Gurukkal* who was a well-known scholar, sorcerer and *Arurpath*, *Kolathiri* asked him to perform 35 *Theyyams* in a single day which he did in an exemplary fashion. In the process, the *Gurukkal* gave its enduring stature to the practice of *Theyyam* that it still enjoys (Sreekanth, 2013: 19).

There are about 400 *Theyyams* in North Kerala. This art form has a very primitive origin. It includes many rituals and worships like hero-worship, tree worship, snake worship, animal worship etc. Hero worship was very much common in all primitive communities. They are praised and celebrated in the ballads, folklore and songs. The legends who died for a cause made a history that people celebrated till this day and passed on to forthcoming generations. The history was altered a bit by giving these legends a divine power so that all sectors of the people despite caste, creed and class, pray to them in utmost respect and awe.

The earliest historical evidences of hero worship in South India are the references found in *Sangam* literature, *Pattinappalai* and *Malaipatukatan* throw light on erecting 'Virakkallu' (hero stones) in memory of heroes of *Sangam* period. Soldiers who fell in war were commemorated by hero stones which bore inscriptions detailing their names and achievements; these stones were often worshipped as godlings. Such heroes were praised by men and women in their dance known as *Tunankai*. The *Sangam* poets like *Mankutikizhar* paid high tribute to those heroes and hero stones in their poems (Kurup, 1973:18).

However, such an instance of hero worship is significantly less found in Kerala, which was very ancient and, according to Kurup (1973), prevalent only in the 2nd century after Christ. In the 13th,

some hero stone worship in South Indian, for example, *Kaliyamballi* village in the Northern part of Kerala.

.... the hero-worshipping tradition of the *Sangam* period is reflected in the arts, rituals and literature of the region. During *Sangam* period the warriors who lost their lives in the battlefield were praised by the *Kuravar* in songs accompanied by the native drum ‘*Murasu*’ and hero stones were erected in favour of their memory and their womenfolk used to sing ‘*Valaipattu*’ and to dance *Vallikoothu*.Thus, the makeup, dance, native musical instrument, and *Pattu* (songs) were the peculiarities adopted in the commemoration of a dead hero (Kurup, 1973:19).

Kurup focuses that “these aspects of the folk cult of a bygone age are still preserved in the present-day *Theyyam*. In ancient Kerala, the spirit of the dead hero is propitiated by the folk dancer, and during the hours of his serene performance, he is treated as a deity by the village folk. This same tradition of hero-worship originated in spirit and form, paving the way for ritualistic folk performances from the cult hero stones of *Sangam* age” (1973: 19).

The best *Theyyam* performer, on account of the number of performances done, is given *Pattum Valayum* (silk cloth and gold bangle) or *Katchum Churigayum* (belt and sword) as a mark of talent and recognition. *Theyyams* are also called *Kaliyattam*. It is held once in three years, five years or after one and a half year. They are also held in six, fourteen or twenty years, and then it is called *Perumkaliyattam*. This is a grand event where food is being served to the devotees, and *Theyyam* happens for twelve days, whereas *Kaliyattam* is a seven-day event. For the *Perumkaliyattam*, Brahmin is the head priest, and a *Nair* is a trustee.

Kerala and its cultures were Dravidian in origin, which later intermingled with the Aryan, Jain, Buddhist and Brahmin immigrants, as explained at the beginning of the chapter. The influence of the immigrants had majorly affected the original culture. The original culture thus formed over

centuries is now mingled with the western forms of appropriation and a new modern, shortcut *Theyyam* is being created. *Theyyams* now go abroad for performances in the diaspora making new variations and effortless short time performances which would be discussed in detail in the fourth chapter. The diasporic Malayalis connect with such culture in their place of settlement. Communities of the diaspora long to go back to their homeland, and in the process of memory-making, they cling to their myths and religions. The memory lane connects them to their people and native land.

Myth is an interesting phenomenon found in all cultures and especially in primary cultures. The study of myth has engaged the attention of many scholars. Myths are not historical facts, though many believers look upon them as factual and historical. Fundamentalists of all religions will argue against looking upon mystical texts as fiction. It is difficult to decide upon the truth of these legends and myths. To anthropologist Levi Strauss myths are the crystallization of human aspirations. Thus myths have a social significance that goes beyond the question of their factual veracity (Gabriel, 2010: 19).

Various myths and folklore of few *Theyyams* that has crossed the borders and performed in the diasporas are listed below and is categorized according to the gender of the deity.

Theyyams with Female Deity:

Muchilottubagavathi: The legend is of a lower caste woman of the *Perincellore (Taliparamba)* who was that well-read that it was not taken very well by the upper caste scholars and was called for an open debate in the village premises. On the day her marriage was fixed, she was called for a debate with the scholars. She was asked which is the highest pain in the world, for which she replies a woman's pain during child birth. She was then asked what gives the greatest pleasure for which she replies, carnal pleasure. With the answers, the elites trapped her and called her unchaste, arguing that an unmarried woman could no way know of such things. They drive her away from

the village. She reaches *Payyanur*, reaches *Subramanya* temple, heads towards *Karivellur*, prays to Lord Shiva (*Karivelluappan*) and *Bagavathi of Rayarammangalam*. Near the temple of *Karivellur*, she visits the house of a warrior called *Muchilott*. Now the woman, to prove her chastity, makes a heap of fire in a pit. She calls out for a *Thiyya* who happens to pass by but leaves unheard. Now comes an oil monger who carries oil to the temple, she asks him to pour oil in the pit and immolates herself. The oil monger then takes the empty can to the temple and finds it overflowing with oil. A *Bagavathi* was then seen in the well by the warrior of *Muchilottu*. Thus, she was named *Muchilott Bagavathi* and remained the *kuladeivatha* of *Vaniya* community. When this *Theyyam* is performed, the *Komaram* during the *Vellattam* carries a *Poorna- Khumba* (a full pot) of oil placed on his head and walks all around the temple. The well in the temple premises and the *Theyyam* looking into the well during the performance symbolizes this legend of *Theyyam*. As part of this *Theyyam*, a grand food feast is arranged for the worshippers. There is also a ceremony called *Thalikettu* (marriage) performed where the tantric of the *Muchilottu kavu* will announce his marriage with the *Bagavathi*. The marriage arrangements happen, but then someone would inform them about death and that the marriage cannot happen. This act symbolizes the goddess' being called out for the debate with the scholars on the day of her marriage and driving her away from the village.

Muchilottu Bagavathi is a female deity of the *Vaniya* community. The *Vaniya* community has 18 important *Stanams*, where *Karivellur* is the most important of all. Except for *Kadannapalli* where *Theyyam* happens every year, other places perform this *Theyyam* in *Kaliyattam* which occurs once in three or five or twelve years. A grand feast is provided for all *Vaniyas* who comes at the particular *Stanam*. The *Theyyam* is performed by the artists of *Vannan* community who have to reside at the cottage near the *Stanam* for at least five days under strict penance.

The *mudi* of the *Theyyam* is a big round made of bamboos and canes decorated with garlands of *chekki* (*Ixora Rosea*) flowers. Facial makeup is yellow is used on the face and ornaments over the body. *Theyyam* carries two silver *Damshttras* (devil's teeth) and two *Panthams* (lights) in the hands. Her eyes are blinded with two silver eye plates while the *Theyyam* looks into the well. The silver eye plates and the *Panthams* are abandoned after this, and weapons like swords are taken in their hands with *thottams* sung in the background.

The shrines of *Vaniya* temple would have *Anthithiriyar*, who lights lamp every day. The *Komarams* of each *Stanams* of their community would get together during the performance and walk with the *Theyyam*. There would also be elders of the community to instruct and guide things, whereas the *Oharikkars* are formed to collect donations and look into financial matters.



Figure 4. *Muchilottu Bagavathi Theyyam* performed at *Nambram kavu*, Kannur. (Source: Surabhi K.)



Figure 5. *Muchilottu Bagavathi* looking into the well as per the myth. (Source: Surabhi K.)

Uchitta: *Uchitta Theyyam* relieves women devotees from various stress they undergo. She is also called *Vadakinitthachi* and believed to an incarnation of Goddess Parvati. The *Theyyam* enacts a female sound during performance and is heavily decorated from head to toe.

Theyyam dons nose rings, headdress made of *thiriyola* (tender leaves of coconut fronds) and a skirt. It has two *ekir* (canine teeth) like other female *Theyyams*. While performing the *Theyyam* hold coconut shell in hands, and bang them against each other, suggesting that she is gossiping with the village women. The deity is then given rooms in the kitchen- *vadakkini* (room in the north) and in the *padinjhaata* (room for worship). *Uchitta* is worshipped as the goddess of protection during delivery and female sterility (Sreekanth, 2013).

Dhumabagavathi: *Dhumabagavathi Theyyam* is created to kill the *asurans*. The female goddess takes the form of this *Bagavathi* to kill the devils.

Madayil Chamundi: *Madayil Chamundi* was formed to kill the *asura* or devils, namely, Chandan and Mundan. This *Theyyam* is known as *Paathaala Moorti Madayil Chamundi* for killing the *asura* who ran around fourteen worlds. Another myth regarding this *Theyyam* is that a priest of *Payyanur Swami* temple, namely *Meethukunil Pothuvaal* made some mistakes in his daily temple rituals. The *Perumal* thus summoned a wild boar (*varaahi*) to punish him. The wild boar which was swine changed itself to a boar and killed his wife and foetus inside her. The *Varaahi* then wandered carrying the corpses to bury them until *Vanaadil Meenakottil Pothuvaal* gave him someplace for burial. *Madayil Chamundi* is performed by the people of *Malayan* community, with costume comprising of *Purathattu* (headdress), *Maarvattam* (torso covering) and *Varaaha mukham* (mask of wild boar). In the *Purappadu* (the beginning) of *Madayil Chamundi*, a spectacular part is when the *Theyyam*, with a burning *pantham* (torch) in hand, creates the impression of replicating the journey through *Madapaathaalam* (one of the worlds under the earth). This is called *Choottaattam* (dance with a burning torch). The same *Theyyam* becomes *Karimanal Chaamundi* when performed by people from *Maavilar* community (Sreekanth, 2013).

Raktachamundi: This *Theyyam* has the myth that goddess *Parashakti*, while killing *Rakthabeejasuran*, wanted not a drop of his blood to fall on the ground as it would lead to the emergence of more *asuras*. She thus drank all his blood to be later called *Raktachamundi*, *rakta* meaning blood. The legend of *Chamundi* described in *Puranas* is the ones who punishes the wicked and saves the innocent.

Thaiparadevatha: It is worshipped in the famous *Madayi kavu* in Kannur. She is also known as *Madayikavil Achi*, which means mother of *Madayi kavu*. The myth is unknown.

Theyyams with Male Deity:

Bhairavan: *Bhairavan* is believed to be an incarnation of Lord *Shiva*, who goes house after house asking for alms like a saint as a penance for killing god *Brahma*. Another myth relating to this *Theyyam* is that *Shiva* gave *Bhairavan*, a seven-year-old boy, to *Cheruthandathi*, who did not have children for many years. He was a blessing after the couple's strict austerity of forty-one day and named him *Cheeralan*. The couple had to provide a feast for a thousand *Yogis* or ascetics for being blessed with a boy. The *Yogis* demanded the couple to arrange for a curry with his son's flesh and blood in the feast. The couple had no other way than to succumb to their demands and follows the tradition. *Cheeralan* took a bath and sat for food after reaching home and laid down in his mother's lap, only to be slit in his throat by *Cheruthandaan* (Sreekanth, 2013). The dishes for the feast were cooked. The food was served to the *Yogis* and one to *Cheeralan* imagining he is sitting beside them, and as the custom says, the mother needs to call out for him. With his mother's call, the curries start to quiver. The *Yogis* gather to perform rituals in twenty-one pyres from which emerges eight *Bhairavans* and thus are worshipped by the *Yogis* as their deity.

The *Bhairava* tradition is strongly epitomized by the *Aghora sanyasis* of North India. The temples of *Kashi Vishwanathan*, *Gokurna*, *Kadri* etc., are renowned centers of *Bhairava* worship (Sreekanth, 2013).

Bairavan Theyyam appears with a *poykannu* (false eyes) and *kapaalam* (skull). There are slight differences in the makeup of this particular *Theyyam* when performed in the northern Malabar and southern Malabar. The headdress is called *Omkaaramudi* though there are slight differences when performed in north and southern Malabar regions.

Bali Theyyam: It is one of the Ramayana *Theyyams*. The community of *Vishwakarma* considers Bali as their *Kuladeivam* or deity. The *Vannans* perform them.

Gulikan: *Gulikan* is the god of death, also known as *Kalan* or *Yama*. There are around 108 forms of *Gulikan*. The *Malayan* community and *Kopalar* community perform them. *Gulikan* is believed to be the most important warrior of Lord Shiva. The dance of this *Theyyam* is astonishing, different from other *Theyyams*. It is believed that all gods are afraid to look at *Gulikan*. Among the *Gulikan kavu*, one at *Nileshwaram* is very famous.

Kandanarkelan: *Kandanarkelan* was reborn after his subsequent death caused by snakebite and falling on fire. He was saved by *Vayanattu Kulavan* (another *Theyyam*) who passed by and saved his life resulting in a strong friendship. The performance involves playing in the fire, and two snake figures are drawn on the performer's chest who belong to *Vannan* community.

Karimkuttichathan: *Karimkuttichathan* is the son blessed by Lord Shiva to *Kalakattu Namboodiri* and his wife, who did not have children for long. The boy grew up to be a quick learner and a bully at the same time. He killed a teacher who caned him because he was reading a book in the teacher's absence. He again killed their bull when his mother refused to give him milk in a *kindi* (a traditional vessel). When his father could not find the bull, he was furious and caned him. Angry by this, he threw a stone on his mother, believing she instigated his father. Seeing the boy's atrocity, his mother slaughtered him only to find him again in the prayer room (Sreekanth, 2013). The couple goes to an astrologer who asks them to do a rite to bring good at home and drive evil. The rites were soon carried out where he was cut into three hundred pieces and ninety and put in a fire pyre. However, the same number of *Kuttichathans* appeared on the pyre and started dancing. He then

burnt down many upper castes' houses, and to quench the anger the *kolam* was performed in the *kavus*.

Kathivanur Veeran: *Kathivanur Veeran Theyyam* is one of the most famous *Theyyams* of North Kerala. The *Theyyam* was a great warrior and carried a sword and a shield symbolizing the same. *Kathivannur Veeran* was a common man known as *Mannappan* born to Chakki and Kamarachan in *Mangat* of *Kannur* district. He was well trained in Kerala's martial arts, *Kalaripayattu*, and always played with bows and arrows till his youth. His furious father called him futile and broke his bow and arrows. Angry *Mannappan* left his house to reach his uncle in *Kudagu*. He started working in farming and trading when he met a low woman caste called *Chemmarathi* and fell for her. Despite all the caste barriers, they soon got married and once having food, he heard sounds of an upcoming war, for which he left despite all the ill omens his wife felt. *Manappan* hurried to the battlefield, killed the leaders but lost his little finger and marriage ring. He felt it shameful to return without his finger and the lost ring in the battle so, he returned to the field in search of those. He was surrounded by his enemy and killed. When his wife heard of his death, she killed herself by jumping in the burning pyre her husband was laid. After the cremation, while his friends and cousin *Annukkan* were taking a bath in a tank, they saw *Chemmarathi* and *Manappan* in the same tank. Soon a *Stanam* was formed to worship them, which was later called *Kathivannur Veeran*.

Vannans don *Kathivannur Veeran*. The crown of this *Theyyam* is circular made from bamboos. The facial makeup is painted red and other natural colours, which would also wear a black beard. The body is painted white with rice powder, and a colourful *Vattoda* is used as the waist dress holding a sword and shield in his hands being a warrior. The cock killing and is a ritual in the *Theyyam*.

A stage – *Thara* consisting of 64 *Kalams* are made from the splice of the banana stem in memory of *Chemmarathi*. The player sings the *thottam* in which the deity's story is narrated, a gripping dramatic monologue by the *Theyyam* himself. After midnight, the performance is generally conducted, prolonging even after daybreak (Kurup, 1973).

Kathivanur Veeran Theyyam should have equal physical and mental strength. He should be proficient in martial arts, which begin from the evening till the night of the next day. The worshippers can ask any doubt they have regarding the *Theyyam* and the *thottam*. *Theyyam* has to recite about the places he went through in his journey from *Mangat* of Kerala to *Kathivannur* of Karnataka in the correct sequence- the hills, rivers, seas, shrines, important people, the lifestyles of the villagers, their daily labour, culture and traditions everything has to be included and recited for 4 hours while he performs.

The performers have many responsibilities before donning up a *Theyyam*. He needs to study major disputes, tragedies, good deeds of most individuals' village. He has to give remedies for people's problems who approaches him seeking help. Other performers of arts like *Kathakali*, *Mohiniaatam*, *Bharatnatyam*, a singer or a drummer would not have to look into such things as they would only be required to perform what they have learnt. Such dancers can choose their stage; if not, they can drop it, take the demanded fee for the performances, unlike *Theyyam* performers.

Muthappan and Thiruvappan: *Muthappan* and *Thiruvappan* are different from other *Theyyams* in terms of *thottam* sung by the performer himself, and the performer himself dons the attire of *Theyyam*. This *Theyyam* has its origin very recent. The myth says that the couple Naayanaar and Paadikuttyamma of higher caste was childless and prayed to Lord Shiva for a child. Paadikuttyamma soon found a son near a pond where she went to take a bath. He was brought up by the couple but often mingled with low caste people and ate meat and toddy, which was against

their family customs. He hunted animals and cooked them near *Ayankkara* temple. The god of the temple left because of the foul smell. His mother advised him to get away from his habits. Immersed in anger, he burnt the temple and the nearby surroundings. Seeing his power and cruelty, Paadikuttyamma discarded her son and put false eyes on him, seeing his eyes in blaze. He thus left with hunting dogs, a knife and a black loincloth on his eyes. He reaches *Thiruvanchira*, climbs on a palm tree to rest. Chandan the toddy tapper of *thiyya* community finding him on a treetop shouted, but Chandan was transformed into a lifeless statue. Chakki, Chandan's wife, found this and pleaded *Muthappan* to pray and make offerings to him. Pleased by this, Chandan was soon given back his life, and *Muthappan* prayed from then on.

Thiruvappan is always performed with *Muthappan*, whereas *Muthappan* can be performed alone. Their performance is famously known as *Koodavellattam*. *Muthappan* is regarded as Lord Shiva and *Thiruvappan* as Lord Vishnu. The *thottam* is same as that of *Muthappan*. They are offered their favourite *Payankutti* which consists of toddy, fried fish, sprouts and tender coconuts. They appear like a barbarian with bows and arrows. *Muthappan* has long black moustache and beard, and *Thiruvappan* has white beard and moustache. The *thottam* of this *Theyyam* only sings about its hunting experiences along with his hunting dogs. *Muthappan* is the deity of the *Thiyya* community and performed by the *Vannans*. The shrine of this *Theyyam* is called *Madapura*, and the *Madapura* of *Parassini* is famous for this.

Padaveeran: *Padaveeran* is a warrior *Theyyam* who was killed during a battle between *Illamkutti* *Swaroopam* and *Alladaswaroopam*. *Padaveeran Theyyam* has a crown-like figure called *Pooketti* and a white dhoti called *Kaanimundu* draped around his waist. The kind of painting or *Mukhathezuthu* is called *Nagamthazhthal*.

Potten Theyyam: *Potten Theyyam* has its myth related to the philosopher Shankaracharya. On his way to *Sarvajana Peeta*, the philosopher was stopped by Lord Shiva, Paravati and Nandikesa to test his erudition. Shankaracharya asked the trio disguised as low born in torn cloths to move away from his way as the then social system prevails for the low caste to move from the high castes' way. Lord Shiva disguised as Chandala disagrees, and both indulge in arguments about caste, class discrimination and untouchability. Chandala argues that such prevalent social systems are irrelevant and should be wiped out from the society. Shankaracharya succumbs and finally agrees to what Chandala opines and falls on his feet. Chandala blesses him and leaves.

The *thottam* of *Potten Theyyam* clearly shows two classes of society- privileged class of Brahmins represented by Sankaracharya and the unprivileged class represented by Chandala. The different sects of society are vividly described in the *thottam*. Chandala advocates for a change of society and equality for all.

....The poet who wrote the song of *Potten Theyyam* nearly five centuries, probably may be the innovator of a great social change. His re- evaluation of the contemporary social life is a memorable event in the development of the cultural history of Kerala. (Kurup, 1973:70)

Thekkan Kariyathan: The myth of *Thekkan Kariyathan* as various adventurous instances. Pata Nair and Kolendra Nair go for hunting. On their return, they go to the house of *Karimkulakal* and requests food. The lady serves food, and they go for a bath in the nearby pond where they find a big fish and tries to catch it. The efforts in vain, they return to the home to find the same fish in the well. The fish is brought out of the well-cut and cooked, but the fish jumps out alive. The pieces of fish then transform into two children who were brought by the women. The children were named *Tekkan Kariyathan* and *Kannikkorumakan*. They learned *kalari* and grew up practising bows and arrows. They roamed out, seeking strings for bow one day, and being hungry, requested three

people to offer food who were having toddy and chicken. When they refused, they threw stones on them, the men became mad but the woman prayed to them and agreed to offer them food. Witnessing all this, a boy on the other side of a river mocked them. Seeing the power, the boy then prayed to them that he will be always his servant and accompany them. Later the ruler called for them to bring the tiger's milk to cure the queen's disease. The heroes sent his servant first and later went with the servant to get the milk. After this, they were prayed and worshipped by the villagers.

The *Vannan* community performs the *Theyyam*. Toddy is being served during the performance to the *Theyyam* and is accompanied by another *Theyyam* who should be a small boy called *Kayikollan*. He wears a small headdress called *Kozhuppattam* and carries a small stick in his hand.

Vishnumoorthi: *Vishnumoorthi* is also known as *Ottakolam Theechamundi*. The myth is about an orphan named Kannan of the *Thiyya* community who worked as a shepherd for the landlord, Kurup of *Nileshwaram*. Once while sitting on a mango tree, the mango slipped from his hand and fell on Kurup's niece, who happened to pass through the way. The girl complained about him to her uncle, and thus he was banished from the town. Kannan ran to reach Mangalore in South Karnataka to meet an old Tulu woman devotee of Lord Vishnu. She treated him well with food and shelter. Kannan then had a dream of Lord Vishnu and left the place to reach Kerala seeking the lady's permission. The lady, while bidding him adieu, gave him an umbrella and a knife for his protection. Back in *Nileshwaram*, Kannan takes a bath in a pond. Kurup, who comes to know of his return, rushes with a sword and kills him. After the murder, Kurup witnessed major calamities happening to him and his family. With the consultation of an astrologer, Kurup is advised to worship Lord Vishnu by making arrangements to perform *Theyyam*. The story symbolizes the rivalry between *Prahlatha* and *Hiranyakashipu*. *Visnumoorthi* here is *Prahalatha*, born to kill the cruel Kurup, *Hiranyakashipu*.

The *Theyyam* is prominent in Tulunadu as well-known famously as *Ottekola*, which means single *kola* or figure. The devotees of this *Theyyam* offer him fire to calm down his anger and pacify him where he falls on the fire pyre a hundred times. The performer from the *Malaya* community who falls on the fire pyre some hundred times is rewarded with a gold bangle, a higher rank for the performance. The *Theyyam* was earlier called *Pallanthayi Kannan* and later known as *Vishnumoorthi*- an example of Sanskritisation of *Theyyams* which would be discussed in chapter 4.

Conclusion

The function of myth is to strengthen traditions and cultures and make them more potent by supernatural events added to it, which is apparent by the myths of the *Theyyams* elaborated above.

When dissatisfaction with or skepticism of an accepted pattern is expressed or doubts about it arise, whether it be sacred or secular, there is usually a myth or legend to validate it; or a so-called 'explanatory tale,' a moral animal tale, or a proverb, to fulfill the same function (Dundes, 1965: 292).

Folklore is the mirror of culture and incorporates common situations from everyday life. "The folklore of a people can be fully understood only through a thorough knowledge of their culture" (Dundes, 1965: 285). Folklore is the story of people. It gives us glimpses of the old ways of life, our history and origin.

The problem of the 'cultural context' or the relationship between folklore and other aspects of culture is in itself far more important. This problem has two distinct facets, the first of which concerns the extent to which folklore, like language, is a mirror of culture and incorporates descriptions of the details of

ceremonies, institutions and technology, as well as the expression of beliefs and attitudes (Dundes, 1965: 284).

Dundes is also of the view that “amusement is one of the functions of folklore and an important one, but there is always a greater meaning beneath the great humour” (Dundes, 1965: 290). The function of folklore is that it plays in validating culture, justifying its rituals and institutions to those who perform and observe them.

Folklore operates within a society to ensure conformity to the accepted cultural norms, and continuity from generation to generation through its role in education and the extent to which it mirrors culture. To the extent to which folklore contrasts with the accepted norms and offers socially acceptable forms of release through amusement or humor and through creative imagination and fantasy, it tends to preserve the institutions from direct attack and change (Dundes 1965: 297).

According to Dundes (1965), to fully understand folklore and its role in man’s life, we must have more knowledge of the specific functions of each of these forms in various societies, literate and nonliterate and more of the tedious but advantageous comparisons of the details of folklore texts with those of culture and actual behaviour. “Folklore is one of the human universals, and perhaps to understand why folklore’s importance has decreased as the written, and printed word has spread. Mechanical devices such as phonographs, radios, moving pictures, and television have been developed as all these mass media amuse due to the inability of folklore to adapt itself to cultural change, which is too rapid or too radical” (297).

Boas’ classical analysis of Tsimshian myths has demonstrated, in the words of Herskovits, that ‘a substantial body of folktales is more than the literary expression of a people. It is, in a very real sense, their ethnography which, if systematized by the student, gives a penetrating picture of their way of life’ (Dundes, 1965: 284).

Folklore is thus definitely one of the ways the history of anything can be traced. It can be pure or formed as a result of cross-culturalism or hybridization or Sanskritization. For instance, the folklore in Kerala results from the amalgamation of Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism. Folklores are made to make a memory; they form a significant part of the cultural imaginary of Malabar; it remains in our conscience. *Puram*, *Kavu*, *Theyyam*, native functions, agricultural procedures, funeral rites once performed always remain our memory which forms a major cultural link one is associated with. Memory is never killed, and mostly it is never erased from the memory when one is in the diaspora. This chapter deals with how Kerala's history helps in understanding *Theyyam* and its origin and the use of text in understanding history. The following chapter discusses diaspora, religion and transnationalism. It throws a detailed analysis of the casteist aspect of *Theyyam* in selected novels and documentaries.

Chapter 3

THEYYAM FOR WHOM? CONTESTING CASTEIST ASPECTS OF THEYYAM IN SELECTED NOVELS AND DOCUMENTARIES

The previous chapter discusses the history of Kerala, focusing on Kannur and provides all the details of the famous folk-art forms of Kannur and a detailed look into *Theyyam*. It focused on how history is read as a text in understanding *Theyyam*. The present chapter will focus on diaspora, religion and transnationalism, a discussion on the plights of migrants in two novels- *Goat Days* translated by Joseph Koyipally, originally written by Benny Benyamin and *Praisesong for the Widow* by Paule Marshall. The argument would focus on the Cathartic (Catharsis) aspect of Functionalism by Talcott Parsons and how *Theyyam* is donned for the prosperity of upper caste and how status reversal and respect as a part of it is a myth with reference to selected novels and documentaries. The novels also give a glimpse into understanding the socio-cultural background of *Theyyam* in Kannur and Kasargod districts.

The Concept of Diaspora and Transnationalism

Migration is not a recent phenomenon. People have been moving as refugees, slaves, exiles in the past, and better opportunities in the present. Unemployment in one's native land and the requirement for healthy lifestyles has been a significant factor for migration and then becoming a diaspora. India has the world's largest diaspora, and many people migrate every year to other land seeking better resources. Globalization and advancement in technology have paved the way for migration. Travel and communication from one land to another are made easy, and contact with the homeland is no longer a hurdle.

....Revolutionary developments in the spheres of transport and communications during the past three decades have introduced far-reaching changes in all societies, including the diasporic communities dispersed in different countries away from their countries of origin. In these cases, the ties with the motherland are not only reinforced and intensified but also extended to reach the members of Indian community settled in many other parts of the world (Baas, Sahoo and Faist, 2012: 2).

The term diaspora is derived from the Greek word meaning ‘dia’ and ‘spora’, which means ‘through’ and ‘spread’ or ‘scatter’ respectively. So, the term in total means to spread or scatter across like a seed. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) describes diaspora for the Jewish exodus who were forced to scatter. It was first used in Septuagint (Hebrew Scripture), where they had a strong narrative of pain and drama of being displaced.

The term migration has been associated with the notion of permanent settlement or a long-term sojourn (Sahoo, 2006). However, migration is a sub-category of a more general concept of ‘movement’, embracing a wide variety of types and forms of human mobility, each capable of metamorphosing into something else through a set of processes that are increasingly institutionally driven. It can be said that “migration itself is not a singular experience, but it takes place under a multitude of conditions and circumstances for different- economic, political, personal- reasons in vastly varied contexts” (Sahoo, 2006). The immigrants from India are from almost every corner and settled in almost all parts of the world. They have crossed the borders of the native land, withholding their cultures deep within. They have thus created ‘Little India’ everywhere where they have found a home and created wide networks with the members of their land who are widely spread in the diaspora to create the feeling of a community and oneness.

Migration from India had already begun from the pre-colonial period. Pre-colonial migration started in the first century AD when Indian priests, poets and artisans migrated to Southeast Asian

countries. Among them were the famous Angkor Wat, Lara Djonggrang and Borobudur. The early emigration from India owed its origins to the Buddhist missionaries, when the Hindu kingdoms of medieval Southeast Asia attached labour and craftsmen from during the 16th century CE (Suryanarayan 2003, as cited in Sahoo, 2006). The trade contacts slowly developed and small colonies gradually established themselves in East Africa and Southeast Asia. Merchants from Gujarat, Bengal and Tamilnadu settled down in the great port cities of Southeast Asia like Malacca, Aceh, Ternate and Tidor during the period. They gradually assimilated with the local people.

Colonial migration began in 1834, 1846 and 1873 to the British, French and Dutch colonies respectively as ‘indentured labourers’ after abolishing slavery. A vast number of workers were required to work in tea, coffee, cocoa, rubber and sugar plantation to meet the shortage of labourers and Indians, mainly from Calcutta and Madras migrated to East Africa, Fiji, Mauritius, the Caribbean as indentured labourers in the 18th century until early 20th century. The workers as indentured labourers were put in harsh condition and climates, and most of them never returned to India dreaming of accomplishing a better lifestyle. Many Indians migrated from the southern part migrated to Sri Lanka, Burma and Malaya to work in tea, coffee and rubber plantations under the headman, namely ‘Kangani’ (Sahoo 2006).

Post-colonial migration includes skilled labourers and entrepreneurs who seek to migrate for best opportunities to various countries like UK, the USA, Canada, New Zealand and Australia. There was a massive migration to the Middle East required for unskilled labourers for construction sites and to work in oil sectors.

Diaspora is divided into two types- Old Diaspora and New Diaspora. Old Diasporas are those migrants who were convicts, refugees, exiles, indentured labourers forced to move to another country through the sea. Old Diasporas mainly indicate the dispersion of Greeks, Jews and

Armenians (Band, 1996). The return of the Old Diasporas was impossible to the native land due to lack of transportation, long distances and economic deficiency. New Diasporas are the migrants who left their native land in large numbers, primarily to developed countries like the UK, US, Canada, Australia, and Western Europe, searching for better lifestyles and job opportunities. They were skilled, semi-skilled labourers and went with their own will and wish, unlike Old Diasporas. The return of the New Diasporas is always possible with increased travel and technological facilities. The Old Diasporas were forced to move like the exiles and refugees, whereas the New Diasporas migrate hoping for a better life from the post-colonial era. The latter would maintain contacts with their families and people, whereas the Old Diasporas in the colonial period had no access to maintain any contacts with their land and people; some remain in the hostland, never able to return.

“According to William Safran, the term diaspora are the population who 1) disperse from an original centre to two or more peripheral regions 2) retain collective memory and myth of the homeland 3) carry a sense of alienation from the host country 4) aspire to return to the ancestral homeland as ideal homeland” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 3) and have a myth of return (eventual return) 5) commit to the maintenance or restoration of the homeland 6) collective identification and consciousness of the self with the homeland (Safran 1991).

“The diaspora community comes together to form a group for sharing their feelings for having a common identity. They find among them common food, common trauma, socio-cultural aspects, languages, lifestyles etc.” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 3). They develop likings and a feeling of community in a foreign land of their settlement. Like-minded people with the same culture and traditions cross the barriers of alienation, and they feel at home. “The strong sense of identity awareness makes them assimilate into their community. They want this to carry from generation

to generation to be among their people” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 3). They try to recreate and preserve their culture and traditions to which they can relate to their homeland. The networks go on, and a strong diasporic community is formed, which has various associations and functions organized in the diasporas to relive their native culture and traditions. The culture and traditions have traces of hostland cultures and create a native culture into a hybrid culture. Michel Bruneau rightly argues,

...for a diaspora to be able to live on by transmitting its identity from one generation to the next, it just as much as possible have places for periodic gatherings of a religious, cultural, or political nature, in which it can concentrate on the main elements of its ‘iconography’... The rooting of national iconography on the minds of citizens is all the deeper as it is transmitted to children very early by the family and the school.... It is also what allows a diaspora not to become diluted into the host society and to keep its distinct identity (2012: 126).

“‘Iconography’ is a major source for linking people of the same origin in a foreign land which are mobile and can be transported for cultural reproduction. With such iconography made available in parks, churches, mosques, libraries, theatres, sports club, radio, television, newspapers etc., the homeland is transported to the hostland. They thus create a Little India to cling back to their memory, seeing the icons with which they construct a cultural space for rooting themselves in the hostland” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 4).

Transnational Communities:

A transnational community takes the global to different local networking places. These migrants often go to their native places and again earn in the hostland, investing a large part of their income in their homeland. The members have a strong affiliation to both the spaces, which they maintain

very well. Unlike diasporas, the transnational community does not like to return to their home country and have trauma being in another land. They keep on moving from native land to foreign land, which is a choice of their own. They maintain familial, economic, cultural links through transnational migration. The far-reaching technologies and cheap and fast transports make it possible for them to maintain their relationships. Thus “there is revival of the local at the global context, with shrinking of space and time” (Sahoo, 2006: 10).

Today the diasporic communities go beyond their nation-states and countries of origin – motherland or ancestral land - to network with their communities dispersed around the globe. The emergence of such networking and community sentiments, cutting across several countries, is most appropriately described by the term ‘transnationalism’ (Bhat and Narayan, 2010).

Diaspora had a clear-cut break with the home country like the earlier migrants they tried to overcome through space construction in the host country. “Memory of native cultures and recreation of iconography paves the way to link to the home country. For the transnational community, there is no clear-cut break with the homeland” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 4); there is always contact with the homeland through mobility. Diasporas are constantly struggling to re-root themselves, whereas transnational communities live a parallel life in host countries and home countries with no real need to re-root themselves. There is a continuous need to recreate and remodel. Thus, these people create a mini home where they feel homeless. They try to create a home that is very similar to their real home, people, food, culture, traditions. The transnational community does not make this crossing of the sea to the homeland once in a while, but they make this a lifestyle of their own.

Globalization has facilitated various transnational networks. Trading has been an important link that developed with transnationalism, with which many social spaces, networks and organizations

in the diaspora began to emerge. Everything is made easy and global. The local is delocalized, recreated and made global in the diaspora. A transmigrant is a new global citizen who shuttles from the place of origin to the place of settlement.

With migration, diasporas lost contacts with the native land but still preserve and protect their cultures and live in the memory of culture. Assimilation and adaption in the new land play a crucial role in the migrant settling in the new land to get away with the trauma. They come up with the construction of various symbolic representations for their re-rooting in the host country. Diasporas are found in every corner of the world. Culture in every diaspora plays a fundamental role, for instance, folklore, cuisine, language, literature, cinema, music, the press, and community life and family bonds.

Transnationals are often criticized for being not here or there. They are not grounded in either of the places. The de-localization thus is an integral part of transnationalism. While the transactions of networks and culture re- rooting happen, the essence of the native culture is often neglected due to various hurdles and transformation of one's culture from homeland to hostland is often vague. Sometimes there is a mingling of many cultures, and a hybrid culture is formed in the diaspora which is organized by various agents. The communities in the diaspora make various changes in the culture, and the culture gets contaminated, becoming a pop culture.

In foreign countries where half of the Malayalis live, books, films speaking the plights of migrants have a significant influence. There are many videos of *Theyyams* posted every year on Youtube. “When *Theyyam* videos of their region on Youtube are posted, it gives them a major source of belonging” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 5).

I have seen this transposition of Kerala from memory to imagination in the second-generation American immigrants from my state. They reconstruct their homeland from fragments of information gathered

from hearsay or from the internet. For them, home is not a place to return to, but a place to fantasize about, or may be to visit some time as a guest or a tourist (Satchidanandan 2001:8).

Homeland is more accessible through Cybercommunication. According to Rathesh Radhakrishnan, “Films started to have simultaneous releases in Kerala and the Gulf; film and related music became available in the Gulf before they were released in Kerala. Within Kerala, discussions of video piracy and the presence of videotapes of Malayalam films with Arabic subtitles that flooded the local market pinpointed the significance of the Gulf in producing a visual culture” (2009: 234). The movies and literature based on diaspora make us connect with the homeland.

Reclaiming the past for a writer is not, therefore, just a sentimental journey down memory lane, a mere exorcising of ghosts from one’s past. It may provide an immigrant writer with what Rushdie calls “a useful tool with which to work in the present.” By working with the past, playing with the images reflected in the broken mirror of arranging individual pieces of an “unfinished jigsaw puzzle”, a writer becomes what Vassanji calls “a preserver of the collective tradition, a folk historian and a mythmaker.” By doing so, he “gives himself a history” through which “he liberates himself to write about the present.” Interestingly, both Rushdie and Vassanji believe that by appropriating his past through his writings, an expatriate writer develops sharper insights and more appropriate tools to tackle his present. As Vassanji has put it to Susan Fisher in an interview- “When I write about the past, the present always matters” (Narang 2008: 89).

Home and Belonging in *Goat Days* and *Praisesong for the Widow*

Goat Days is initially written in Malayalam and is a trendy novel among Keralites for its in-depth details in narrating the migrant life, the tortures the protagonist suffers in a host country, the longing for the homeland, which is an important work to understand the plights of the migrant.

Praisesong for the Widow by Paule Marshall is the second text that is dealt for the very reason that it poignantly focuses on the protagonist's return for her long-lost culture and rituals with which she always connects.

Goat Days

Goat Days (2012) is a fine example of literature where the plights of a gulf migrant are very well portrayed. *Goat Days* is a 2008 Malayalam novel by Benny Benyamin originally titled *Aadujeevitham*, translated in 2012 by Dr Joseph Koyipally as *Goat Days*. Benyamin himself was a migrant labourer in the Gulf and dealt with the same theme in many of his short stories and novels. His *Aadujeevitham* won the Kerala Sahitya Academy award in 2009.

The story of *Goat Days* revolves around Najeeb, the protagonist of the novel, his struggle for livelihood in the deserted lands of the Gulf. The story is said to have depicted the real-life history of Najeeb, a villager of Benyamin whom he interviewed to understand the plights of migrant life. Najeeb belongs to a poor family with a pregnant wife and ailing mother who lands in Saudi Arabia in the year 1992 with the dream of getting a white-collar job and making a better living for the family. Najeeb travels to Saudi Arabia from Bombay with Hakeem, where an agent makes arrangements for his visa. Things are not as he thought of when his passport is assumed to have seized by another Arab who takes him and Hakeem to different goat farm far away from human civilization. He is kidnapped by the Arab, who comes to pick him from the airport and is made to work in an unknown deserted land surrounded by only goats, sheep, camels and another man except for the Arab, who might also have been kidnapped like Najeeb. They are forced to tend and milk the goats, sheep and camels with no proper space to sleep, eat or clean themselves. He was often whipped and threatened for drinking the water from the tank. He is enslaved in the goat farm (*masara*) for three years under the cruel instructions of the Arab called as Arbab. Najeeb's only

companion is goats, whom he associates with his villagers. He has names for each goat in the *masara* like Pochakkari Ramani, Arabu Rabuthar, Indipokkar, Niandu Raghavan, Chakki, Ammini, Pinki etc. He has named some public figures to the goats, for instance, EMS, Mohanlal, Jagathy etc., which in some way resemble their character, sound or some incidents that remind him of them. Thus, goats become his world and his longing for home is made up by talking, scolding and cuddling each goat he connects to his homeland character.

One has, in short, to take into account different forms of ‘othering’ experienced within the diaspora, as also different levels of identity. Imagining the other is not necessarily a crippling experience; it also defines one’s Self and reassures one about one’s own distinct identity. The narrative production of home assumes many strategies according to one’s relation to the place one came from, the place one came to and the place one belongs to (Satchidanandan 2001: 8).

The longing for homeland creeps over him again and again. He says:

...memories of homeland awakened in me. All my suppressed thoughts stirred and erupted like a volcano. I must escape from here.At such moments, I could truly comprehend the meaning of nostalgia. It is a craving. An acute craving that makes us hate our present condition. Then, that craving takes the form of a crazy urge to rush home, like a wild boar rushing wildly through sugarcane fields when it’s been shot. It happens only once in a while, but when it does, it is not easy to shut down the surge of emotions (Koyipally, 2012: 146).

He happens to meet his long-lost friend Hakeem on the nearby farm, and they plan to elope with Hakeem’s Somalian co-worker Ibrahim Khadri. They escape on the night when their respective masters are out to attend a wedding. They run through the deserts for days and nights, escaping roads to avoid being spotted by the Arabs to reach a Malabar Restaurant run by a Keralite named Kunjikka. The compassionate Kunjikka treats him well and takes him to the doctor to regain consciousness after three days. Under the instructions of Kunjikka, Najeeb and Hakeem, another

farm labourer, surrenders to the police. The Indian embassy gives some eighty trapped Indians passports to go back to the native country after some procedures.

The novel is all about the struggles of migrants who are betrayed in the name of a promising future and subjected to various hardships in their workplaces. The novel elaborately presents the poignant reality of Gulf migrants of Kerala. For Keralites, Gulf remained a land providing better career and financial stability. A considerable number of migrations in the 1970s, known as the Gulf Boom, provided various jobs for Keralites in the Gulf. However, migrant labourers always have had a stay full of hardships in the Gulf, where they had to sleep and work in hazardous conditions. They still struggle and accommodate themselves in such situations. Like in *Goat Days*, Najeed says, “How many times had I heard about the nostalgia of the diasporas? It often surprised me later that I never grieved for my shattered dreams even in those hostile situations” (Koyipally, 2012: 172). Despite being in such circumstances, they never cease to long for their homeland. In the strict workplace, alienation, forced labour, low wages, homelessness, trauma, and nostalgia are the memory for homeland and its return that keep them strong. Najeed says:

I was like a flower that was forced to blossom in the desert. It was a lie when I said I had not been thinking about my homeland and home. An outright lie. My every thought was occupied by fantasies of my homeland. I had only buried them underneath the cinders of my circumstances (Koyipally, 2012: 179).

According to Hema Raghavan (2008), “we have three kind of writers (a) those who feel nostalgic and constantly bemoan the loss of inheritance (b) those who celebrate the gains of adaption and do not regret ‘absent flavours’ and (c) the hybrid types whose writings reflect both the loss and gain of inheritance” (101).

The narrative of the diaspora is above all a narrative of the ‘self’, for the very act of migration implies a ‘bodily’ lifting out of the familiar and relocation in the new and the unfamiliar. Diasporic presence is a

dispersal, a scattering, a flight and has to take root elsewhere, specially if it seeks sustenance and growth. But it continues to depend on the bits and pieces of its origin to hold itself together in the face of the onslaught, rejection or domination by the 'other', by the world which both frightens and fascinates (Jain: 2001:79).

Praisesong for the Widow

Praisesong for the Widow, a 1983 novel by Paule Marshall, an African American writer, is one such novel where the protagonist realizes the intensity of having long lost one's culture and tries to indulge in the same. The novel mainly focuses on going back to her traditional route to relocate her lost identity.

It is not a mere coincidence that a large number of writers of Indian diaspora continues to invoke in their writings- at least in the earlier ones- their past back home. On fact, this past itself becomes as Salman Rushdie puts it, some kind of a 'home' to which emigrant writers escape, seeking solace from harsher realities of their respective presents. Through poems, stories, plays and novels about their communities, these writers have tried to recreate what Rushdie has termed as 'Indias of the mind' and what Moyez Vasanji has termed as 'imaginary landscapes' (Narang 2008: 88).

The protagonist Avey Johnson's story begins with her luxurious travel with friends in a Caribbean cruise which she thinks of abandoning to reach Grenada where she encounters an annual excursion to Carriacou to the 'Beg Pardon', the yearly tribute to ancestors of Africa in the 'Big Drum' ritual dance. Through this ritual dance and with her people, Paule Marshall's black female protagonist finds herself and goes back to her roots.

Avey is a middle-aged woman from the middle class who is physically dislocated from her home and assimilates back to her past life while celebrating the ritual of connection and memory. She rediscovers herself by being a part of the ritual. She becomes a part of her community, Carriacou, while pondering about the memories of her childhood. Her journey indicates her moving back to

her past with flashbacks, headaches and seasickness, making her both physically and emotionally weak. The revisiting of her past in the present connects her to relive a new life. The present takes her to the past when people talk in creole. She is reminded of her aunt and how she converses with her aunt in creole. Her aunt had taught her that 'Avey, short for Avatara' (Marshall, 1983: 251). She finally reaches a hotel away from the people, but the past never stops to haunt her, where she considers herself at fault for forcing her husband, Jerome Johnson, to lead a life chasing the American dream and forgetting their identity. She believes that leaving their small apartment in Harlem was 'an act of betrayal' (Marshall, 1983: 122). She believes that chasing a material life led them to lose their culture and indeed lose each other to gain more material pleasure.

The novel is a longing for the past for a diasporic protagonist with the connecting beats of music and drum of the rituals of her ancestors which is very crucial for African community to preserve and protect their culture. The Caribbean culture binds their connection with their ancestral land and people.

Thus, the novel clinging to the past through culture and rituals shows a purgation by connecting to the culture and then expanding it to the future generation, like how Avey goes home to Tatem and then New York teach her grandchildren what her great-aunt taught her.

Dances and music can connect people to their culture; for instance, *Theyyam* is a primary ritualistic dance form that connects people of Kerala in the diaspora to go back to their homeland while present in the foreign land. Each dance has a history; it conveys many meanings as any painting, literature, or cinema. There is a collective history of any ritual performance which unites the performers in a shared diasporic culture. For Avey, the Beg Pardon preserves culture in the diaspora where the individual comes from different class and space but unite to celebrate a culture that is one. *Praisesong for the Widow* is how dance and drum beats join hands and foot to form a

homeland for those away from it in the diaspora, which would strengthen diasporic identities. The reconnection makes the protagonist reclaim her culture and liberate herself from the materialistic dream she chased for her entire life.

Caste Politics and *Theyyam* Depiction in Literature

This section would look at some of the literature and documentaries where *Theyyam* plays for the well-being of the upper caste. *Theyyam* performers are imposed by traditions to appease the gods so that the elites are bestowed with fortunes, be it Little Tradition in the homeland or Great Tradition in the diaspora or the ‘Appropriated’ Tradition for the elites on stages. Culture is imposed on the *Theyyam* artists to dance for the upper caste – a ritual in the past donned only for the prosperity of the upper caste. As mentioned in the previous chapters, *Theyyams* were earlier meant to relieve the upper caste and kings from diseases. They had to jump and dance naked on fire embers with drums, and the women had to sing in the background to please the king. They were asked to perform to wipe out the diseases the king is suffering by taking the diseases into their bodies. By dancing and praying to god, they are assumed to get the disease, and the king cured. When the traders who come to Kerala are sick, the *Panue* jump on the pyre in the early morning, called ‘*uranjuthulal*’ (jump in a frenzy), to get rid of the possessed evil on them. C.M.S. Chandra, a famous writer to have written on *Theyyam*, writes that *Ottakollam Theyyam* is also donned to get rid of diseases (Somashekharan 2014: 21).

The literature on *Theyyam* was scarce from primitive times. *Manipravala Sahithyam*⁴⁶ talks about witchcraft, temples and shrines but not any on *Theyyam*. *Payyanur Pattu*⁴⁷, *Puthuvan Pattu* has no

⁴⁶ Early poems of South India which are a mixture of Sanskrit and Malayalam languages dating from 9th century to 17th century by various writers.

⁴⁷ First independent literary work in Malayalam language in the 13th and 14th century by anonymous author which gives an elaborate picture on social and cultural life of then Kerala society.

traces of *Theyyam* too. Until the sixteenth and seventeenth century, Portuguese tourists and Samuel Purchas' works do not mention it except for witchcrafts, medicinal methods, *Velichapad*⁴⁸ that were prevalent earlier in *Kolathunad*. It was in the seventeenth century, through *thottam*, *Theyyam* narratives and its literature have emerged. *Thottams* are inscribed on the palm leaves and also byhearted by the people. These narratives of *Theyyam* sung during the *Theyyam* performances are believed to be the first literature of Malayalam. The authors are anonymous. The credit of advocating for social equality in Kerala goes to this unknown author of *thottam*. The theme taken by him may be a purely imaginary one. Sometimes, a Brahmin scholar of the locality must have been criticized by a *Pulaya* scholar for the racial superiority of the former. That episode must have influenced the author of this *thottam* which is still cherished by both educated and uneducated (Kurup, 1973:70).

Scholars believe that social necessity greatly influences all creative arts and literature, and such a necessity has contributed significantly to the *thottam* of this deity. Historically speaking, *Potten Theyyam* is a creation of contemporary social necessity. The Aryan settlement in *Kolathunad* created so many social problems, and the aborigines were treated as untouchables by them. *Pulayas* and *Cherumans* who cultivated the land, were excluded from the social structure and pushed into economic slavery. In these circumstances, the *Potten Theyyam* appeared as a clarion call for the social revolution whose optimism was human brotherhood in the light of monotheism. The caste system was an invention of the Aryans, who introduced it to casteless Kerala. Though the Aryanization began after the first three centuries of the Christian era, it was completed in the 8th century, as mentioned in Chapter two. The Brahmins attained utmost supremacy in the reign of

⁴⁸ *Velichapad* is the Oracle, also known as *Komaran*. He is a mediator between the deity and the devotees who comes to houses of Kerala at a particular season and also plays its part in the rituals held in temples.

Kulashekaras of Mahodayapuram. There were irrational caste rules, and even the sight of lower caste people was considered polluted. When the upper castes walk through any street, they shout at the lower caste so that the latter hides from appearing in front of the upper caste that would pollute them. If not, the lower castes are killed as part of the punishment. The upper caste then had to take a bath in the stream to evade the pollution at the sight of the lower caste people. Women who are molested or touched by the lower castes are banned from society. Law and orders were partial towards the *Namboodiris*; there was no death penalty for any heinous crime done, whereas the lowest of crimes by the lower caste community was death. The lower the caste, the punishment given would be the harshest. They were not allowed inside temples or given the right to education. Various social reformers like Sree Narayana Guru brought SNDP Yogam to elevate the *Ezhava* caste community from being suppressed.

The Nair Service Society by Mannath Padmanabhan in 1914, Sahodara Sangham by K. Ayyappan in 1917, the Vaikom Satyagraha in 1924 and the Guruvayur Satyagraha in 1931-32 etc. were other organizations who stood against the evils that were bestowed upon the lower caste community. Temple entry to the so-called *avarnas* (lower castes) was allowed in Malabar and Cochin in 1947(Menon 1979). Inter-caste marriages and inter- dining between castes were encouraged by the organizations. With the spread of education among all strata of society and industrialization, Kerala society paved its way for advancement, but caste prejudices and hatred are still prevalent in Kerala.

Unless the lower castes are not made to be settled and prayed as a deity, there is a higher chance of them fighting against the elite upper caste, giving the lower castes a temporary role to be worshipped as a god. Giving space and position of divinity for a short time can keep them voiceless for their entire life. The divinity given to them is an outlet of regressed life and emotions

for the lower caste imposed by the upper caste. The social resistance of the *Theyyam* performers fails them to raise their voice any further and be under the control of divinity that is imposed on them only for the welfare and prosperity of the upper castes. *Theyyams* are often appropriated with time and given Brahmanical names of gods and goddesses under the supremacy of Brahmanism. They get the freedom of expression and respect only for a short time which cannot be considered empowerment. The power- politics has a significant role to play, which is hidden, and even the *Theyyam* performers fail to understand it.

The National Academy of Music, Dance, and Drama (Sangeet Natak Akademi), upon its establishment in 1952 in New Delhi, “declared four regional artistic forms as ‘classical’ dances of India. They are *Kathak* from northern India, *Bharatanatyam* of Tamil Nadu, *Kathakali* of Kerala, and *Manipuri* of Manipur. Regional dance traditions, such as *Kuchipudi* from Andhra Pradesh, *Odissi* from Orissa, *Mohiniattam* from Kerala were recognised as ‘classical’ by the National Academy of Music, Dance, and Drama in the mid-1950s and 1960s after it was revived and reconstructed based on the descriptions provided in the *Natyasastra*, other vernacular treatises, and palm-leaf manuscripts” (Shah, 2002: 128). The focus on the ‘classical’ dance forms and negation of folk dance like *Theyyam* made it to the margin due to this. *Theyyams* are considered a ritual dance of the lower caste. However, *Theyyam* has now emerged out worldwide and reached the masses. People from various parts of the world come to watch the splendid art form, and many agents arrange it to be performed abroad. But the fact cannot be denied that caste discrimination after all the recognition is still prevalent, and once they remove the *Theyyam* costume, they are not even looked upon with respect.

I have picked up a few novels and novella in English literature where there are references to *Theyyam* through which the legendary story and socio-cultural background of *Theyyam* in Kerala

are brought about. The mention of *Theyyams* is scarce in English literature, but there is an attempt to find out those in the translated Malayalam novels and mainstream English literature. It also tries to bring into light the casteist aspects of *Theyyams*. *The Edge of Another World* by Pepita Seth, *Swarga: A Posthuman Tale* by J. Devika, *On the Banks of Mayyazhi* by Gita Krishnankutty, *Dance* by D. Krishna Ayyer and K. G. Ramakrishnan and William Dalrymple's *Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in Modern India* are some of the fictions and non-fictions that are referred to analyse the casteist aspects and socio-cultural background of this art form.

The Edge of Another World

The Edge of Another World (2015) by Pepita Seth is a novel consisting of a Prologue and three chapters, namely Sophie, Ines and Thattakutty. The first part, 'Sophie', is about the protagonist, Sophie, searching for her identity and her real parents knowing later that her mother adopted her through a letter her adopted mother writes to her before her death. In a prolonged search for her father, 'The Bastard', she goes to Malabar on the invite of her friend and historian, Mr Satishan, whom she befriended in Portugal. The other parts of the novel are symbolic of women breaking the shackles of patriarchy and power to get away from their restrictions. *The Edge of Another World* is the story of three women living in three different times and places but interconnects in various ways, which are not direct but create mystery. The novel has details about the Kerala history and *Theyyam* myths of *Muchilottu Bagavathi* narrated by Satishan to Sophie as for him, 'our Bagavathi is the whole universe' (Seth, 2015:116).

Sophie, an English woman, the first woman of Seth's story, leaves for Portugal to the Alentejo region after her mother's death to overcome the pain of her loss. She accidentally meets with a Malayali historian from Malabar, Satishan Nambiar. They indulge in the conversation of frescoes, murals, church arts, megalithic standing stones and the figure of Madonna-like Indian goddess. He

compares it to the goddess in *Theyyam* known as *Muchilottu Bagvathi*, saying, “She was called the Virgin of O and was a Virgin of the people, a Virgin who knew the pangs of childbirth, who had suffered as they did. A Virgin woman could pray to and who would intercede with god on her behalf and grant miracles” (Seth, 2015: 57). He also tells Sophie that her name means ‘wisdom’ and narrates to her the story of *Muchilottu Bagavathi* from his village whose wisdom and beauty being scorned upon by male elites led to her destruction.

The first story had a detailed description of Kerala history and *Theyyam* myths which Satishan narrates to Sophie.

When Vasco da Gama landed on the Malabar coast, he was taken to a temple dedicated to the Bagavathi, our Goddess, and thought Her shrine as a church honouring the Virgin. And there is another deeper connection; when we address the Bagavathi we usually call Her ‘amma’ meaning mother while when the Portugese refer to the Virgin in the context of the Crucifixion and the Pieta they call Her ‘mae’, again meaning mother (Seth, 2015: 58).

He explains how devotees make offerings to seek a deity’s blessings, and in return, they receive *prasadam* (which means divine grace, a gift from the deity), and usually in the form of sandal-paste, flowers- and sweets. While the devotee is happy, he probably is unaware that he has helped finance the temple. He later invites her to Malabar before they part. He writes to her at the end of the letter, “PS the festival of our Goddess will be in two months - it would be wonderful if you could be here then” (Seth, 2015:106).

The recording of folklore leads for the investigation of the content of culture, insuring that important cultural details are not overlooked, it provides a nonethnocentric approach to the ways of life of a people (Dundes 1965: 284).

For instance, Satishan says, “Our stories are about what people feel and what we see around us, they are about faith and belief, about what we feel in our hearts regardless of whether or not the plots are logically possible. And what is belief anyway? Every single one of our myths and folktales has emerged out of our land, the land that surrounds us. Their emotion is true” (Seth, 2015:116).

He explains, Malabar Brahmins were known as Namboodiri Brahmins. The Namboodiri women were strictly brought up. They see a man from another family or going outside the house, and many of them were never married because only the eldest son of the family could marry. This enabled the Namboodiris to keep their property intact who are both patrilineal and patriarchal. Despite having spiritual and scholarly pursuits, the younger sons of the family always took mistresses from other upper castes like Nambiars and Nairs known as *Sambhandam*. Also, being the mistress of a Brahmin was not only socially acceptable but desirable for them. (Seth, 2015).

He narrates the myth of *Muchilottu Bagavathi* to which she wonders if any women would have the guts to question the status of a woman fearing they would be driven from the village. According to him, “*Theyyam*, came in two forms: one a preliminary manifestation who would sing the *thottams*, the songs of the deity’s life and presence in the shrine and that later, and in different costumes and with intricate make- up, the actual *Theyyam* would appear in what Satishan referred to as ‘the full form’” (Seth, 2015: 130).

Sophie sees a young man, maybe twenty-five or more, called Kunhiraman, whose features were ageless, not very tall or fine- bodied who was bare-chested. She finds his eyes restful and expressions enigmatic. She soon realized that they resembled the goddess’s eyes in the picture hanging in her room (Seth, 2015). She explains, “Almost all evidence of an individual’s human features were erased, no part of their bodies seemingly unadorned while headdresses crowned their

painted faces. One powerful goddess even had burning tapers rimming her headdress and great fire- torches blazing around her waist. Another goddess- who Satishan first said was a tiger goddess but then confused me by saying she was Shiva's consort, Parvathy- whirled and leapt against the restraining arms of her attendants to run in great athletic leaps, apparently disdainful of the costume's restrictive weight and bulk" (Seth, 2015:136). The processions took place in the evenings and mornings and always ended before the sanctum or shrine where a small crown-like headdress was tied around Kunhiraman's head. He had gold ornaments hung over his chest, gold bands across their foreheads and heavy jangling belts of bells around his waists. She understands that Kunhiraman had an increased speed of the last round when his attendants' need to support him became apparent. She says, "My one barely conscious thought was that the line between man and god had blurred and that to even think of denying the existence of the divine within the small red-robed dancer would be a sacrilege. However, when it was over, and the small headdress had been removed, and I watched him being led away, still visibly supported, I felt that he was being like a small lost child" (Seth, 2015:138).

The second story Ines is set in 16th century Portugal. Ines is an orphan born to an unknown mother during an earthquake. Ines is also in search of her father. She is taken by a noble family as a caretaker to their younger daughter, Leonor and sent to a convent. At the convent, she is declared to be 'Virgin' of Lucas van Domburg, the painter commissioned to create the frescoes in the church. She is later asked to accompany Leonor to Malabar by her parents to see Leonor's future husband. She happens to meet her father Thayathu Chandu on the ship to Malabar, which is revealed later when she accidentally lands up at his place. Thayathu Chandu in the ship explains how he landed up in Portugal. He was asked to send his elephant by the Governor as a gift to Portugal King, Joao. With the elephant, its *pappan* (mahout) was to go too. When they arrived in Portugal, they were

taken in a grand procession with musicians beating great kettledrums and sounding golden trumpets. Richly dressed men on prancing and caparisoned horses, standard-bearers with fluttering banners and lance bearing soldiers accompanied them. On arrival to the King's Palace with cheering crowds, they were grandly and ceremoniously received by high officials. As the Governor's letter was read out, he was given a gold coin by the King. Kesavan, his elephant, took everyone's attention. The crowd shouted and cheered, amused by the highborn's fear when they came close to Kesavan, and he lifted his trunk (Seth. 2015). The King would come to see Kesavan accompanied by his wife and children. They are an integral part of every royal procession through the city with great pomp. However, he and his Kesavan could not adjust to the language and the food. They missed their native food though they were well treated. After the plague came to Lisbon, their life took a turn. The entire royal crew packed things on mules or in carts and set out for Evora. He too left to Evora with Kesavan, but the royal family now lost interest in them; their novelty has faded, and they left from there to their hometown in Kerala.

With the turn of events, a crucial part of the novel happens when Ines lands in Malabar, and it is revealed that her father is the mahout -Thayathu Chandu, she had met in the ship and conversed, who had come to Portugal from Malabar in the story he had narrated to her.

Thattakkutty is the last story in the novel. It is set in an *illam* which happens centuries ago. Thattakkutty happens to be the story of the girl Satishan had mentioned in the first story to Sophie, whose beauty and wisdom were against her because the male scholars of her village did not very well take it. Thattakkutty lives in a man-dominated Brahmin family abandoned by her father and attempted to be destroyed by her guru, who could not stand her intelligence. Men here are free to indulge in sexual misconduct, but women should stay out of it, and such circumstances make Thattakutty's sister kill herself, who is rumoured to be in an illicit relationship with a Nambiar

man. Thattakutty, on the other hand, flees the *illam* when she finds the door open like the way *Muchilottu Bagavathi* runs to end the defamation the patriarchal society and upper caste scholars put on her.

There are many instances where *Theyyam* being the lower caste, are called upon to bring glory to the upper caste family. For instance, Thattakutty's father sends a message requesting the goddess *Uchitta* to come and bless Parvathi-edathi-amma with Her divine presence. *Uchitta Theyyam* relieves women from various stress, especially protection during delivery. The Kariasthan Achutan Nair make arrangements for it with Kelu Panikkar, a Malayan who is to perform for them and his wife who would attend to Parvathi-edathi-amma at the time of her delivery. *Uchitta* later comes to the *illam* with the aura of god and with her high-pitched voice. The family is delighted to welcome her, which would smooth all the forthcoming events in their family. If not in *Theyyam* costume, the Malayan would never be allowed to come near a Namboodiri woman or man. They have never seen him near to them except for when he performs. After the performance, they believed that the goddess has come to their doorstep to bless the family and Parvathi-edathi-amma with painless childbirth.

Swarga: A Posthuman Tale

Swarga: A Posthuman Tale (2017) originally named *Enmakaje* (2009) by Ambikasutan Mangad, translated by J. Devika is a breath-taking novel which depicts the cruelty of elites and politician adamant in money-making by pouring the pesticide, Endosulfan on the cashew trees of rural Kasargod. As the novel's cover page clarifies the poignant tale as 'When the skies rain poison and our world turn into a wasteland.' The story is set in the 70s where the Plantation Cooperation of Kerala poured Endosulfan to prevent cashews from being attacked from mosquito bugs for almost

two decades. This usage of pesticides made the entire land and its inhabitants poisonous. Animals and plants were dying; children born then were equipped with strange disabilities.

Swarga is the name of a place in Kasargod, abundant with natural bees, plants, and animals, as the name suggests. The protagonists of the novels, Man and Woman, live a primitive life discarding their real names Neelakantan and Devayani, away from human beings, being tormented much from civilization. They take a vow to forget their names and maintain no contacts with human beings, thus leading a life like the first Man and Woman on earth. However, the vows are near to be broken, for the Woman finds a deformed child, her motherly instincts awake, and starts to look after it. Man disagrees with her deed but gradually come to terms. They find that many more children in the Swarga are suffering from such deformity concluding to the fact with other journalists and revolutionaries that it is the poison poured from above, the pesticide, Endosulfan thrown from the helicopters on the land are causing the land, animals, water, stream and a whole lot of generation to perish with deformity and death. They take actions against it by pulling rallies, protests, speeches and meeting with the MLA to ban such pesticides. The consequences are haunting where the corrupt MLA endangers them by threatening them, putting them in jail, murder and disappearance of the protestors making the reader's release the nexus between politicians, private companies and government officials who fill their pockets and kill the environment and the innocents living there.

The novel attempts to look into the serious crippling grip of Endosulfan in the State of Kerala and provide a wider awareness of the same. It has portrayed the folklore of North Kerala, myths and lifestyles vividly. Jadadhari hills of Kasargod have its myth, culture and traditions. *Theyyam* and *Bhutha Kola* has major depiction in the novel. It says,

The Jadadhari Bhoota⁴⁹, the local deity, the Teyyam, of Swarga, turned out to be a thorn in their flesh. The Sivolli Brahmins performed black magic and trapped the Bhoota in a copper pot and buried him on top of the hill. ...When the sorcerers came down the hill, she [Kurathi, tribal deity] rescued the Bhoota. Smashing the copper pot, scattering the heap of huge stones his foes had piled above it, Jadadhari re-emerged, furious (Devika, 2017: 17).

With this, they say the Sivolli Brahmins' golden days in Swarga were numbered. Terrible things happened in their homesteads each day. They lost their children for various causes, and such disasters became common. Agriculture and their animals were all died and diseased. Poisonous snakes started attacking them and crawling all over their houses. Having lost their wealth and health, they sold everything they owned to escape from Swarga, leaving no trace of Sivollis. The place is said to have faced much destruction unless the Jadadhari Bhoota's anger was appeased. The protagonist Neelakantan thinks, "Why did these migrants, the Sivolli Brahmins, try to bury humble people's Bhoota?" (Devika, 2017: 64).

There is a description of *kavu*;

A small, single- room shrine stood there, with a donation box at the doorstep and a flat dish with ash which had spilled all around. Inside were the Bhootas worshipped – Kurathi and Gulikan. Once in three years, the Bhootam- the Dance of Invocation- was held. Around it was a little yard, overgrown with grasses. Outside the yard, right in front of the shrine, were some steps, worn with age. These are the truth steps (Devika, 2017: 93).

Subba Naik shows Neelakantan the Pookkare stone with which Mother Kurathi sharpens the Bhoota knife. Everyone who passes by offers a hibiscus bloom as a prayer to the goddess.

⁴⁹ Bhoota, the spelling differs here as the novel uses Bhoota all through instead of Bhutha which I have been using.

According to him, Mother Kurathi is a powerful Bhoota and comes to their aid, whoever worships her. Neelakantan, who never believed in any god, plucks a hibiscus flower and prays for the children of Swarga.

Panji, the tribal older man, always had a hundred tales of the legend to tell to Neelakantan and Devayani. He tells of Nagas and Bhootas. He describes how crucial the role of Mogeyans on the lands of the landlords in Swarga is. No agriculture or cultivation would begin without a Mogeyan stepping on it first. A sacred pot is to be offered then to Gulikan, and then the first sapling had to be planted by an Adivasi, the Mogeyan who are Panji's ancestors. They have the right to harvest the first cultivations because it is believed the season would not be auspicious without them.

....While there has been erosion of tradition with modernity, especially in an urban context, this detraditionalization has also been accompanied by a retraditionalization and traditions reinventing themselves and reconstituting ritual forms. We can see this, for example, with tantric traditions in Kerala and Tamilnadu where a temple priest might perform an old ritual enjoined in the tantric texts in a temple with no previous history of the rite (Flood, 2003:6).

There would be held Maima, which is the Dance of Invocation special to the Jadadhari Bhoota. Basava, a cow, was prayed. Thousands would be fed during Maima, but only after the cow is fed. Menstruating women cannot go near the cowshed. The Dance of Invocation happens every year in Jadadhari. The deity wears ornaments of gold and silver, and those are kept safely in the *taravad*⁵⁰ for the prosperity of the upper caste. Snakes and leopard are worshipped in this land. There are eight Bhootas, including leopard deity, Puli Bhoota, Puli Chamundi, Posa Bhoota, Cheliya Bhoota, Kaavala, and Kurathi *Gulika*...of which the main Bhoota is *Puli Bhoota*. This is symbolic of the eight cultures in the land of Enmakaje. Languages like Tulu, Kannada, Malayalam, Arabic,

⁵⁰ Ancestral home in Kerala.

Marathi and Urdu. There are no wells in the land but streams all over, thousands of channels for the people to fetch water.

Enmakaje's most colourful history belonged to Bhoota worship. Earlier, there were no temples, but only Bhootas were prayed in their shrines which were oppressed and emerged as the real hero of these people. The groves protect the major flora and fauna of the land. No one dares to cut and kill flora and fauna near the groves

Jayarajan, the journalist, was curious why only Bhootas of other groves are not worshipped and only Jadadhari and Kurathi are worshipped. Jadadhari and Kurathi were once buried on the top of the hill, thus named Jadadhari hill. There are many other bhootas, but they are not worshipped. They are all the deities of the oppressed and the excluded. The Bhoota who defeated Sankaracharya was the *Pulaya's Bhoota* or *Pottabhoota*, *Potten Theyyam* of Malabar. It is believed that they emerged when the Brahmins moved in and grabbed everything, and the people of Swarga had to suffer all of it.

The novel also pictures the myth about *Bali Theyyam* and how grand the festivity happens, with thousands of gatherings to witness it. There are instances where the author depicts chickens being carried by the people to be sacrificed for the Bhoota worship, where innocent chickens are sacrificed for the deity, which is believed to bring goodness among people.

The story is all about mythology linked to the place and the gods they believe live with them, who are the reasons for every fortune and calamity in the place.

... function of folklore is maintaining conformity to the accepted patterns of behavior. Although related to the last two functions, it deserves to be distinguished from them. More than simply serving to validate

or justify institutions, beliefs and attitudes, some forms of folklore are important as means of applying social pressure and exercising social control (Dundes 1965: 294).

By worshipping them and giving them a position, the voice of resistance is made to end forever. Raising them to a position of local deities, they are elevated to be prayed and made only a myth by which they are subjugated and made to live a voiceless life forever.

On the Banks of Mayyazhi

The following selected novel for analysis is *On the Banks of Mayyazhi* (2014) by Gita Krishnankutty, the translation of the famous Malayalam novel *Mayyazhipuzhayude Theerangalil* by M. Mukundan. It has won the *Crossword Award* for Indian Language Fiction in Translation. The book is translated both into French and English.

The plot begins with Mahe, which was ruled by the French for 200 years and as a community, both French and the natives lived sharing each other cultures until the second generation looked into communism, and a bunch of youth thrived on driving the French away from their native land. French men and Indian women married, some shared food and lived in cultural harmony. The French flag could be seen flying in Mahe's dreamy wind. The first generation lived like a good neighbour, and with the break of revolution when the French had to leave Mahe, many cried like they lost their family. Kurambi Amma, the revolutionary Dasan's grandmother, is an admirer of the French magistrate Leslie Sayiv who comes every evening in his fine horse carriage to Kurambi Amma's house. They would talk for hours on "village matters until dusk, helping themselves now and then to a pinch of snuff" (Gita, 2014: 10).

There is a potpourri of characters vividly depicting the socio-cultural, political background and cultural assimilation of Mahe. The plot weaves the revolution of ethnicity with love stories of

Dasan and Chandrika, Kurambi amma's infatuation for the coat and suit and French magistrate. There is a thread of happenings that happens one after the other keeping the reader engrossed.

Amidst all the hustle-bustle, folklore and myths of Mayyazhi catch the colour of the novel. *Theyyams* are a major part of the lives of the people in Mayyazhi, throwing light upon the readers how inescapable is *Theyyam* to the people of Malabar.

There were two important festivals in Mayyazhi- the Feast of Virgin and the Thira festival. Although the Thira temple belonged to the thiyyas, every caste except the Mappilas came to watch the celebrations. The Mappilas were forbidden to enter the temple premises (Gita, 2014: 91).

The place flocks with villagers when a *Theyyam* happens. There are many stories that villagers share about their deities. Kurambachan, a drunkard, did not have money to pay to the toddy shop; no one would lend him money, so he crept surreptitiously into the temple banana tree and stole them. He wrapped them in his towel and went to the toddy shop. He drank to his satisfaction, and while he was returning, he heard a sound of the dancing bell and appeared before him the *Gulikan Theyyam* wearing anklets and a skirt of palm fronds. He asked Kurambachan, "Where are my bananas?" (Gita, 2014: 43). Shocked and scared, he fell on Gulikan's feet. The deity kicked him and ran into the darkness of the temple. Kurambachan laid there for long, and when he got up, he found himself lame. The villagers believed that the curse of *Gulikan* has made his entire generation lame and can be cured only when *Gulikan's* anger sooths.

After Malayan Kurumban's death at the age of seventy, Uthanam had to perform *Theyyam*. The *Theyyam* had to be performed for the Meethala temple. It was believed that the deities came out of their divine mysteries at the silent hour of midnight or in the afternoon invisible to the people of Mayyazhi.

The deities of Meethalambalam were fierce. They loved you if you loved them. But if they were crossed, they would destroy your tharavad. There were families in Mayazhi that had been ruined this way and families that had been blessed by them as well (Gita, 2014: 89).

The deity is visible to the folks when Kurmban performed on the temple courtyard. He used to perform vibrantly *Gulikan*, *Kuttichathan Theyyams* with thirty feet high headgear and Velattam every year. Now Uthanam was asked to don the *Theyyams* his father had carried to the satisfaction of the villagers. Uthanam does not believe in god; he negates his mother's approach to performing the *Theyyam* dance. Uthaman, a communist, wanted to drive away from the French force from Mahe, but his family profession demanded him to be a *Theyyam* performer. His family had been sorcerers and healers of snake bites, but instead of following the ritual, Uthanam wanted to perform it just as a means of livelihood. The *Theyyam* performers have to go into complete abstinence without having fish or meat during the festival time. Uthanam defied the ritual rules, brought sardine fish to cook and slept with a prostitute. When the news spread like a fire, the head of the Meethalath family who owned the *Theyyam* shrine discarded him to perform *Theyyam*. But the proceedings allowed him to perform on the belief that if he had done the wrong, he would be punished by the deity. When the festival days has come;

There were lights everywhere. The rhythmic beat of the Keli had started, announcing a Thira performance. The drummers stood in rows, with caparisoned elephants behind them. The glowing oil lamps illuminated the figure of the Vellattu in his yellow silk, his long hair flying, sword in hand (Gita, 2014: 95).

Uthanam performed *Gulikan Theyyam*; all villagers and the French officials were seated to witness *Theyyam* in his quick rhythmic steps to bless the folks. Uthanam was laid down on a mat in a thatched shed, and a tribal painter was painting on his face with rice powder and vegetable colours.

Now the *Mukhathezutu* was completed, he came out with the drummers accompanied. They all stood in front of the temple. Uthanam prayed to the deity, and a headgear of palm leaves and bamboo as high as five men was tied on him. With the crackers bursting, *Gulikan* came with his dynamic steps, balancing himself on sticks. Surrounded by lamp lights and drummer's sound, the steps got speedier, the headgear dipped, and Uthaman fell on his face and died. The audience was transfixed; his mother and sister left the village. The only explanation some could give was "after all, he was a novice. He should have been more careful" (Gita, 2014: 97), and he faces the consequences for breaking the ritual rules his family had been following. This is believed to be a punishment Uthaman faces for going against his familial tradition he did not believe in. This shows how community and caste impose *kulathozzil* on *Theyyam* performers, and it is made to believe that neglecting those would lead to tragedies in life.

Dance

The next literary text I have selected is a novella, *Dance* (2002), translated to English by D. Krishna Ayyer and K. G. Ramakrishnan from the original text *Nrittam* (2000) by again M. Mukundan. The novella is a celebration of dance and the martial art of Kerala, known as *Kalaripayattu*.

The novel is all about how a traditional martial art form like *Kalaripayattu* of Malabar is changed into a modern dance, extracting and appropriating it moves to form a new variant dance in the West. The protagonist Balakrishnan in the story of Agni, is a student of *Kalaripayattu* practising under his teacher Gurukkal. Gurukkal was a master not only of *Kalaripayattu* but also of *Kathakali*.

He taught me bodily throws and thrusts special to kalari that I learnt to do not to the punctuation of music but to the call of the teacher- the basic stances, those agile body movements, the quick circular

movements of the leg that expressed the inner urges, the expression of the self (Ayyer and Ramakrishnan, 2002: 17).

Balakrishnan was invited by Patrick Rudolf, the famous dancer who came from Europe to Kerala to witness *Kalaripayattu*. “I saw a foreigner watching me. He had blue eyes and a handsome body like the male nude sculptures of Michelangelo. His head was clean-shaven.” (Ayyer and Ramakrishnan, 2002: 20). He was impressed by Balakrishnan’s vibrant moves and invited him through a letter later on to be a part of his European dance troupe. Balakrishnan accepts the invitation and leaves for Europe leaving his lover Raji to be lost forever. He joins the dancers in Europe, and the body colour he was mocked at in his village now stood out stark and clear from others. “Amidst a swirl of dancing bodies, my body stood out stark and clear. The darkness which no one wanted was now an asset. To appreciate black, I had to borrow the eyes of white men” (Ayyer and Ramakrishnan, 2002: 65).

Rudolf now asks him to fuse his western moves with the Indian, which he criticizes for having whirls and twirls and eliminates all circular moves from his dance. He says,

Like you Indian dancers manifest your whole individuality in twirls, whirls and circles. Indians should find an escape from circles and Spaniards from flamencos if they want to become postmodern dancers (Ayyer and Ramakrishnan, 2002: 62- 63).

It is an immigration narrative with the main plot happening in the hostland. In Rudolf’s words, “... the future of the world lay in the hands of immigrants” (Ayyer and Ramakrishnan, 2002: 87). The places were filled with immigrants. Balakrishnan could find immigrants crowded before stores that displayed undergarments and around bars. There was an immigrant colony as well. There were migrants from Morocco or Algeria, Old Congo who settled in the town, many as part of the dance

troupe where several black men and women were required. They make it a career and fuse their native dance with foreign dance.

Balakrishnan has become a successful dancer, and after breaking his relationship with Radolph and his eventual suicide, he returns home after sixteen long years. Everything has now changed in his native land of Kerala. He comes home hoping his native fellow people are practising *kalari*. However, there are no *kalari* being practised, nor the land of *kalari*; instead, on the land stands a huge shopping complex with a chit fund company.

The novella is all about dance, *kalaripayattu*, commercialization, and how it has been moulded and modified according to modern dances when carried abroad.

Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in Modern India

William Dalrymple's *Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in Modern India* (2009) is yet another non-fiction where the author encounters the nine diverse religious practices in various parts of India. Dalrymple's second chapter discusses his travel to Kannur district of Kerala, which would be the primary focus of the book. The chapter brims with *Theyyam's* folktale, history and mythology. He mentions it as a breaker of the caste system where the performer from a lower caste community is prayed and respected as the god for a brief interval. The performances happen from December to February every year. Dalrymple narrates the life of Haridas, a *Theyyam* performer whom he had interviewed. He is a part-time *Theyyam* performer, and for the rest of the season, he is a prison warder in Thallicherry jail for the rest of nine months and a manual labourer at the weekends. The performance he says is raising voice against the oppressive caste system that prevailed where the legend of each *Theyyam* criticizes the brutality of the upper castes to the lower

castes. With such rituals, even the highest of Brahmins would come to seek their blessings even though it is for a short period.

While interviewing Haridas who was preparing to perform, Dalrymple asks if it is a full-time job of becoming a god.

“Is this a full-time job, becoming a god?” (Dalrymple, 2009: 32)

“No,” he replies, a little sadly. “For nine months a year, I work as a manual labourer. I build wells during the week, then at the weekend I work in Tellicherry Central Jail. As a warder.” (Dalrymple, 2009: 32)

“You are a prison warder?” (Dalrymple, 2009: 32)

“I need to make a living. I am poor enough to be ready to do virtually anything if someone pays me a daily wage. It’s not for pleasure—it’s very dangerous work” (Dalrymple, 2009: 32)

He discloses that all the *Theyyam* dancers lead double lives. The performer of *Chamundi* makes wedding decorations, and *Narasimha Theyyam* is a waiter at a hotel. That boy who plays *Bagavathi* is a bus conductor and *Gulikan* the destroyer at each season of the year. Another dancer putting on makeup in the back of the hut is a toddy tapper of the *thiyya* community where his caste job asks him to pluck coconuts and collect the fermented coconut water from the top of the palm trees. For some months, they give up their jobs to don *Theyyam*; when everything changes, the social system is upside down. The Dalits become the god, and the elite upper castes *Namboodiris* worship them. They are the ones believed to bring peace and prosperity to the village and villagers. According to Haridas, the artists during the season have to be in strict penance where they do not consume non-vegetarian and nor could sleep with their wives.

Kerala was oppressive with rigid caste systems. The upper caste had the privilege to behead any low caste men who come his way. The latter had to hide, either jumping on the steam or running

away. The mere sight of the lower caste is believed to be a disgrace to the upper caste. The lower caste has to maintain a prescribed distance from the upper caste, where the distance decreases with the caste superiority. *Theyyam* originated in such a land where the lower caste could dominate for a brief interval of time. Thus, *Theyyam* becomes, according to Dalrymple, a conscious and ritualized attempt to invert the social caste structure. It is not the Brahminical gods that are worshipped but the shunned and outcaste real people who lived in the land of Kerala who is worshipped by all sections of Kerala. As mentioned in the introduction chapter, the performances happen not in the temple, but in the shrines or sacred groves of the countryside. “The priests are not Brahmin but Dalit. The only role of the upper caste is when, as landowners, they sometimes have the right to appoint a particular family as hereditary *Theyyam* dancers for a particular shrine, rather than like a village squire in England have the right to choose the parish priest” (Dalrymple, 2009: 36).

The stories around which the *Theyyam* performances are built range from tales of blood-drinking *yakshis* and witches, and the myths of serpent and animal deities, to the deeds of local heroes and ancestors. Many, however, concentrate on issues of caste, and of the social and moral injustices that caste tensions have provoked. Frequently, they question the limits of acceptable behaviour—especially the abuse of power as the upper castes struggle to keep their place at the top of the caste pyramid (Dalrymple, 2009: 37).

He adds,

In many of the *Theyyam* stories, a member of the lower castes infringes or transgresses accepted caste restrictions and is unjustly punished with rape (in the case of women) or death (in the case of men, and sometimes women too), and then is deified by the gods aghast at the injustices perpetrated by the Brahmins and the other ruling castes (Dalrymple, 2009: 37).

When asked if *Theyyam* has altered the power structure, Haridas replies that over the last 20-30 years, it has completely altered the power structure in these parts. It has filled them with self-confidence in the rest of their community. *Theyyam* has made them learn, educate and develop self-esteem.

This obsession with caste infringements and the abuse of upper-caste power, with divinity, protest and the reordering of relations of power, is something that Hari Das believes lies at the heart of this ritual art form, and he sees *Theyyam* as much as a tool and a weapon to resist and fight back against an unjust social system as a religious revelation (Dalrymple, 2009: 38).

Theyyam is no easy task, says Haridas. He says he would have to then travel by bus for three hours to perform in another place soon after the present, which is another all-nighter performance. It is his month of hard work, which he looks forward to for the rest of the year to get appreciated and prayed to, at least during the performance. It is hard for him to go back to everyday life, a new life from the other, a harder one. Haridas says he can dig a well in a Namboodiri's house but is still banned from drawing water from their well.

Many rivals political parties like Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Communist Party of India (CPI) have started patronizing *Theyyam*. Many *Theyyams* are sponsored by elites who stay abroad, like the case of Prashant and Shiju. Many posters, DVDs are sold all over to make this a popular art form attracting crowds from all over the world. Hari Das is unsure about the future of *Theyyam* legacy taken forward. His son is hesitant to take up this tradition seeing his father's struggle, deprived of sleep and money. Hari Das says when the children are educated and enter professional occupations, they might not get time to spare months for such performances.

The Dalits seem to enjoy the power structure upside down during the *Theyyam* season. Hari das says, "who would not be proud to see their father being worshipped by the whole village?"

(Dalrymple, 2009: 43). However, this power reversal is a rude ritual imposed on them to appease the kings and the elites and the upper caste if one can read between the lines.

They are made to headdresses of forty feet high in some *Theyyams* to cure the villagers. The struggle they undergo is never noticed. They are prayed for a short period for their good and then not even cared for or looked upon in reverence after putting the dress and makeup off from their body.

They are paid significantly less, and their costume would cost even more than what they get from their performance. Hari das recalls how he had to borrow money from his village money lender to buy his first costume. Some of those were very expensive, the headgear- the *thallapaali* of some *Theyyams* cost around 5000 and one silver anklet costs around 2,500.

The performer has to be in constant efforts to make the performance vibrant; it needs to be never dull, for people tend to lose interest.

Unlike other Keralan dance forms such as Kathakali, *Theyyam* is not a fixed composition- it depends on the artist and his skills and his physical strength. Also, in a *Theyyam* there is no screen between the performer and the devotees, so before you go out for your first performance you have to be as near to perfection as you can. You can train for the make- up and the steps and the story and the costume, but you cannot train for a trance- that comes only with a real *Theyyam* performance (Dalrymple, 2009: 44).

Though this dance form inverts caste norms, the Dalits are asked to take up the role of incarnating *Theyyam*. The Brahmins have selected the rejected Dalits to deck up the same for appeasing the health and prosperity of the other castes. When the artist is setting out for a performance, however sad and despondent he is inside, he cannot show that on his face. He is expected to appear happy and spread goodness in the villagers who surround him to see the vibrant dance. The performers

have to invest their body, heart, mind and soul. “If you do not feel for the story your eyes would be soulless without expression. The blood has to come to your face from your heart” (Dalrymple, 2009: 47). The performance is also exhausting, where during the season, the dancer cannot eat or sleep properly because they dance the whole night and almost all the nights during the season. All they can do is rest between the performances and sleep all day to recoup their strength so that their body does not give way. The dancers are seen to have a very low life expectancy. Most of the performers die before they reach fifty. The costumes they wear are cumbersome, and the strings used to tie their costumes are very heavy that rub and inhibit their blood circulation. Many of them turn into an alcoholic because the performance requires them to drink toddy, which gives strength to their body and expression in their face.

The future generation of *Theyyam* clan is negligent to perform their father’s profession because they have seen the plights and sleepless nights of their fathers. They are allowed only to perform in the shrines where even the priests are Dalits, not in the Brahmanical space like temples. The various rituals associated with *Theyyams*, like killing and drinking the blood of chicken, is all done by the performers who belong to the lower caste to bring glory to the upper castes.

From one side a pair of squawking chickens was produced, each held by the feet and flapping and crowing frantically. Another attendant appeared, holding an offering of rice on a palm leaf plate. Seconds later, the cleaver descended and the chickens were beheaded. The head of each was thrown away and blood gushed out in a great jet on to the rice. Then, as the drums reached a climax, both deities lifted the flapping carcasses up to their faces, blood hemorrhaging over their costumes and headdresses (Dalrymple, 2009: 54).

The reality of role reversal is very crucial in understanding *Theyyam*. Though there is outwardly a brief period of reverence given to the dancers, they are all tortures imposed on them in the guise

of rituals. The question arises why Brahmins would stick to such beliefs in the past where they are required to bow before the lower castes. They seem to normalize their efforts and struggle to perform when Haridas says, “I am not complaining, the season may be hard work but it’s what I live for, what I look forward for the rest of the year” (Dalrymple, 2009: 54). Haridas says that the rest of the year, they would not even be greeted or invited for a cup of tea and that he is like a temple who gets status and respect all of a sudden (Dalrymple, 2009).

According to V K Anilkumar in his Facebook post, Kenavoor Rajeevan Nennikam, assistant prison officer of Kannur jail, performs *Police Theyyam* and *Muthappan* in the jail not as a part of his duty but to relieve around 14000 prisoners’ distressful life. Hearing their plights and knowing them, he is a real god to the prisoners. He gives turmeric powder as *prasadam* to the prisoners and listens to the cruellest prisoners before they are hanged. Many innocent prisoners are aided hope by him. He had donned many *Theyyams* outside as well. His position as an assistant prison officer never came his way. In a way, he never gave up his *Theyyam* performances, a lower caste performer of *Vannan* community aiding to the needful even after being an assistant prison officer.

The untouchables had a very miserable life in Kerala. They were considered agrarian slaves who had to serve in the landlord’s land, especially *Pulayas*, *Parayas* and *Kuravas*. The landlords could kill the untouchables for breaking the laws. They were not allowed to enter the landlord’s house. The tax system was in favour of the high castes, and the lower castes had to pay the death tax, head tax, breast tax, war tax etc. There was also slave- markets where the slaves were sold at a cost equal to that of an ox, and a slave couple cost only 20 to 300 rupees in Malabar. With the Declaration of Slavery in 1853 and 1855, many untouchables treated as slaves were freed from the landlords’ cruelty. The untouchables thus create their spirit gods, priests and place of worship, which was never temples. They did not worship idols, and *Bagavathi* was their main goddess.

They followed their religion, made blood sacrifice to their ancestors, and worshipped devils in engraved stone images (Kottaparamban and Sulaiman, 2016).

.... In order to relieve from the pain of the hard labour, they used intoxication and during their festivities, they dance and sing throughout the night. They had to depend on their masters to the extent that they had to get permission from their masters for their personal needs like marriage and children. They were considered as objects of transaction (Kottaparamban and Sulaiman, 2016: 325).

According to Mircea Eliade in the *Encyclopedia of Religion* (1987), “ritual arises from and celebrates the encounter with the ‘numinous’, or ‘sacred’, the mysterious reality that is always manifested in a wholly different order from ordinary or ‘natural’ realities. Religious persons seek continual contact with those realities and flee or transform the inconsequential banality of ordinary life, thus giving rise to the repetitions and ‘archetypal nostalgias’ of ritual” (405).

The rituals of these sorts, for instance, *Theyyam*, is a way of communication among the villagers that evokes Catharsis in the viewers. Pallath (1995) says that rituals are dynamic expressions of the ethos of the performing culture (10). Talcott Parsons, in his Functionalism, talks about Cathartic (Catharsis), where religions have specific functions in society. Cathartic means affective or emotional, where any social action makes one happy, and their emotions are satisfied. It is a kind of purification. The rituals associated with religions comfort the individuals in relieving emotional stress, leading to a state of Catharsis through purgation of emotions. This can be related to Freud’s Catharsis, where there is a discharge of strong emotive feelings from the unconscious mind like in *Theyyam* during the ritual, which is gradually a Catharsis of every individual witnessing the ritual. Each act of *Theyyam* is a purgation of emotions when the performer transforms from his human form to divinity to tell the people the legend behind the act. The long hours of performances, the rhythms, vibrant steps and colours, drum beats and accompanying

musical instruments lead to Catharsis. Being part of *Theyyam* rituals, jumping on the pyre, the costumes of *Theyyam*, *thottam*, rhythmic dance and the engrossing trance act of the performer induce in the audience a participatory trance and has a lasting effect. Such rituals in *Theyyams* impart emotions, a collective conscious, and a strong emotive force leading to Catharsis.

Theyyam rituals inclusive of animal slaughter, toddy drinking, meat-eating, dance and *thottam* invoking deity is a way of relieving the pain they have been vulnerable to being born as a low caste and indulging in such rituals helped them achieve Catharsis and then respect from the worshippers. However, this is yet another strategy by the upper caste to respect them for a few hours, making them gods and keep them at a pace so that they do not cross their limit as untouchable. With *Theyyams*, the higher caste affirms their superiority over the performers with various instructions as part of the rituals.

Caste Politics and *Theyyam* Depiction in Selected Documentaries

Two documentaries on *Theyyam* are taken where it would be quite evident of how *Theyyam* is silenced for the sake of upper castes and elaborate on what these performers deal with while performing *Theyyam*. The two documentaries are *Meleri- The Pyre* (2016) and *Only Sometimes a God* (2019).

Theyyam is a three-hundred-year-old ritual art that originated somewhere closer to 1675. The documentary *Only Sometimes a God* was directed by Prateek Prajosh in 2019. It is an attempt to get a holistic perspective on the truth behind the trance state of *Theyyam*. According to the documentary, *Theyyam* is a connection of hearts rather than idol belief and superstitious beliefs. Sudhakara Sharma, rationalist and humanist, opine that there can be two perspectives of this- I

believe, therefore, it is the truth, and it is the truth; therefore, I believe. Psychiatrist Dr Ajit V. Bhide opines that possession is a dissociative state; it is under hysteria, a hysterical dissociation. Some delusions are insightful- though it is a paradox. Some delusions carry you out of the pain. When they wear the headgear, and with the aura, they assume a psychological matter; they have a godly power. According to him, religion is an addiction; believers get symptoms when they do not do it. *Theyyam* is a social gathering of all strata of society to mingle. Idol gods cannot come to a solution, as gods in temples are indirect, devotees can only pray to god, but *Theyyam* comes with a solution, a direct talk to the god. God is something to hold on to, some shoulder to hang on to relieve mental stress, which is very direct. Questions of believers are from his villagers within his understanding. During the rituals where traditions are followed blindly, there are many superstitions, killing animals to please gods, letting god know that since there are sacrifices done, let the prayers be granted.

I would look at the casteist aspect where such bulky heavy headgear and palm branches to be carried on a body are a forced cult to please the higher caste and their family. The caste system plays a dirty role in *Theyyam*. One day or two, they get to grow higher than their feudal lords. When untouchability prevailed, *Theyyam* was a social balancing act, a social reformation, but later it became a ritual only performed for the wealth, health and goodness of the upper caste. In the documentary, while *Theyyam* gets tired, he wants to sit down for a while, but the crowd mocks him for being drowsy. He is voiceless whatever mockery he hears for not being the perfect *Theyyam* the audience expects him to be. He needs to keep mum even if he gets burnt or is hungry or exhausted to perform further. People get angry because their belief in god gets disturbed. He is then not given respect for being the divine temporarily but expected to perform to bring all wellness people have come for. When he is tired, they say he is no god; he is on booze. When donned the

costume, he has no other way than dancing tirelessly whatever comes to him, or else he is criticized mercilessly. Divinity is poured in *thottam* song so that the upper castes praise the lower, if no divinity is attached in the *thottam* when written, there would be no fear, there would be no praying.

Rajeevan Panicker gets burnt while performing *Kendamar Kelan* with fire wicks all around him, tied to his costume. He has been performing for the 11th year when he was burnt. When people say that this is a social balancing act of society and a godly thing, the accidents happening to the performers are no less which takes to my argument that *Theyyam* as a lower caste are given the *kulathozzil* only to appease the state of upper castes.

Meleri- The Pyre is directed by Anil Kumar V. K. and Ameer Ali Olavara. It tells about the struggles of *Ottakolam Theyyam*, belonging to the Malaya community, who has to jump on the huge pyre known as *Meleri*, innumerable times as the ritual asks. *Ottakolam* is the most difficult and dangerous *Theyyam*, also known as *Theechamundi*, where ‘thee’ means fire in Malayalam. This *Theyyam* happens only once in 10- 30 years with much grandeur and celebrations. Woods to make the pyre is collected from the village premises by men belonging to the *thiyya* caste. The performer who jumps on the pyre 101 times gets recognized as Panicker and gifted silk and bangle.

The sufferings of *Ottakolam Theyyam* are seldom mentioned or taken care of during the ritualistic performance. There are many instances where the nose, eyes, forehead are burnt during *Ottakolam Theyyam*. Their private parts are also affected when they fall on the pyre with the whole body, so the costumes are made to protect their body from face to knee. Costumes are tied very tight on the performer. Some faint, but they have no voice to raise even when the costume is tight. *Arayoda*⁵¹, is tied around the waist, which is made of palm leaves to protect from the heat of the pyre, but the

⁵¹ *Theyyam* costume that is tied around the waist made of palm leaves.

pain of it is unbearable, and if much strength is not gained, there are chances to fall at once because the waist holds the weight of the whole costume which is very heavy, according to the *Ottakolam theyyakaran*, Sajith Panicker. After the tiresome performance, *Ottakolam* has to walk with other villagers to the village border to perform rituals to ward off diseases of the villagers. He again has to hear the problem of conflicts or disputes people face and tell solutions and blessings to them. However, they never turn their back from their family tradition because it is only this season of the year; the performers get respect and esteem as the lower caste community.

Sajith Panicker started performing *Ottakolam* at the age of fourteen. He had then fallen on the *Meleri*⁵² 115 times as *Ottakolam*, for which he was honoured with *pattum valayum* (silk and bangle) and titled Panicker by the royal family of Udinoor Kovilagam. They take no food or water before performances until it gets over expect for drinking toddy, which is a part of the ritual. They suffer from sleep disorders, and it is after a week or so, they could eat properly. The ashes that go into their nose and mouth are removed when he finds time after the whole performance is done. The *kavu* authorities from whom they have taken the next *adayalam* for the *Theyyam* to be performed are never worried about what *theyyakaar* has gone through in the previous *Theyyam*; they only wish for their *Theyyam* led by them to be performed very well. Sajith Panicker suicides in September 2014 at the age of 43 due to severe back pain he happens to suffer due to heavy costumes he carried during *Theyyam* performances.

Sajesh Panicker, brother of Sajith Panicker and an *Ottakolam theyyakaaran*, says that he gets a very meagre amount of money after the *Theyyam* and the temple authorities are only diligent about *Theyyam* arranged by their *kavu* or committee being performed well but not on increasing the

⁵² ⁵² Pyre for *Theyyam* performers to jump on it as a part of the ritual

amount that is paid to them. He adds, when there is a price hike in every field, there is no hike for *theyyakaar*, no one ever talks about their struggle. The recognition for artists is denied, nor are they given any funds or remuneration by the government. Being a folklore artist, he wishes if the *Theyyam* artist who goes through physical pain due to the heavy costume and dangerous rituals get recognition or pension by the government. By the age of forty- five, the performers get diseases because of sleeplessness; ashes go into noses and mouth when they jump on pyres.

Kannan Panicker, who has donned around 30 *Ottakolams*, says that eyes and torso are most affected when they jump on the pyre, the ashes get into their throat. Eyes and chest burn for a week after the performance. They cannot defecate and urinate for a week or so and need help to even get up from their bed.

Kundora Kunhara Peruvanaan has the worst experience of narrating where his leg was amputated due to the firewicks⁵³ entering his finger during the performance. He says that the pieces of burnt woods that were to be picked up after the fire lights up before the performance were not done so thoroughly, leading to such mishapening. The nail was initially affected with flesh, and the firewood first hit on his face. The accomplices who held him pulled him back, but they were not ready to stop, and, in a frenzy, he too jumped on the pyre again. When the temple authorities finally were asked to request the *theyyakaaran* to stop, he did, and by that time, the finger was severely injured. The leg lost its strength when the thumb leg finger was amputated. In a few months, the adjacent two fingers, which got infected, gradually led the infected leg to be amputated. After all these, the temple and *kavu* authorities did not take into account the performer's pain and hurdles. Doctors advised the performers to sleep properly and have food on time, but as they had no money

⁵³ Wooden wicks are burnt for the *Theyyam* to jump on it during the performance.

and land, they seldom had options to make a livelihood. He was advised not to consume alcohol, but the *Theyyams* he later donned required him to drink alcohol like *Kathivanur Veeran*, *Muthappan*, *Kandanaar Kelan*. Unfortunately, he also has not received a disability certificate even after two years of amputation.

The performers do not wear anything that would lower the pyre's heat or, better say, the tradition does not allow them. This explains what a *kolakaran* has to suffer after donning *Theyyam* for the villagers, to hear them and aid them. This oppression is carried on to them wherever the *Theyyam* performers go to perform. The *kulathozzil* is such that they are bound to perform to appease the elites- the elites in the native land, the elites in the diaspora, the elites to whom they perform on stages, for they have no choice but to follow what traditions have long way imposed on to them. Sacred traditions are appropriated to form Great traditions, which are again appropriated to form 'Appropriated' traditions, but the only thing that remains static and unappropriated is the caste oppressions *Theyyam* performers has to undergo anywhere they go.

The agents who take *Theyyams* for performances in the diasporas and on stages mould the folk performances into a form acceptable to the ruling class and their ideology. According to Dasan Mannarakkal, the troupe does not include an educated person from the performing community who could act as a translator or better intermediary between the performer and the viewers. The performers are often insulted and exploited by not giving the total remuneration promised to them and the upper caste, elite cultural agents, project themselves patrons and protectors over the performers. Their position, power, and caste status enable them to prolong this hegemony and control over these artists. MATA (Malabar Association of *Theyyam* Artist) was formed in 2005 by the artists to curb the exploitation of *Theyyams* outside, but it soon came to an end (2012) as it failed to form a strong organisation. When they don the costume, they are prayed to and

worshipped, but when they take it off, they are seen as the mere low caste poor man of menial jobs with no financial setups. The *Theyyam* artist is seldom given an award, appreciation or a *Padmasree*, unlike the mainstream dance forms like *Kathakali*, *Mohiniattam* or *Bharatanatyam*. One may question how conservative Kerala society accepts the inverted structure seen in *Theyyam*. Otherwise, upper-caste Brahmins, who usually are punishing Dalits who do not observe social norms, accept *Theyyam* and even worship *Theyyam* artists during *Theyyam* season as they perform. Others argue that *Theyyams* were tolerated as an acceptable safety valve to allow complaints against the misdeeds of the upper castes to be expressed in a ritualized and non-violent manner. But there is no doubt that today they are in a stage on which the social norms of everyday life are inverted, and where for a short period of the year, position and power are almost miraculously transferred to the insignificant and powerless. Anurag has the view that;

Theyyam deities are people who are victims of upper caste oppression and because of the collective guilt consciousness of the society they are deified into a *Theyyam* god. An analysis of the costumes will reveal that the colour red is more prominent than other colours and the red stands for rebellious anger. The costumes are made to be huge and marvelous in appearance so as to help the performer attain the transformation state of divine. A majority of the *Theyyams* advocates for a rationalistic interpretation of the varna system (2017: 42).

According to Anurag (2017), *Theyyam* flourished in the 1960s and became way too popular in the global market in the late 20th century. Untouchability came to an end during the 1990s because of the higher literacy rate in Kerala, and *Theyyam* made a mark on North Kerala's cultural identity. There were conducted many seminars to study *Theyyam*, and books were published on the same. Anurag adds that, with globalization, *Theyyam* became a commercial product from the 21st century. *Theyyam* was revived to make it an added attraction for the tourism industry with

government incentives. Brahminical hegemony was exercised in every field before colonization. Western education and social reforms had their influence in bringing an end to untouchability and notions of caste to some extent. The role of Brahminic hegemony has diminished, and *Theyyam* has now shed off its notions of caste and has transformed from a ritual into an art form (Anurag, 2017).

However, even after social reformations and the end of untouchability, caste hierarchy and notions of caste are still prevalent in Kerala. Many of the *Theyyams* performed in the diaspora is caste-based, where *Theyyams* of specific caste are sent to the diaspora to be performed for that particular caste. The troupes, when sent overseas, are purely made caste-based even in the diaspora. “*Muchilottu Bhagavathi* is toured and taken by the agents of Nair society and *Kathivanur Veeran* by the *Ezhava*⁵⁴ society in the diaspora” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 6). Ravi Gopalan Nair, artistic director of the performing group that happened in UCLA’s Royce Hall, Los Angeles as part of North American Tour, 2004 says that he has been touring with two *Theyyams* – *Muchilottu Bhagavathy* and *Kathivannur Veeran* (Bharadvaj, 2018).

Theyyam is transforming from a ritual to an art form by performing at various stages, but the notions of shedding caste hierarchy and respect as a part of status reversal during *Theyyam* performance is a myth. The divine role imposed on the *Theyyam* performers is a tactic by the upper castes to silence the performers against their atrocities. This is elaborately discussed by analysing two documentaries, fiction and non-fiction of English Literature. The chapter also discusses Catharsis by Talcott Parsons, where the aura of *Theyyam* makes the individuals go into the state of Catharsis being a part of the rituals. The chapter elaborates novels to understand the socio-

⁵⁴ Caste division of Kerala which are also known as Erava in the southern regions Kerala, Chovas, Chokons Chekons and Chogons in Central Travancore and Thiyyas in northern regions.

cultural background, myths, legends of *Theyyam* and the plights of migrants in adopting new culture and environment in the host country.

The following chapter would discuss the Malayali diaspora and the commodification of *Theyyam* from Little tradition to Great tradition to Appropriated tradition. It discusses how rituals and traditions in religion play an essential function to cling to the homeland. The chapter elaborates on the impact of transnationalism in sending *Theyyam* to the diaspora.

Chapter 4

RELIGION, TRANSNATIONALISM AND COMMODIFICATION

The last chapter had detailed the social aspect of *Theyyam* in the selected literature and documentaries. This chapter will deal with the myth and memory of Malayali diaspora scattered across the world through the folk-art form - *Theyyam* and how, due to globalization, there is commodification of *Theyyam*. It throws a glimpse on Malayali diaspora, the associations among them and mainly focuses on the transnational marketing of art forms and religion in the diaspora, which has intensified the already happening Sanskritization of *Theyyam* as a whole.

The Malayali Diaspora:

Kerala was also a central hub for immigrants for many centuries, as discussed in Chapter 2. The Arabs, Jews, Brahmins, Buddhists found their way to Kerala. Many of the cultures and rituals we have today are the contributions these immigrants gave Kerala in the past. Many people have come in with their cultures, and many have gone out to share Kerala culture. Now the migration of Keralites to the West is still happening in large numbers.

Malayalis can be seen in every corner of the world. They are in considerable numbers spread across the Middle East, Singapore, Malaysia, North America, Netherlands, England etc. The diasporic Malayalis are keen to celebrate all their native functions like *Onam*, *Vishnu* in great zeal. They often go to churches, temples and mosques more than they did in their homeland to stay connected to their culture and traditions. They make the hostland a 'mini Kerala', making available Malayalam newspapers, movies and television serials. Various spices and fish are often exported from Kerala to various countries like Johannesburg, London, New York and Sydney. The various

currencies like *Dollar, Dirham, Dinar, Euro, Pound, Rand, Riyal, Yen* etc., flood into various banks of Kerala to be exchanged. With the significant development of I.C.T., which led to the emergence of technology like telephones, mobiles, and the internet, the Malayali diaspora has bridged the distance between homeland and hostland. Travelling to far away countries and daily contact with relatives and friends were no longer a hurdle for the diasporas. Malayalis in the diaspora have always indulged in the native country's policymaking, entrepreneurship and charitable services (George & Thomas, 2013). Kerala is known as God's Own Country, and Malayali diaspora makes it another tiny god's own country wherever they move, shares a cultural space of the global Malayali diaspora, pitching their tents in various parts of the world.

Malayalis are people of Indian origin from the state of Kerala in the southwestern corner of India. They speak Malayalam and are popularly called Malayali. They are also known as Non- Resident Keralites (N.R.K.). Malayalis have a rich heritage of cultural and religious traditions, mostly hailing from Hindu, Muslim, or Christian backgrounds. They possess many distinctions and eccentricities. They have a long and convoluted history of dispersion across India and the world (George 2013).

Internal migration and external migration are a result of poverty, unemployment and seeking better opportunities and lifestyles. The push-pull factors lead to the flow of Malayalis to a foreign land. Push factors at home that are unfavourable like the lack of employment opportunities even for the educated population, low pay and pull factors which are promising like the oil economy in the Gulf and high demand for nurses in foreign countries make the flow of Malayalis in huge number. The scarcity of opportunities and many socio-economic reasons led to the migration of numerous Keralites outside India and within India after Independence. In the first half of the twentieth century, they went to British colonies in Africa, Southeast Asia and Europe and then in the latter

half of the twentieth century to the West and the Middle East. The migration to various parts of the country has led to Kerala's development immensely because of the enormous remittances from the Malayali Diaspora. This vast contribution from the scattered population results from the diasporic contributors' cultural affinity to stay connected with the homeland. However, the expatriates face alien life, culture and difficulties in the host land as well.

The vast migration from Kerala to different parts of the world had led Kerala to become the first state of India to set up a separate department for the welfare of the emigrants from the state, known as the Non- Resident Keralites Affairs (NORKA), and this works closely with the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs of the Government of India. NORKA looks into the job-related issues of Malayali migrants, workplace harassments, bringing home the dead bodies of the deceased migrants, assistance in travel, education, banking etc. Migration from Kerala was not that earlier. Greeks, Romans, Portuguese, Dutch and Arabs have come to Kerala for the spice trade and made Calicut and Cochin major trade centres in the 13th century and 15th century, respectively. However, the travels to other places from Kerala were still not prominent. Many Tamil and Telugu-speaking populations migrated as indentured labourers to French, Dutch, and British etc., between 1834- 1910, and later Keralites too joined in the indentured labour system. By the 1970s, the Gulf Migration boom occurred due to the vast oil economy in the Gulf, and Keralites became one of the most migrant communities to migrate to the Middle East.

The History of Malayali Migrants:

The first migrants to travel to the colonial plantation were the lower caste community of Kerala such as the *Pulayas*, *Parayas* (Oommen, 2013). The migrants were only male then, and by the

mid-19th century, they marked the beginning of Malayali migration. The farmers were the second group to migrate from Kerala with the growing demand for spices and pepper prices, increasing the world market by the 1880s. An innumerable number of farmers migrated to Kerala's hilly regions like *Nilamboor*, *Wayanad*, *Malabar*, *Peermade* and *Gudalloor*. The third group of migrants from Kerala were the *Shanars* of South Travancore, *Izhavas* of North Travancore, and Syrian Christians, the lower-middle strata of Kerala society. The third group also included a few higher castes who were educated but were denied government jobs because of caste restrictions. The government jobs were given only to higher castes people like the *Namboodiris* and *Nairs* in Kerala, and the other section of society had no jobs available due to casteism. Various missionaries and educational institutions started by Britishers increased the migration of the Kerala population due to the improved literacy rate in Kerala. The higher literacy rate made the Keralites aspire for better jobs outside Kerala in Singapore, Ceylon and Malaya, but it almost ended by 1910 when Malayalis from Ceylon returned as the indentured labour ended by 1910.

Kerala during the 1900s experienced major socio-cultural shifts. Some significant changes in the Kerala society like the increase in literacy rate of women and men, the end of the *Marumakkathayam* system, and the freedom of lower caste people from the shackles of caste hierarchy through many movements led to international migration who sought semi-skilled, middle-income jobs.

The first concrete record of Malayalis setting foot on the Malay Peninsula is when the Portuguese Viceroy, Alfonso d' Albuquerque, set sail from Cochin, India to Malacca, Malaya, on May 2, 1511. There were Malayalis on the island of Penang three years after British Captain Francis Light annexed the island and established a trading post there. The streets' names prove the presence of Malabari migrants there, e.g. *Kampong Kolam*, *Kampong Malabar*, etc. The majority of migrants

were Muslims from Malabar, but the exact count is not known. The migrated Malayalis started settling in Malaya only after the end of the Second World War. They began holding on to their cultures, forming a small Kerala there and developing Kerala Samajams and All Malaysia Malayalee Association (AMMA). There are various associations that these diasporas celebrate to revive their Kerala culture, traditions, food, music and arts. This also helps the second generation mingle with their traditions and festivals of native land like the *Vishu*, *Onam*, and *Puram* of North Kerala, which the second generation is not aware. Such festivals are often grand, and high paid Malayali actors, singers or writers were invited.

Malayali Migration to Africa:

Migration to Africa by the Malayalis was during the 1930s, and by 1960- 70 it increased, and many migrated to countries like Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Nigeria. Malayali migrants to Kenya were majorly professionals- teachers, accountants, doctors and engineers. There are various worship places for Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians that the diasporas have set up after emigrating to Africa. The temples in Kenya are said to have built by artisans recruited from India, especially to build temples that would look like the temples in Kerala. For years various Kerala association were also formed in these places.

Malayali Migration to South- East Asia:

During the Second World War of 1939, many Malayalis migrated mainly to South-East Asian countries. Many countries became independent after the Second World War, like Sri Lanka and Burma, which then stopped granting citizenship to foreigners, especially to Indian, and as a result, people could not migrate to those countries. In the 19th century, many farmers and unskilled

labourers migrated to other countries until the 20th century when ‘brain –drain’ began with the surplus emigration of educated people to the U.S.A.

Malayali Migration to the Middle East:

The vast number of emigrants from Kerala went to the Middle East. In the 1930s, huge oil reserves found in the Arabian Peninsula and Gulf Regions led to the vast scale migration to the Middle East. By the 1950s, with the large-scale commercial extraction, it became rapidly industrializing nations. There was migration to the Persian Gulf through the Kafala sponsorship system, an immigration mechanism that directly links residency in the country to the employment contract with the particular employer, the *kafeel* or sponsor.

Labour migrants in the Gulf are both short-term as well as long-term migrants. They are a highly complex group of people from skilled to non-skilled labour, single migrants to migrants with families, limited labour contracts to extendable contracts, and their tenure in the Gulf is brought to an end either on their violation, personal or familial commitments or an unanticipated emergency. The tenure of migrants from Kerala to the Gulf is seven years, limited to the duration of employment contract where some employment contracts are renewed, and in some cases, the new employer is sought in their place. If the migrant feels his employment space unhealthy, seeks a better employment opportunity with another sponsor after the migrant secures a ‘release’ from their sponsor. Many workers leave even before their tenure gets over, most of whom are low-skilled labourers and high- skilled labourers stay up to two to three generation.

Malayali Migrant Nurses:

Nurses from Kerala were in huge numbers, and the United States saw Indian nurses in the late 1960s and 1970s. Women were discouraged from taking up nursing as a profession previously because of the negative social stigma of nursing, its low wages, unsatisfactory working and living condition of nurses in India and that led them to seek nursing jobs in countries like the United States, the United Kingdom or Canada. Foreign countries were no better, and for those who could not possess a Registered Nurse (RN) license, finding a job became very difficult for them. The aspirants then had to begin some other menial job to support themselves, staying in shared rooms until they find better opportunities. Language barrier came their way too, especially those who were diploma nursing graduates. Such nurses also suffered in finding a job and take additional hours of theory and practice to qualify for the R.N. licensing exams as their diploma education from Indian nursing school was not equal to American education. Those who got into the profession made much personal investment which led to the opening of many nursing schools and colleges in Kerala.

There was also the migration of nurses, doctors and engineers to Africa and the Middle East. The migration to Middle East countries began in the early 70s, and the majority to migrate were the Muslims and Hindus from Malabar. The oil-producing countries invited many skilled and unskilled labourers. Nurses also went to the Middle East, seeking high pay. The migrants in the Middle East were not allowed to own any real estate or own any business of their own. On the negative side, these countries would not ensure the security or welfare of the migrants. Thus, cheating of the migrants with false visa or false hopes for giving jobs was given to them, for instance, in the case of Najeeb in Benyamin's *Goat Days*, which is based on the real-life struggle of a migrant. However, inspite of all these, most migrants from Kerala from pre-Independence seek jobs in the Gulf countries. Today, the most migrating people to Gulf are the ones who have

secured lesser than secondary school education; nonetheless to say; many qualified have also sought the Middle East and earned a better lifestyle. According to Joseph, Gulf regions have the most significant number of Keralites, and non-Gulf countries have more Keralites from the Travancore region (1988: 48).

Malayali Migrant Associations:

The ones who settle down in the foreign land forms several associations from sticking to their cultures. The Malayalis in the U.S. in the 1970s and early 1980s formed many associations, for instance. Such associations aimed to bring the community together and celebrate common festivals, celebrated at the native place to get an opportunity to know each other, to find jobs, talents, skills, and finally find their common home. For instance, FOKANA⁵⁵ (Federation of Kerala Association of North America), FOMAA⁵⁶ (Federation of Malayalee Associations of Americas), W.M.C.⁵⁷ (World Malayali Council) are a few of them. There are other associations divided into religious as well as professional organizations. The religious associations include Kerala Hindus of North America (KHNA)⁵⁸, Malayali churches, Nair societies, Sree Narayana Mission Center

⁵⁵ FOKANA is an umbrella organisation formed to unite all Malayali organisations of the American continent under a single roof. It was formed in 1983 in New York City.

⁵⁶ FOMAA was formed in 2008 to organise social, cultural, educational, charitable activities of Keralites in America. It is the largest Malayali association in North America.

⁵⁷ World Malayali Council formed on July 3, 1995 in New Jersey works with the Malayali diaspora across the world. Its objective is to maintain brotherhood within the Malayali community in the diaspora and to boost their artistic, social and cultural uniqueness. They also aim to give resilience and understanding towards other cultures with which they have to co-exist and interact.

⁵⁸ KHNA was formed in 2001 inculcating the vision and motivation of Late Swamiji Sathyananda Saraswathi to unite all Hindus for preserving Sanatana Dharma. It aims to bring all Kerala Hindus in North America together without any social divisions of caste and creed.

(SNMC)⁵⁹ etc. The professional networks include All Kerala Medical Graduates (AKMG)⁶⁰, The National Association of Indian Nurses of America (NAINA)⁶¹, which is aimed to unite all nurses and nursing students of Indian origin. There is a non-political organization like the Malayalee Engineers Association in North America (MEANA)⁶².

The Diaspora Communities:

There are two types of community in the diaspora, according to Thomas Kulanjiyil. The first, 'Migrant Worker' community, is migrants who go to a foreign country for a certain period and then return. They are referred to as 'Going out and Coming in Community.' The second type is the 'Permanent Settlers' who settle in a foreign land permanently. It becomes difficult for the emigrants to return to Kerala for such permanent settlers after being acculturated to the foreign land and culture. The children of such Indian immigrants are called the 'Coconut Generation' - brown on the outside and white on the inside and ABCD- American Born Confused Desis. They are Indian from the outside and English from inside, often torn between being Indian and American at the same time (Kulanjiyil, 2013).

⁵⁹ SNMC is a charitable organisation in the Greater Washington, D.C. area. It aims to propagate the ideals and teachings of Saint Sree Narayana Guru.

⁶⁰ AKMG is an organisation that is spread globally for its involvement in educational and humanitarian efforts locally and globally. It was initially named 'Alumni Association of Kerala Medical Colleges in North America' in 1980 held at Bombay Palace in New York, later changed to 'Association of Kerala Medical Graduates' 1984.

⁶¹ NAINA is a professional organisation for nurses of Asian Indian origin. It aims to collaborate with other national and international nurses' associations in its journey towards professional excellence and improving global health.

⁶² MEANA was formed in 1992 in order to bring all Malayali engineers under one umbrella organization and to work together in promoting cultural interaction and professional development of its members through technical meetings, networking, information sharing etc. MEANA has its headquarters in Chicago, Illinois and the U.S.

Categories in Malayali Migration:

Malayali migration is divided into three categories depending upon the countries to which they have migrated. The first category includes those who migrated to North America, Europe, Australia and other developed and developing nations. The second category is internal migration, i.e., those who migrated to other parts of India and, thirdly, those who migrated to the Gulf.

The first category of migrants is the permanent settlement of Kerala in a foreign land. They try to imbibe all cultures of the foreign land to make a permanent life there. For them, Kerala is just a place of a visit when they get their holidays. The third generation of such a category has no idea of Kerala because they would seldom visit Kerala. They would only revisit their culture through various associations of the native country in a foreign country.

The second category is the migrants of Kerala who move to other parts of India. Many settle down in various states of India like *Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta, Hyderabad* etc., for a better job. Like the first category of migrants, they imbibe the new culture and revisit native culture through associations and programs. They might be permanent settlers but visit native land now and then.

The third group is the gulf migrants. As mentioned before, Gulf migration began with the migration of Muslims from Northern Kerala to the Gulf countries in country boats and the Catamarans. By the mid-1970s and 1980s, migration to Gulf was at its peak when it was a rapid collective migration with a very organized structure and network of recruiting agents, travel agents and several other agencies working. Poverty, unemployment and an urge for a better life, the social, political and economic issues in Kerala in the mid-1970s were also reasons for gulf migration. Many young men who had leftist political affiliation in the same year escaped to Gulf fearing arrest when Indira Gandhi had called for emergency due to extreme police brutality under the leadership of a right-

wing Congress leader, Karunakaran. Those who ran away from Kerala landed up in Bombay and finally in the gulf countries. In the same year, agricultural production in Kerala began to decline, farmers who found no hope in agriculture paved their way to Gulf. In addition to this, when exporting to countries like the Philippines, Thailand, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, many agricultural labourers were thrown out when the rice production began to collapse. Many such men landed up in gulf countries hoping for new jobs. Migration to the Gulf countries was a result of all such things. Most male members of the family escaped to Gulf for money until the Gulf war strike in the early 1990s. The Gulf War gave a clear picture of the struggles of the people who migrated to the Gulf. Men, women and children mainly from South and South East Asia, North Africa were physically pushed out of Kuwait and Iraq into no man's deserts where these migrants were looked upon by suspicion and hostility by Saddam's occupied Kuwait. The 600,000 migrants were Indian migrants, and among the Indians, the largest ethnic group of labourers were Malayalis (Pillai, 2011). The quality of migrants from Kerala in terms of the occupational pattern was superior to other ethnic groups from India.

Migrants from India consisted of three broad categories- labour migrants, trader migrants and professional migrants. Among these three categories, the overwhelming majority was labour migrants. The system of assisted migration fell under disrepute towards the close of the 19th century and migration from Kerala became conspicuous only after the emergence of free migration. Migrants from Kerala therefore were mainly of the free labourer type. The free labour migrants were mainly boatmen, building and factory workers, cooks, and other domestic workers (Joseph, 1988: 41).

With Malayalis moving out of their land, they took their culture and tradition, food and festivals, literature, and cinema. Through various social media, they easily connect with the people in the homeland. They are more aware of the political and cultural activities happening in the native land.

Globalization and its Impact:

Globalization leads to rapid change. According to Robertson and Chirico (1985), globalization denotes an emerging conceptualization of the world as a single entity or place, creating an impetus for syncretistic religious innovation and diversity. It brings “together peoples and ideas of widely divergent religious backgrounds, fostering dialogue, accommodation, and innovation that often includes a syncretistic blending together of beliefs and practices into new ‘global’ faiths” (as cited in Robbins and Lucas, 2007: 232). Religion moves with diasporas making it a religion of all diasporas living in the same space. The spreading of religion is also a result of significant trade routes that occupied various countries.

Globalisation, however, is more than the spread of one historically existing culture at the expense of all others. It is also the creation of a new global culture with its attendant social structures, one which increasingly becomes the boarder social context of all particular cultures in the world, including those of the West (Beyer, 1994: 9).

Religion⁶³ forms identity and solidarity in any land. Culture, rituals and traditions are a part of religion, and rituals bind people together. Any religious construct in a diaspora is an identification of a community living nearby to it. These are the only way through which they identify themselves with their native culture. There are always perceived efforts on migrant’s part to maintain their cultural and ethnic identities (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020).

...ethnic identity of diasporas can... be defined by both objective attributes (e.g. dispersal from a place of origin) and subjective feelings (e.g. self- awareness of group identity, sense of alienation, memory of

⁶³The term ‘religion’ is very difficult to define, it “...entails a well-defined theological doctrine which explains the origin of the universe, the existence of a supreme being who dispenses justice, a clearly defined set of ethical codes which serve as referential frames of worldly conduct, a formal set of rituals executed by a hierarchical body of clericals or priests, and a clearly demarcated ‘this world’ vis-à-vis the supernatural world” (Huang 2009: 155).

homeland, etc.). These objective and subjective components of diaspora are sustained and reformulated through the changing triadic relationships that exist between the homeland (real or imagined), transnational community and new home. The terms diaspora and ethnic minority are often used interchangeably. Most diasporas would, in fact, belong to a criterion of minority in their host country with respect to the size of population and their economic, social and political power (Um Hae kyung, 2005: 5).

“There are hierarchies in religions as well. Sanskrit based rituals are believed to fall under the higher forms of Hinduism, and the non- Sanskrit based rituals come under lower forms of Hinduism. The lower form is considered to be ritualistic, whereas the higher is considered to be philosophical and are based on Sanskrit texts. Folk arts and folk rituals come under lower forms of Hinduism” (Pratap, 2013:208). “Folklore is considered an ancient form of customs and belief that passes on from one generation to another orally and is considered part of a community’s identity” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 2). “Indians in the diaspora ‘have retained many aspects of their cultural heritage, including folk art, literature, and dance forms’” (Sahoo & Sangha 2010: 82). The religion of the elites is a vital societal identifier. “In a very Durkheimian sense, their gods (or equivalent) are symbolic representation of their culture and their prestige” (Beyer, 1994: 47). Folklore is not only an ancient art, but it also is a part of today’s identity. “There is an assumption that the South Asian diaspora use the dance primarily as a cultural link to the homeland, as a symbol of national identity, and dance is a primary vehicle for ethnic identification, an articulation of cultural identity⁶⁴” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 2). Language and culture are also a mark of one’s identity. Survival of the traditions is dependent on the survival of the languages.

⁶⁴ Bharatanatyam dance, for instance, though it is a South Indian dance form, Bengalis, Gujaratis from North India and families from other South Asian countries like Pakistanis, Sri Lankans and Bangladeshis all strive to learn this dance form because of its popularity in the diaspora (Anita Kumar 2005).

Immigrant Indians set up “religious and cultural institutions to perpetuate their religious practices as soon as the circumstances permitted them” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 2). All of them make efforts to preserve their old ways of lifestyle in the host countries they occupy. “Temples, churches, shrines began to appear” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 2) in no fewer time Indians arrived in a foreign country. The first generation always taught vernacular language and traditions to the second generation to retain their culture. Many Christian missionaries consider Hinduism to perish very soon, but it had been redefining and re-organizing to make its existence everywhere. The sense of loss makes the diasporas indulge in more religious activities. “There are various religious organizations like the Arya Samaj, the Divine Life Society, Ramakrishna Centre, Chinmaya Mission, the Saiva Siddhanta Sangam, the Satya Sai Baba, and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKON)⁶⁵” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 2).

According to Nadeau Randall, “ISKON was founded by A. C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada (1896-1977) in 1966. Known widely as the ‘Hare Krishna movement,’ it was branded a ‘cult’ in the 1970s, when new religions gained widespread attention- from the People’s Temple at Jonestown to Eckankar, Scientology, Jews for Jeus, and the Rajneesh movement (to name some of the best-known ones at the time). ISKON was targeted by the anti-cult movement of the 1980s, lumped together with these other religions. ISKON has today more than 80 centres around the world. It is a devotional movement dedicated to the worship of Lord Krishna and promoting vegetarianism, purity of lifestyle, and salvation through communal chanting of the Lord’s name” (2014:135).

...the global social reality ‘relativizes’ all particular cultures, including of course the religions that form part of these cultures. Globalisation merely change the context in which particular cultures exist,

⁶⁵ Popularly known in the diaspora as Hare Krishna movement.

implying transformation but not the disappearance of separate and recognizable identities (Beyer, 1994: 9).

There is always a reconstruction of religions in the diaspora. Globalization of religion has its good/bad aspects in maintaining as well as destroying it. “The religion(s) of India, indeed of South Asia, have been reconstructed in the diasporas” (Hinnells, 2007: 3).

It has become a historical and sociological commonplace that traditional religions, as we know them today, are very closely tied to particular cultures. In Durkheimian language, they express the wholeness of societies. Therefore, of particular cultures are to survive in altered form in the modern global context, the religious traditions associated with them will also survive, but not without themselves facing serious challenge of the relativized context (Beyer, 1994: 9).

Parents in the diaspora always make a point if their children are involved in congregational worship or classes and whether their participation was frequent or seldom, active or passive. Their level of participation in rituals and festivals is taken care of (Nesbitt 2007: 55). Weekly *satsangs*⁶⁶ in houses, musical get together, weekly Bal Vikas classes to identify themselves as Hindus. They are much vocal about their rituals and beliefs. Parents and grandparents encourage their regard for traditions and encourage them to follow them.

A recurrent statement was that what mattered was belief (notably in god) rather than ritual practice. The young people spoke with emphatic sincerity about values such as respect for elders, and experiences such as the sensation of peace in a religious building (Nesbitt 2007: 67)

Traditions of the old country are always reconstructed in the diaspora. They have developed various institutions to socialize and keep the young within the tradition(s), and some of the temples

⁶⁶ religious congregations. Religious congregation and its institutions are an effective means for its own maintenance and the preservation of its cultural traditions (Geaves 2007: 17)

are splendid reconstructions of magnificent Indian temples with marble and carvings from India to present a positive image to the outside world- and their children (Hinnells 2007: 7).

In establishing their religious life based on the forms already existent in South Asia, the newly arrived migrants tried to deal with the separation or detachment from a particular set of cultural conditions of duplicating them in a new environment. Although the creation of religious forms and structures provided the constructive potential of public engagement, the continued strategies of isolation and a rhetoric of 'otherness' provided the possibility for the growth of destructive trends (Geaves 2007:23).

According to Geaves, this paves the way for a cohesive community identity (2007:23) with the reproduction of religious life, which are a re- appropriation of rituals, customs, ceremonies, conventions etc. According to Nye (2001), both ISKON and the Sai movements are very much organized, international organizations which run classes and produce very high-quality English-language publications (as cited in Nesbitt 2007: 68).

Many immigrants affirm that they are more religious following immigration than in their native place, even though the style of their participation and their religious roles are substantially different than they could have mingled prior to immigration. When everything is changing, religion provides a firm transcendent base from which to negotiate those changes, even changes affecting the religion as well. For example, absence of professional religious specialists among immigrants thrusts new, young immigrants into leadership positions and requires new modes of religious expression (Williams 2007a: 144).

The new groups in the diaspora aim at construction and preservation. They are always into re-creation and self-identification when away from their homeland. A Hindu temple in the diaspora and the ways migrants worship are different from the temples found in India. Social and religious groups adapt to different ways to reconstruct religious and social activities. Hindus of different

languages, dress, food and values are combined to form a group who celebrates native culture together. Such groups are not static as new immigrants join them for various reasons and are often redefined and unstable.

...Immigrants do not form religious groups and other social groups in order to stay isolated from the settled society, but in order to negotiate from a stronger position with other social groups regarding their new social location in ways that will protect their children and the values the immigrants wish to affirm and preserve. Forcing new residents into identifiable social designations is one way that groups in the settled society create space for them (Williams 2007a: 144- 146).

Religious and social institutions are made to maintain and fabricate individual identities and preserve continuities with the past. They are often in the quest of creating a Hindutva consciousness. According to Williams (2007b: 233), the Hindutva movement in India focuses on the ancient Hindu foundation of Indian culture and religions and tries to strengthen and support political and social movements that emphasize that tradition. According to Jacobsen (2008), religion in the diaspora functions to secure emotional attachment to the culture of origin. Religion preserves language, aesthetic traditions, and social traditions inherited from the past, notably because their rituals are repeated, and their norms are considered eternal or transcendent. Processions in the diaspora celebrate the religious tradition of the country of origin that confirm identity and transfer it to the next generation and functions to display native tradition to others in a pluralist environment. It strengthens engendered feelings of unity and identity and make the group visible in the public space.

“There are temples and schools that own centres for religious and cultural activities for the second generation where they indulge in reading the scriptures, enacting religious plays, and the storytelling of the same. The other objective of such formation is to mingle with their people and

share a culture where the native home companions share a sense of belonging. There were different modes of preserving cultures like lectures, sermons by visitors, observance of festivals, the performance of rituals, and the vernacular study” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 3). The host countries have still religious institutions built uninterrupted to spread and preserve their religion wherever they migrate to feel connected to their roots.

Almost all their life seems to be guided by the temple activities. From birth to death, an average Hindu passes through a series of temple ritual activities. Temple rituals attract Hindus of all background regardless of their education and economic status. (Pratap, 2013: 34).

“Indians in the diaspora often relieve their mundane life with religiosity. For instance, many temple rituals in Hinduism, which were earlier restricted for the Brahmins in India, are done now by priests who are even non-Brahmins in the diaspora and who have even no systematic knowledge about the religious mantras. It is often noticed in the diaspora that sometimes, the elders of a particular community take up a priest’s role” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 4). According to Waghorne (2014), the elaborate consecration rituals in the diaspora sacralise both the temple and its land and look if the place of worship is close to work and to homes. The temple’s space often resembles a meeting hall rather than a seat of the gods in the diaspora. Waghorne explains how temples in Chennai compete for prestige and hence membership by sponsoring the very best festivals with nightly performances by famous classical musicians. The new temples often include a hall for performances, lectures, and public meetings. With the ‘production of locality’ in a global context and the place of certain temples in that process, the temple erupts when a group of ‘like-minded’ people or neighbours meet in each other’s homes for prayers or discussions and then collectively decide to build a temple. North American Tamil devotees reaffirmed regionalism/localism to their Tamil Lord *Murugan* through reinvoking, and in some cases reinventing, local identities through

local practices such as violent blood sacrifices, possession, fire walking, the entrance of god into the human body in the diasporic space (2014).

The tension, however, for the Hindu inhabitants of this city was not between space and time as the dominant motif but between the resacralizing of space and the articulation of values. Hindus, by the late seventeenth century, re-established places for God/s within the new urban space of a global trading network (Waghorne, 2014: 232).

“As Steven Vertovec observed in his seminal work *The Hindu Diaspora* (2000) of how these performances are being enacted in the Caribbean” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 4):

In some places, Hindu ritual procedures have become truncated, refashioned, or eclectically performed; in others, much of the style or corpus of rites has been virtually ‘invented’ in conjunction with social change in the community, and in still other places, basic rights have been mutually ‘negotiated’ so as to provide a kind of socio-religious bridge between migrants from regionally distinct traditions; in most places, many rites have been embellished or popularized in order to appeal to young, diaspora-born Hindus even to the chagrin of conservative elders (Vertovec 2000: 17).

The strict caste rigidity followed in India among the Hindus differs in the diasporic context. In the case of South Africa, for instance, as Pratap Kumar argued:

As for traditional Hindu rituals, only Brahmin priests perform them in India. Priesthood in India is hereditary and children are often trained from the beginning in a particular school of ritual tradition... however, these fine distinctions have become irrelevant, perhaps, for the simple reason that the trained Brahmin priests did not constitute the groups of early settlers. Even if there were some who belonged to the Brahmin caste, they did not have the necessary priestly training. Therefore, the Hindu priesthood in South Africa is drawn from a highly differentiated group from among the Hindu community (2013: 42-43).

“As a result of globalization and intense transnational networks, the diasporic identity becomes an important issue today” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 4). Often the “immigrants face the problem of identity (both self and group identity) at the initial stage of their settlement in the host society because of their minority status. However, they negotiate this identity in the course of time with their religious and cultural symbols” (Sahoo 2006: 89). As Gupta argues, “...isolated in an alien land setting and unaccustomed to the norms of their host society many immigrants see religious rituals as a form of communication through which they can recoup a sense of self” (2000: 142).

***Theyyam* and Commodification:**

“*Theyyam* performances in the Indian diaspora have increased considerably in recent times” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 6), which has started performing in the diaspora by the 1980s, according to the interviews I have conducted. “This study proposed to understand the dynamics of *Theyyam* performances in the diaspora” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 6) through an ethnographic inquiry, “how it creates a specific cultural and localized identity among Malayalis in the Indian diaspora, and most importantly, how the performance is changed when it is performed transnationally, thereby opens up for commodification” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 6). Commodification makes religion a commodity, and selling religion leads to the selling of the pure, scared and indigenous. Globalization and modernization have led to the decline of religion, and with modern technology, people tend to be enchanted by their committed faiths, making religion a consumer commodity that can be sold (Kitiarsa: 2008). I have interviewed for this purpose 20 *Theyyam* artists who have performed in the diaspora and on stages at various events. There have been 20 in-depth interviews and observation on *Theyyam* performers from the various parts of Kannur, Kerala. They are spread out in “various areas ranging from *Azhikode* to *Pazayangadi* regions of Kannur” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 7). The analysis has been on “how the *Theyyam* performances are being enacted in the

diaspora” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 7) and at various events in foreign countries, “how these performances created a specific religiosity among the Malayalis in the Indian diaspora, and what changes it adopts in the process of ‘diasporisation’ (Olsson, 2009) in contrast to the performances that take place in the homeland” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 7). “Today, the connection with the homeland for diasporas made it more comfortable due to globalization, primarily due to the growth of faster information, communication, and transportation technologies” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 7). Simultaneously, globalization also significantly impacted many “traditional cultures by incorporating them with global elements, thereby producing what scholars called glocalization” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 7).

Robert Redfield argues that “there are mainly two types of traditions observed, i.e., Little Tradition and Great Tradition. According to him, both the traditions are interrelated and interdependent; while the Great tradition is cultivated in schools and temples, the little tradition works itself out and keeps itself going in the lives of the unlettered in their village communities” (Redfield, 1956: 70).

Culture can be studied by dividing it into ‘Little’ tradition, and ‘Great’ tradition and the tradition is transferred to the third level, which can be called ‘Appropriated’ tradition.

‘Little’ tradition is often seen in village rituals, folk traditions that share cultural consciousness among the village people. This is also observed in the diaspora where culture is recreated but often inclines to the ‘Great’ tradition, and there is null when it is performed on the stage, becoming an ‘Appropriated’ tradition. The diasporas make out a way to cling to the tradition by involving in the ‘Great’ tradition- a little modernised due to time and space limitations.

Sacred books and rituals form a significant part of the development of the ‘Little’ tradition. Culture and its rituals are collectively followed and transmitted from one generation to another. Little tradition can be the belief patterns, the rural institutions, folk tales, folklore, folk rituals, legends, myths, proverbs, riddles, anecdotes etc., and the future generation imbibes cultural knowledge through such tradition be it Little tradition or Great tradition. Little Tradition includes all local rituals, animal sacrifices and often superstitious rituals but is considered more sacred and in the purest form. The priest and ritual leaders are more prominent in Great Tradition.

Theyyam artists who visited their “communities for performance in the diaspora had myriad experiences of emotions and ecstasies. The respondents in the study revealed that they had a different experience of travelling to the diaspora and received accolades from the Malayali diasporic communities for their performances” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 7).

The following section will delineate the views and opinions of the respondents regarding their experiences of performing *Theyyam* in the diaspora and on the stages when taken away from the native land. The experiences of the respondents will be divided into two sections:

- 1) Great Tradition – in the diaspora
- 2) Appropriated Tradition – on the stages

Great Tradition

The respondent Mukhundan Panicker,⁶⁷ “a 56-year-old *Theyyam* artist who belongs to the *Malayan* community in Kerala, has visited with his group of artists to several Indian diasporic countries for *Theyyam* performance such as the U.S., the U.K., the Middle East, and Singapore and thereby made a sustained transnational connection with their community members that live across the

⁶⁷ For anonymity the respondent names were changed in this article.

world. During the interview, he explained the details about this first visit to Muscat in 1982, where most Malayalis live⁶⁸” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 8).

In the year 1982, I was called to visit Muscat through one of my acquaintances who lived there and was asked to perform for their first-anniversary celebration of the club called *Kairali Arts Club of Oman*. I went for four days, and the performance lasted for about three hours over a big open ground. I performed *Vishnumoorti*.⁶⁹ It usually began in the evening, where *thedangu*⁷⁰ was done first, followed by *thottam*.⁷¹ I was accompanied by my friend, who helped me during the performance. We stayed in a two-floor building where the host paid for food and accommodation (personal interview with Mukhundan Panicker) (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 8).

Mukhundan’s first visit to Muscat was so successful that he was later invited through the Malayali diasporic networks to countries like Singapore, the U.S., and the U.K. in the subsequent years. He performed *Karikuttichathan* in the U.S., *Rakthachamundi* in the U.K. and Singapore, and *Kandanarkelan* and *Bairavan* in 2005. While the U.S. and the U.K.’s performances were arranged in an auditorium for two to three hours, in Singapore, he has to perform in a lane that lasted for two to three hours, but in the night. He was amazed by the dazzling audiences coming from different sections of the society, not just the Malayalis but also non-Indians. However, he says that, though he was happy to perform there, he was sad to know that there was no *kavu* made and was

⁶⁸It is interesting to note here that the Middle East countries especially the six GCC countries surrounding the Persian Gulf hold the maximum number of Malayalis in the world outside Kerala, constituting around 2.5 million (Zacharia and Rajan 2011: 29).

⁶⁹*Vishnumoorti* along with other performances which are discussed in this thesis such as *Karikuttichathan*, *Rakthachamundi*, *Kandanarkelan*, *Bairavan*, *Dhumabagvathi*, and *Uchitta* are all *Theyyam* miming that are based on characters derived from the myths of real men/women of North Kerala who fought for a cause and later worshipped as gods and goddesses.

⁷⁰ Initial slow steps in *Theyyam* performance.

⁷¹ Narratives accompanied by songs related to the particular deity.

in ‘*ardha* (half) *anushtanam*’.⁷² It was the food and language that worried him initially, but things changed when the committee members of the club came and helped them. For instance, the club committee members were supportive in translating the performance and the speciality of the art form to the second-generation diasporas and their non-Indian counterparts, and at the same time, they arranged a kitchen and cooking necessities for the performers to cook their food (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020). Mukhundan recalls:

Initially, I was very excited to perform abroad, and it was my surprise that the crowd gave us overwhelming support and respect. There was a *kurikodukal*⁷³ ritual, and were given *dakshina*⁷⁴ by the people... We received the payment of INR 100,000 in Muscat and INR 50,000 in London. Whereas in Singapore, we received INR 6000 to 7000 excluding our travel tickets and living expenses... I did not have any bad experience and would love to perform for our people there if they invite... While I could not make any strong connection with the people because of the short stays, I was very happy to see that this art form has appealed to many people in the diaspora (including non-Indians) who were unaware of this tradition and the rituals that associated with the *Theyyam* performance (personal interview with Mukhundan Panicker) (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 8).

“The diversities within religious traditions of Hinduism in India – which is also observable in the Indian diaspora – is so much so that one can find very distinct similarities and differences in every ritual and festival in terms of their observation and celebration by the Indians. There are several rituals performed in the diaspora and important among them are *Thaipusam*⁷⁵, *Maha Shivrathri*⁷⁶,

⁷² Solemnization and practicing of rituals and fasting with dedication and faith.

⁷³ The last stage of *Theyyam* performance where the performer gives his blessings to the devotees.

⁷⁴ Honorarium given in the form of fee, fruits or attire to show respect.

⁷⁵ One of the important Tamil festivals in the diaspora is the *Thaipusam* festival, where Hindu devotees publicly offer prayers, sacrifice, and thanksgiving to Lord Murugan in fulfilment of vows for favours granted (Ward 1984).

⁷⁶ *Maha Shivaratri* is a Hindu festival dedicated to the worship of Lord Shiva and is celebrated widely in India as well as in the Indian diaspora.

*Rama Navami*⁷⁷, *Krishna Jayanti*⁷⁸, *Deepavali*⁷⁹, etc. which are carried out by the devotees in great zeal for certain purposes of fulfilling the vows⁸⁰” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 8). Other important festivals like *Mariamman* are associated with smallpox, cholera, and healing such contagious diseases like certain *Theyyams* of Kerala. Like the *Draupadi* festival, the goddess is taken for a procession in a temple chariot in *the Mariamman* festival. After the procession, the goddess is again brought back to the temple for the devotees to pray and give their offerings. *Neem* leaves are given to the devotees as part of healing the diseases. There are vegetarian as well as non-vegetarian offerings. Live chicken and goats are slaughtered as part of the ritual. The meat is then cooked with rice and served to the devotees. In the *Draupadi Amman* festival, many devotees go in trance. The beating of drums and going into a trance during the festival is very common in the Indian diaspora in South Africa. Trance for them is a way of experiencing god. The more intense and louder the drum’s beat, the more energetic the devotees’ dance in a trance. Because they believe that the goddess would delve into them while reaching the trance and thus experiencing goddess in them (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 8). “Though these festivals are all divided along the linguistic lines in India, i.e., South Indian and North Indian, they are celebrated together in the diaspora by breaking these linguistic barriers. This way, they allowed Indians to pass on the culture and religious knowledge to their next generations. Besides fulfilling these significant objectives, these

⁷⁷ *Rama Navami* is a Hindu festival which celebrates the birthday of Lord Rama.

⁷⁸ *Krishna Jayanti* or *Krishna Janmashtami* is a Hindu festival to celebrate the birthday of Lord Krishna.

⁷⁹ *Deepavali*, the festival of lights, is a major Indian festival.

⁸⁰ According to Hindu tradition, “vows, called *vrata* in Sanskrit, are well-known and widely practiced features of Hindu religiosity all over the Indian subcontinent” (Luchesi, 2008: 184).

festivals also establish a very close bond between different communities within Hinduism” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 9).

Language is fundamental to differentiation, so Gujarati, Punjabi, Telugu, Bengali, Tamil, Hindi and other groups develop, first as meetings of a few relatives and friends in homes and meeting halls and then formally incorporated charitable organizations recognized by the government as tax-exempt. These provide support networks for providing a wide range of social welfare benefits from securing jobs to teaching languagesto arranging marriages. They also provide the only location outside the home where immigrants and their children, perhaps to a lesser degree, can enjoy the language, cuisine, arts and mores of the parents’ native place (Williams, 2007a: 152).

Mohanan Peruvanaan, for instance, a 53-year-old *Theyyam* artist, belongs to the *Vannan* community in Kerala, having a vast experience of performing *Theyyam* in several countries outside India. He and his group of six to seven artists performed *Muthappan*⁸¹ in Malaysia and Singapore in the year 2012 and Dubai in the year 2014 (see Figure-6). In Dubai, it was for the Malayali association where *Velattam*⁸² also occurred from evening 5 O’clock to 8.30 p.m., whereas *Thiruappana* was performed from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. The performance in Singapore and Malaysia too had the same timings and organized for two days. Initially, he had many anxieties and fear before the performance and had to carry all the *aniyals*⁸³ required for the performance. They carried with them the sacred elements of *Theyyam*, such as the *tulsi*, *chemba*, and *chekki* flowers, along

⁸¹ It is interesting to note that there are approximately four hundred varieties of *Theyyams*. *Muthappan* and *Thiruappan* are important among them. Each of these varieties differ in terms of their worshipping deities, performance costumes, performance timings, number of artist and their assistants involved and so on so forth.

⁸² Second stage of *Theyyam* performance after *thudangal* where the artist performs some rituals.

⁸³ Elaborate elegant and heavy attire worn by the performer from head to toe.

with costumes for about 12 artists to Dubai for the performance (see Figure-7). His first performance in Dubai was a memorable one as he had encountered several issues, both individual and issues related to *Theyyam* (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 10-11). He recalls:

... I was amazed by seeing the number of audiences and the wonderful ambience in Dubai. I had lost my concentration while performing but luckily regained it, the usual way of performing is totally different in a foreign land than at home in Kerala. We sang *thottam* before *Thiruppana* and constructed *Madapura* on the stage... However, the money we promised initially for the troupe did not receive the same in the end. The agent had assured us that they would provide us with a good amount, but we were given nothing except for the money we got during the *kurikodukal*. We were cheated by the agent and thought of not visiting these places in the future... This happened even for other trips to Malaysia and Singapore (personal interview with Mohanan Peruvanaan) (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 11).

In the diaspora, the migrants often provide a setting for a ritual gathering for the people living in different parts of the same new country. Festivals of all cultures focus on food, clothes, music and dance, sports, arts etc. and celebrate bringing people from several ethnic cultures as one nation with the same ethnic identity.

...Such cultural festivals are often not religious, although religious elements might be involved but probably with an emphasis on their aesthetic quality, on religion as art. Often music with a background in religion is presented, or film music and modern popular music. This is a way to make the diaspora group proud of their cultural heritage and show the wider public their positive contribution to society and thus counteract the usual mass media focus on harmful criminal elements and political extremists (Jacobsen, 2008: 202).



MUTHAPPA SARANAM

DUBAI
APPAPPA SEVA SAMITHI

8th
**MUTHAPPAN
THIRUVAPPANA
MAHOTHSAVAM**
2014

2014 october 2nd & 3rd (THURSDAY & FRIDAY)

MAHA NAVAMI & VIJAYA DASHAMI DAYS

DUBAI ALSAFA EMIRATES ENGLISH SPEAKING SCHOOL

Figure 6. *Muthappan* and *Thiruppan Theyyams* in Dubai, 2nd and 3rd Oct 2014 organized by Dubai Ayyappa Seva Samithi and held at the Dubai Alsafa Emirates English Speaking School. (Source: Surabhi K.).



Figure 7. The performance in Dubai depicting *Muthappan* and *Thiruppana* accompanied by drummers. The roof of a small *Madapura* is slightly visible, and innumerable Malayalis are seen witnessing the same in a vast hall with the leisure of coolers/A.C. s, which is not the case when performed in North Kerala. (Source: Surabhi K.)

“Unlike the respondent Mohanan, another respondent, Cheeran, a 53-year-old *Theyyam* artist, had a fantastic experience of performing *Theyyam* in the diaspora. Though he has visited Dubai, Ajman, and Singapore several times since 2007 along with his troupes, the most memorable trip which he recalls was his visit to Ajman in 2018 (see Figure-8). All the trips were made possible through the invitation of the Malayali diasporic association. His journey as a successful *Theyyam* performer is exciting. At the initial stage of his visit to the diaspora, he accompanied the *Theyyam*

troupe as a *vathyakaran*⁸⁴ , but later he performed the *Gulikan Theyyam*⁸⁵” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 11-12).

I was surprised to get an invitation in 2013 from the Malayali association in Dubai to perform *Theyyam* for a program. The program went on for four days, and each day our performances were scheduled from 3 p.m. to the next day early morning. The stage was arranged inside a school ground. At Ajman, the program went on for two days, and each day it used to start in the evening and continues till the next day early morning. However, in Singapore, it was arranged inside an auditorium that was attached to a Hindu temple. The *kavu* which was built, though a temporary one, lighted with lamps and witnessed by a vast crowd that surprised us... It was not difficult in communicating in our language in Dubai and Ajman, but in Singapore, a Malayali translator was arranged for the audiences as most of them were Tamils... We carried all *aniyal* with us for those trips, though some were arranged there by the organizers. While *Kurikodukal* and *thottam* were included in the *Theyyam*, all *anushtanam* was done by the artists themselves... In Dubai and Ajman, we were provided room in a flat for stay and our food was arranged from a Malayali hotel... We were paid a sum of INR 50,000 apart from the *dakshina* we received during the performance... The language was, of course, a problem for us at the airport, but not after that as we encountered a lot of Malayali people there who could even invite us to visit their houses for sumptuous lunch or dinner (personal interview with Cheeran) (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 12).

⁸⁴ The trumpet player of the musical troupe. The performers accompanying *chendakaran* with other musical instruments. Also known as *vathyam*.

⁸⁵ *Gulikan* performances are considered as part of much larger *Theyyam* and they are worshipped as Lord Shiva.

MUTHAPPAN THIRUVAPPANA MAHOTSAVAM – 2018

At Ajman Indian Association Hall , Al Jurf (near China Mall)

On Thursday 22nd February 2018

Evening

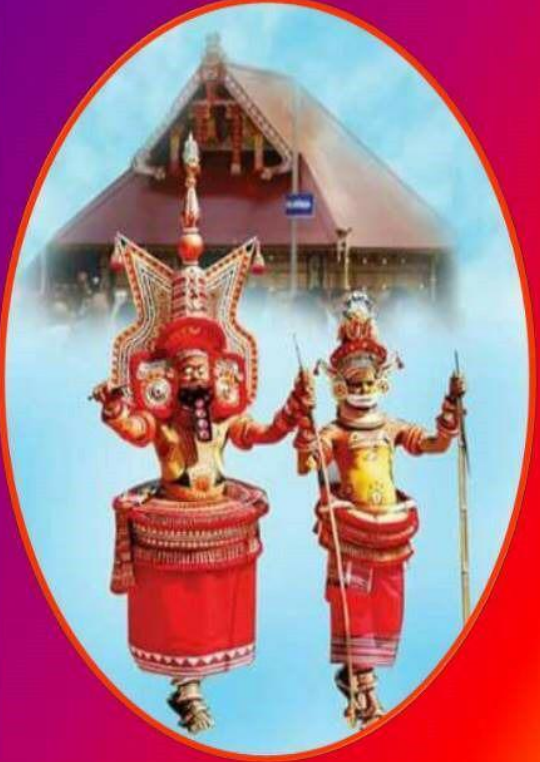
5.30 pm : Bhadra Deepam
: Kalasham at Gulikan Thara

6.00 pm : Malayirakkal ritual

7.00 pm : **MUTHAPPAN
VELLATTAM**
: Mudiyazhikkal ritual

12.00 am : Kalasham Ezhunnallathu

02.00 am : Kalikkapattu



On Friday 23rd February 2018

5.30 am : Maha Ganapathy Homam

6.00 am : **THIRUVAPPANA
VELLATTAM**

12.00 pm: Pallivetta

8.00 pm : Mudiyazhikkal ritual
: Prasadam Distribution

Figure 8. *Muthappana Thiruppana Mahotsavam* held on 22nd and 23rd February 2018 at Ajman Indian Association Hall, Al Jurf (China Hall), Ajman, U.A.E. A chart of rituals exclusive to that particular *Theyyam* is listed with time and date. (Source: Surabhi K.).

“As rightly pointed out by Ann David” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 6), “the tension and interaction of global and local influences play a significant part in the complex construction of identity and place-making within diaspora groups” (2008: 89). Religion is a powerful component of personal and group rhetorics of representation and identity because it provides “a transcendent basis for personal and group identity” (Williams, 2007a: 157). Gathering on any organizations in the diaspora with other people is the only time people get to make their ties stronger by going back to their rituals, food, language and past. Many religious institutions, elaborate temples, and social and religious programs are widespread now in the diaspora.

Shankaran Panicker is another respondent from the *Malayan* community who gave a relatively passive response to my questions. He was a little scared to answer about his going out to perform. The only response he gave was the places he went to. In 2015, he performed in Polland, Singapore, as *Rakthachamundi* and London as a helper to the performer's troupe.

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തിരുവപ്പന മഹോത്സവം
Thiruvappana Maholsavam 2019
(INDIAN TRADITIONAL ART FORMS)

17th December 2019, Tuesday
Morning 6 am to evening 7 pm
Jashannal Auditorium, Indian School
Isa Town, Kingdom of Bahrain

2019 ഡിസംബർ 17, ചൊവ്വാഴ്ച
ഓവിലെ 6 മണി മുതൽ വൈകിട്ട് 7 മണി വരെ
ജഷന്നൽ ഓഡിറ്റോറിയം, ഇന്ത്യൻ സ്കൂൾ
ഇസാ ടൗൺ, ബഹൈറൈൻ

പ്രവേശനം സൗജന്യം

കുത്തുത്തർക്കുള
ചോറുണ്
കർമ്മത്തിനുള്ള സാകര്യം
ഉണ്ടാക്കിക്കുന്നതാണ്
(മുൻകൂർ ടിക്കറ്റ്ബുക്കർ നിർബന്ധം)
ബന്ധപ്പെടുക - 39101089

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ഉച്ചയ്ക്ക് അന്നഭാനം ഉണ്ടായിരിക്കുന്നതാണ്**

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Figure 9. Recent *Theyyam- Muthappan* and *Thiruappan* in Bahrain on December 17, 2019, at the Indian School, Bahrain, followed by cultural programmes, procession, festivals, and lunch. A lot of Malayali diasporas were the sponsors of the programme (Source: Surabhi K.)



Figure 10. *Muthappan* and *Thiruappan* in Bahrain on December 17, 2019, at Indian School Hall surrounded by gates where the audience is seated outside the gates, strikingly different from *Theyyams* in the native place where gates do not block devotees. (Source: Surabhi K).

Dance is an ‘identity- marker’ of the Indian culture in the period before the formation of an independent India. After independence for a long time, the elites in India did not acknowledge dance as a part of literature and culture. Then came a stage where dance became the emblem of India’s glorious past and its rich cultural traditions- an image that stays till today. India’s cultural diversity and heritage are spread in the diaspora, and it serves as a reminder of India’s values of secularism, tolerance, inclusiveness and cross-fertilisation of cultures which are an intrinsic part of our civilisation. India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi talks about cultural diplomacy, an essential dimension of a country’s soft power. The five pillars of this soft power are *Samman* (dignity), *Samvaad* (dialogue), *Samriddhi* (shared prosperity), *Suruksha* (regional and global

security), and *Sanskriti* evam *Sabhayata* (Cultural and civilizational links). With the nurture of the living culture, the traditions can be strengthened by generations, including diasporas. In the pursuit of cultural bonding under the initiative of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) was established in 1950. It aims at reviving and strengthening India's cultural relations with the rest of the world. It includes Indian classical dances, religious tourism, the global popularity of Bollywood and Indian cuisines, intangible heritage, which includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors such as oral traditions, performing arts, religious and cultural festivals and traditional crafts, for instance, Vedic chanting and the *Kathakali* (dance drama of Kerala). The Know India Programme (KIP) under the MEA initiative also is an engagement programme for diaspora youth (between the age of 18-30 years) of Indian origin to introduce them to India and promote awareness about different facets of Indian life, our cultural heritage, art and various aspects of contemporary India. It is open to youth of Indian origin (excluding non-resident Indians) with preference to those from Girmitya countries (Mauritius, Fiji, Suriname, Guyana, T&T, Jamaica etc.). KIP aims at an understanding of India's political system, economy, society, and developments in various sectors, visiting places of historical, cultural, religious importance, familiarisation with art, music and culture of India, visit to industrial sites and a village, interaction with non-profit organizations and meetings with senior leadership/officials in India. Folk and tribal dances were an integral part of the culture of the unrepresented minorities. These were good for showcasing the variety and 'ethnic-ness' of the Indian people and were therefore required to be put under the particular category where they were clearly part of the non-elite masses; suitable for an exhibition-like circumstances such as Republic Day parade for the India Festivals held abroad but never deemed to fit to be representative of Indian 'high' culture. Dance is aped according to the Western form of dance when performed in

the diaspora, and local is taken to the global. ‘Modern’, ‘contemporary’, ‘intercultural’, ‘fusion’, ‘creative’ can be the terms for the new version of dance forms.

Bharathan Panicker, is a seventy-six-year-old *Theyyam* artist who performed *Theyyam* in the diaspora of France in the year 1989. He had also performed in Germany and Belgium. He had been contacted through an agent of folklore academy, and his travel and stay were all sponsored by the government. A group of 13 people, including a helper, four *vathyams*, a *chenda* and other *Theyyam* performers were in his troupe. They did not have check-in issues at the airport though they had carried all *aniyal* and artificial flowers for the performance. He says:

I had major flight fear but no fear or lack of concentration while performing in the new land. It was a three-hour stage performance, usually during the night from 7-9 p.m. Tickets were sold to the massive crowd outside the gallery. We did all *anushtanam*, and a temporary *kavu* was set up only in France. Other places, it was just a red curtain that was set up on the stage with lighted lamps. There were no *thottam*, *kurikodukal* or *dakshina* rituals. A Malayali lady was the translator to our performances in France. It was a stay of 10 days with a house for two people per room was arranged. We were paid a fee of INR 4000 each. All the places we went to had an extreme cold climate and for us, who are unaware of the climate in the foreign land did not have any suitable clothes. This made our stay difficult. The restaurants in most places had chopsticks and spoon, which made it uncomfortable to eat (personal interview with Bharathan Panicker).

He recalls how a Malayali family of a *Kathakali* performer took them to a Malayali restaurant to have fish, meat and rice. They were given leisure time by the agent to roam around the places, and a bus was arranged with two guides. On enquiry, if the cultural essence of the art form is retained while performed abroad, he replies;

“Not at all, we went just to show it as an art form, a dance, and I do not want anyone to go out on this behalf. Why should our *anushtanam* go astray?” (personal interview with Bharathan).



Figure 11. Pooja before a performance by the *koladhari* of *Muthappan* and *Thiruappan* in Bahrain on December 17, 2019, at Indian School. A temporary *Madapura* is also seen at the back of the hall with *chendakaran*. (Source: Surabhi K.).

Reconstruction of the meaning of rituals is always difficult. The legend of the rituals is unknown among many devotees. The devotees are involved in the rituals to gain material profit like prosperity in health and wealth. Here in diasporas, people indulge in the reconstruction of culture and rituals to maintain their cultural and religious ties and make their next-generation involved in all their religion. The performance and continuity of rituals are always taken care of by the diasporas.

...Hindus do not seem to know the meaning of the rituals that they observe, it does not mean that no meaning can be attributed to them. The rituals in many festivals are the same, or at least similar. But

they take on different meanings in different festivals and on different occasions. In this sense, the meaning of the ritual depends on what is celebrated and what is remembered in the context of the ritual. This special meaning is preserved in the myth that relates the significance of the festival (Pratap, 2013:71).

For instance, according to Pratap Kumar, *Kavadi* rituals originated from the non- brahminical Hinduism, but when it goes to the diaspora in South Africa and India, it becomes more brahminised and happens in the temple. The participants of the rituals and the bearers of *Kavadis* who later experience trance is non- Brahmin, but the non-vegetarian goddess worship is kept separate from the Brahminical priesthood (2013:87), just like the *Theyyam* performances in the diaspora where it happens in an auditorium attached to temples.

Religion forms the identity of an individual. Identity is related to rituals and religion, which plays a crucial role in the diaspora. Communal rituals foster personal and social identity.

The meaning and the intent of a ritual will, perhaps, be recovered as the members of the Hindu community increase their knowledge of their scriptures, ritualistic symbols and so on. But what seems to be important is the performance of the ritual (Pratap Kumar, 2013: 55).

According to Pratap Kumar (2013:58), Hindus in South Africa conduct birth ceremony (or hair removal ceremony), which is practised both by the South Indians and North Indians. Tamilians call it *Katteri* prayer, which is performed in the seventh month. A black rooster and a white hen are sacrificed during the ritual, after which the child's hair is shaved off. The ritual is usually undertaken when a woman does not conceive for a long time to remove any evils inflicted on the child or the mother. All Hindus in South Africa celebrate Tamilians' ritual in South Africa when a woman does not conceive. However, the idea of the ritual to be performed only when a woman does not conceive for a long time exists only among the Tamilians in South Africa.

With the performances of *Theyyam* in the diasporas, there forms *communitas*, as it creates a sacred space in the diaspora when performed and forms a special bond, community tie and a generic human bond.

Another respondent, Appan Panicker, is a fifty-year-old *Theyyam* performer from the *Malayan* community. He is the only *Theyyam* performer listed on the panel of the Indian government's cultural list. He had performed *Karikuttichathan* in the U.S.A in 2008, *Bhairavan* in Singapore in 2008, *Bhairavan* and *Rakthachamundi* in England in 2009, *Vishnumoorti* in Abudabi in 2010, *Karikuttichathan*, *Bhairavan* and *Chamundi* in Nigeria in 2011. It was a group of 11 people in the U.S.A, six people in England, including two *Theyyam* performers and the rest four *vathyam* and helper. Appan says,

To Nigeria, we went as a group of 15 people, and to Abudabi, two, my brother and I performed for the Malayali diaspora's club celebration. I was called to the diaspora of Abudabi by his neighbour, where I sang *thottam* from the green room before the performance. I wanted to recite that to myself, if not on the stage, to retain the essence of the dance. It was an open stage wherever he had performed. The stage had a mike where I could talk in between the performance about the legend of that particular *Theyyam* performed. We also included one man in the group who could announce the performance while I was dancing. This performance had *kurikodukal* to get down to the audience and gave my blessings and *prasadam* to the audience. The audience was awestruck and came to see the *mukhathezuthu* and to ask about the legend. I had carried *Ayudam*⁸⁶ and *Velak*⁸⁷ for the performance. It was a performance of two hours for all the *Theyyams* in total. The agent arranged a translator, and food, accommodation and travel were very well paid by the agent. The leader of our troupe was paid INR 20,000/- and he divides it

⁸⁶ Arms and weapons; in this context as a means of enacting the myth

⁸⁷ Oil lamp for illuminating with a wick of fire

among his other members. Each was paid some INR 4000/- There had been many cultural, food, and language barriers, but we could overcome it (personal interview with Appan Panicker).

He adds,

It was all a wonderful experience, and he had little fear while I was travelling for the first time in flight and anxiety while performing abroad for the first time. I faced no objection from the religious institutions and had taken permission from them, and also, the official invitation from the government made things easy for me. There is a total change when performed abroad on a stage, and there is no cultural essence taken, no belief taken, belief should be in people that is how *Theyyam* is a success. If *Theyyam* is not for entertainment purpose, then it is all good. (personal interview with Appan Panicker).



Figure 12. *Kurikodukal- Thiruappan* giving blessing to the devotees at the Bahrain Indian School. The devotees are lined up for blessing from their god, who would also hear to their plights. A

security guard is seen keeping a watch near the hall, which is never a sight at the native place *Theyyam*. (Source: Surabhi K.).

Ramakrishnan Peruvanaan, another respondent, is a 49-year-old *Theyyam* performer who had donned *Muthappan* in Malaysia and Singapore. “The performance in these countries took place for two days from the evening until the next morning” (Surabhi & Sahoo: 2021: 365). There came a large audience who were more of non- Malayalis than the Malayalis from the diaspora. He says he had much anxiety about going on a flight and then performing abroad, but the family and friends helped him decide. He says;

Although the travel was smooth, I could not be satisfied with performing abroad because of the enormous cultural gap. The audience could only watch it as mere spectators of graceful movements and with little essence and legend known to them. I cherish seeing the country abroad but not performing abroad for a group of people who have no idea of what was and why was going on. It was the only money that drove me abroad to perform as my family was really in need of money. I did not face any objections from the religious institutions and was granted permission before going abroad (personal interview with Ramakrishnan Peruvanaan).

Kunjikrishnan Peruvanaan from *Vanaan* community had donned *Muthappan* in Bahrain and Dubai. He was called by his neighbour to perform for the Malayali diaspora. The Malayali diaspora has organized their association’s programme for which *Theyyam* was a cultural event. He said;

The performance happened for a whole day with many people to witness. We were a group of four people who had carried all *aniyals*. Flowers were not carried as we had all artificial *Theyyam* materials available there. They conduct it every year for the diaspora when the club’s programmes are being conducted. Temporary *kavu* and *madapura* were set up for the performance. Men and women came

decked up in Kerala's traditional attire. Kerala *sadhya*⁸⁸ was also served. Tickets were sold for those who had to get into the auditorium (personal interview with Kunjikishnan Peruvanaan).

Upendran Peruvanaan is not a performer but a middleman who had taken various *Theyyam* performers outside and introduced them to various agents. He is a native of Kerala but resides in Calcutta as part of his work. He is a well-settled mechanical engineer who belongs to a family of *Theyyam* performers. He took his brothers to Calcutta to perform during various Malayali associations' programmes and then are contacted through various agents, and the performers are called abroad to perform. Various residents of foreign countries who organize cultural programmes contact him; he says. He then used to translate to Calcutta's native about the legend of the particular *Theyyam* being performed. Many from folklore academy have a close acquaintance with him. He has his brothers who are *Theyyam* performers and has showcased various performances abroad. He says,

The native land, village, village people, ambience can never be created in a foreign land, but when the diaspora feels lost, they long for the memory of native performances, native culture, then they have no other choice (personal interview with Upendran Peruvanaan).

Also, in the native land with the flooding of the Gulf, money forests are damaged with new constructions as part of the state's economic well-being, which has affected the environment of *Theyyam* shrines. Global cultural trends update and transform local practices according to their conditions and needs. From the 2000s, the festivals have been celebrated on a large scale and often organized at many shrines under the patronage of the Keralite diaspora in the Gulf region and further supplemented by the increasing influx of money from rapid economic development

⁸⁸ A feast consisting of variety of traditional vegetarian dishes of Kerala served on a banana leaf.

(Takemura, 2018). In Kerala, modernization, increased literacy, communist ideology and social changes like land reforms have shaped the social structure and people's mind.

...Until early 1980s the traditions of Teyyam ritual were in danger of dying out. However, under the influence of scholarly and media attention, its appropriation by communists and artists., as well as the increasing inflow of global money, the ritual performance has not only been revived but also proliferated to emerge in several other places and spaces and deviating from the original contexts of the last two decades- such as tourism, art festivals, political rallies and Keralite diasporas outside the state and country (Takemura, 2018).

Sankunni Peruvanaan is a 28-year-old shop keeper who belongs to the *Vanaan* community. He also dons *Theyyam* occasionally as it has been passing on from generations of his family. He had performed *Muthappan Theyyam* in Dubai in 2014. It was a two-day performance that began in the evening of the first day and ended in the night the other day. He went with a group of three people, and accommodation, travel and food were all arranged by the agent. He was paid INR 30,000 and some more by the audience on the stage. The Malayali diaspora was in a huge crowd to see the performance. Many are known to them in the diaspora who been staying in the Dubai diaspora for so long. He says he had flight fear while going to Dubai but was happier about going to Dubai and performing there to the Malayali diaspora. The audience had more bhakti and respect. There was a small *madapura* created on the stage during the performance. They were also called to perform at houses of certain permanent settlers of Malayali diaspora who had prayed to god to conduct *Muthappan* after the fulfilment of their prayers. In such houses, a temporary *madapura* was created, a small shelter roofed by coconut shreds. He recalls;

It was a totally different experience. Nothing felt like at home. The people at the houses where performances happened were significantly less in number, only about six people. When *Muthappan* is

donned in any houses after fulfilling one's prayers, the whole village comes to witness it. There would be an aura of some grand event and festivity, but everything was dull (personal interview with Sankunni Peruvanaan).

According to Pratap Kumar (2013), there are the Siva temples, the Vishnu temples and the Amman (mother goddess) temples or Sakti temples in South Africa set in a single compound. The temple worship patterns are mostly Brahminised now. There are no permanent priests in the temples in South Africa like that in native temples. The priests are called from native lands for festivals, some of which are also non- brahmins but never a priest from South Africa as people believe ritual procedures will be spoiled if done by priests in South Africa.

In the beginning, Indian settlers in South Africa depended on their own memories of tradition. The ritual acts, prayers, chants (mantras), myths, symbols, beliefs and various religious practices were carried over to this country as part of their experience. Whatever ceremonies they observed in India, they remembered and transmitted with relative accuracy. It is only much later, almost at the turn of the century that some religious books were brought by visiting religious leaders (Pratap, 2013:43).

Tilakan Peruvanaan has not donned any *Theyyam* abroad but has been the helper to various programmes performed abroad. He went to Singapore and Malaysia in the year 2014. He owns a *puja* store in his native place. He went with his brothers and said he was very nervous during the travel. All *aniyal* were carried and had minor issues during check-in at the airport as they had to carry a knife and arrow and bow for the performances. They were a group of four people, and the agents paid for all facilities. The crowd was immense and gave much respect. The Malayalis were seen giving details to the non- Malayalis, and tickets were sold to see *Theyyam*. In Singapore, it happened in a forest-like area where *madapura* was constructed, and in Malaysia, it was a public park. Kerala food and other cultural programmes were conducted for the event. Translators were

arranged by the agents, and vehicles to pick up and drop were also arranged by the agents. For many VIPs were also seen witnessing the *Theyyam*. He says;

For the audience, it was nothing divine, unlike the native people. They saw it just like a dance form. Language and cultural difference were not a major problem as there were many Malayali men to guide them. We even met people of our own dialect. The foreign audience felt the performance was Kathakali and were then explained about it. The event organizers had created a CD of the *Theyyam* performances, and our group was sent the same later on. My mere wish to see the foreign land made me go with the troupe of artists. Other than that, it was nothing about the performance that made me happy (personal interview with Tilakan Peruvanaan).

According to Sinha, people in the diaspora “engage in forms of Hindu religiosity in new locations, and in so doing reveal an attachment to ‘tradition’ while at the same time, display an openness to introducing changes in order to function meaningfully in new socio-political and religious terrains” (2011: 25).

Appropriated Traditions:

Kumaran Panicker, a 52-year-old *Theyyam* artist who had performed for the Asiad in 1982 at New Delhi and Asia Song Festival in 2004 in South Korea, shared a different narrative of his visits. He had done the *Theyyam* performances like *Rakthachamundi*, *Dhumabagvathi*, *Vishnumoorti*, and *Uchitta* in the Asia Song Festival in South Korea. It is not always possible for a local artist to perform on the international stage, but for Kumaran, it came as a surprise as one of his school teachers in Trivandrum (the capital city of Kerala) helped him to get a chance initially to perform for the Asian Games in Delhi and later for the Republic Day in Delhi. These performances were so spectacular that he was called to perform in South Korea for the Asia Song Festival in 2004. He got the chance at such a time that he had to struggle for arranging the passport and costumes for

Theyyam as that was not the right season for the *Theyyam*, and the availability of *Theyyam* costumes was also scarce (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020). He says:

The *kuruthola* made of *murikku*⁸⁹ in the costume bag was so loosely handled in the airport that it had the chances to be broken. For travel to South Korea, I had to wait for seven hours due to my visa problems. We went as a group of eight people, including *chendakaran* (drummer) and *mukhathezuthukaran* (facial artist). They helped me construct the *kavu* on the stage but could not go into the crowd like in Kerala, so no rituals of *kurikodukal* were there in South Korea. There was no interaction during the performances because of the language barrier. The audiences used to come only for praying and taking blessings from the artists. The area where the performance held was a plain open ground where and the stage was constructed by our *Theyyam* artists. Though the duration of the performance took only seven minutes, we took almost one and a half months of practice as we were scared to perform in South Korea for the first time, outside our country. It was a fantastic experience for us to see people coming to watch us by wearing Kerala *sarees* and *mundu*⁹⁰ by men and women, respectively... We were provided very comfortable accommodation and served good food. We were paid INR 50,000 per person for our performances. The food and language both had troubled us in South Korea and could depend mostly on food items such as omelettes, bread, and bananas. The cold climate also made it difficult to visit new places, though we could get some leisure time during the visit... I watched *Theyyam* and heard the music from my childhood, and today feel proud to perform *Theyyam*. It is passed on to us by our ancestors. Though I could only go abroad to perform in South Korea, I am looking forward to another chance to visit any other country in the future to showcase this art form to foreigners (personal interview with Kumaran) (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 9).

⁸⁹ *Kuruthola* is a thin tender strands of palm leaves, and *murikku* is Indian coral tree.

⁹⁰ *Saree* is a lengthy cloth draped by Indian women, and *mundu* is a white garment wrapped around the waist mostly by men in Kerala.

“On a question regarding any taboos associated with performances outside the homeland, he replied” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 9):

I got the letter of permission from the respective *kavu* of my *Theyyam* for going to perform in South Korea.... also, I received numerous calls to perform in Dubai for our Malayali diasporic communities at different times, especially during the celebration of various Kerala functions, but unfortunately, I could not make it due to my busy schedule of *Theyyam* performances in my home state, Kerala (personal interview with Kumaran) (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 9).



Figure 13. A tableau of *Kuttichathan Theyyam* in Dubai Kalotsavam (Art Festival), 2012. (Source: Surabhi K.).

Another respondent, Shekaran Panicker, is a 47-year-old *Theyyam* artist from the *Malayan* community who had gone to South Korea along with the respondent Kumaran as a helper to deck up *Theyyam* performers. He says:

I felt a huge difference in the cultural form while performing in a space outside Kannur. Although our travel expense and other needs of the performers in the new land was very well taken care of, the food and language difference made it very bad. A short book on *Theyyam* was distributed to the audience to make them aware of this art form, but the essence of the art form they could no way exchange to them during the performance although the people came to talk to the troupe to ask their queries at the end of the performance. However, I would like to go and perform again in the other land as it is their only way to go abroad (personal interview with Shekaran Panicker).



Figure 14. shows various performances making efforts to represent *Theyyam* as a part of Dubai Art Festival, 2012, which is in no way similar to the actual *Theyyam*. (Source: Surabhi K.).



Figure 15. A tableau of *Theyyam* by donning a vague costume was a total failure in the Dubai Art Festival, 2012. (Source: Surabhi K.).

According to Weller (2008), movements [of rituals] “attempt some kind of commodification of charisma through mass production of artefacts or videos, but in this process, there is undermining of the sense of authenticity”. He says, “...one very common answer is to establish a ‘home’, even while attempting to appeal universally. Often these charismatic centres fall well outside the major financial and population centres of the world, creating a sort of religious core in the economic periphery, which itself is an important comment on the market” (Weller, 2008: 18).

Palgunan Peruvanaan, a 67-year-old *Theyyam* performer, had donned *Kandanarkelan* in Polland in the year 2009. He went to Polland through a Sweden research scholar from Bombay who had

come to Kannur to make a documentary on *Theyyam*. At a festival in Polland, his documentary was shown, and then *Theyyam* was called to perform in the Brave Festival⁹¹ of Polland. A group of seven people left for Polland, where they had to perform on a large bare ground. A temporary *kavu* was set up by the artists, which were half-covered by a red cloth and *ola*⁹². *Theekundam* was also set up for the performance, which is called *Meleri* by the wooden wicks available there to perform the *Theyyam*. This took the performers about two days to arrange the *Meleri*. The *thottam* was also sung during the performance, and the whole performance took about two hours from 6 p.m. – 8 p.m for two days. He recalls:

The audience had tremendous respect for us and was awestruck by our performances. They came and prayed to us and took blessings as flowers we gave during the *kurikodukal*. Everything was arranged by the student from Sweden who took us there to arrange for a translator for the *thottam*. The student also arranged the fee, and we were each given an amount of INR 1,200. The seven of us stayed in three rooms where the food was arranged on the first floor, and all the travels, accommodation and food part was free of cost. There was a guide too arranged to show us in and around in Polland when we found gaps between the performances (personal interview with Palgunan Peruvanaan).

Regarding the travel, he explains:

The travelling part was challenging when we did not get the visa until the departure date, which we only received from Bombay and got into the flight after that. It was 14 hours travel from Bombay to Polland,

⁹¹ Polish festival launched in 2005 where artists are invited to present their traditions cultures, traditions and rites from all over the world, which are on the border of becoming extinct. The festival keeps the subtitle “Against Cultural Exile”. Today it is one of the most important emblems of Wrocław. The originator and artistic director, Grzegorz Bral, created Brave Festival showing the authentic art of various nations, which is cultivated and maintained by participants of communities, who live in unfavourable social, religious and political conditions or which are endangered with a loss of their own culture for the benefit of civilizational assimilation. (<http://www.bravefestival.pl/en>)

⁹² In Kerala locally called for palm leaves.

and I also happen to miss my boarding pass from Paris to Polland, which made me unable to go on a connection flight and had to take another flight (personal interview with Palgunan Peruvanaan).

He adds that;

It was all because of my fear and anxiety as it was our first travel on the flight. Packing for the travel was difficult for us because all the *aniyal* and drums are to be securely packed as there are chances of it to be broken in the airport. Our troupe carried *aniyal*, flowers and *avil*⁹³ with them. We also faced food and language difference which made it very difficult for us to stay for more days. The lack of rice and curry like the everyday Indian meal drained out our energy. Later a friend of one of us in Norway came to support and encouraged us. I still remember how the religious institutions initially discouraged our going and later agreed to it. I was so afraid before my performance because it included fire for this particular *Theyyam* which was also happening in an unknown place. It was so crowded, and the *Theyyam* pictures were posted everywhere in the town. I lost concentration while performing, and there were men to hold my hand from both sides while running over the *Meleri* in the native land, but here we had to run by ourselves with none holding our hands which made it more difficult. I feel like there was no fulfilment and satisfaction after the performance, and I would not like to go again to perform for a foreign audience (personal interview with Palgunan Peruvanaan).

Vineeta Sinha (2011), while discussing Hinduism in the diaspora, emphasises how physical landscape are organised and transformed materially and symbolically in recognising a revered space for religious reconstruction. “The arrangement and orchestration of objects and artefacts within this sanctified realm facilitate not only the housing of Hindu gods and goddesses in these constructed places of/for worship but also enable the enactment and performance of rituals therein” (69). Thus, an object with no religious value becomes a sacred object once it enters the sacred

⁹³ beaten rice

space and “...when religious symbols are de-contextualised and transposed to an unrelated context, there is indeed the potential for their misappropriation and abuse” (Sinha, 2011:199).

Within a Hindu context, two possibilities about the sacredness of any entity are recognised: one, that objects are deemed to be inherently, intrinsically sacred (divinely given), thus sacredness is carried in their very essential properties and thus permanent; and two, that sacredness is attributed or assigned to objects through external (including human action) mechanisms, and thus temporary and transient (Sinha, 2011:195).

Achuthan Panicker is a 42-year-old respondent from the *Malayan* community who is also a music teacher and does *Theyyam* every year. He went to three places; France, Italy in 1999 and Japan in the year 2000. He had donned *Rakthachamundi Theyyam* in all three countries. France and Italy’s call were through a folklore agent of Kerala, and in Japan, it was through a researcher who is a native of Kannur. The performance happened in an auditorium in France and Italy, whereas it was an open stage in Japan. Everywhere it was full of people seated, even on steps and many on foot. There was neither *thottam* sung nor any *anushtanam* done. A small temporary *kavu* was arranged by a Malayali there. However, the artists sang the *mulamantram*⁹⁴ recited before performing *Theyyam* and went to the stage to their satisfaction (Surabhi & Sahoo, 2021: 363). He says:

It was a mere showcase of the art form, nothing else. The audience was pleased seeing the *marachal*⁹⁵ with the heavy attire which weighs 10-20kgs during the performance and did not leave until the performance got over. The audience was awestruck seeing the performance and came to take photos with us. A group of 21 people were in our troupe, including *chendakaran*, *vathyam*, set maker, helper etc... We stayed in a flat where food was all paid by the agents. The travel did not have any issues while check-in at the airport. The difference in food culture made our stay a little complicated and survived

⁹⁴ Prayers related to *Theyyams* which are strictly studied by the *Theyyams* artists alone.

⁹⁵ Vibrant turns and twirls by the *kolakaran*

on bread and omelettes. We were paid INR 100,000, where INR 50,000 was paid in cash. It was just the money that made us perform in foreign land (personal interview with Achuthan Panicker) (Surabhi & Sahoo, 2021: 363).

According to him, a *kolam* or *kolakaran* succeeds only when he is the embodiment of singing, dancing, speaking, and the village people who take that into their hearts, if not that it is a failure like any other dance form.

With the commodification of art form, the new place is charged with new spiritual, religious meanings.

Sustaining a Hindu universe at an everyday life level requires an extraordinary range of religious specialists and ritual paraphernalia. Historically, this has been a challenge for Hindu communities located outside India. Not unexpectedly a ‘diasporic’ location has produced a variety of local responses to this need, including some highly innovative and creative ones. At the level of practice, Hinduism is an embodied religion and grounded in materiality, that makes the presence of specific physical objects (which carry an immense ritual and symbolic load) an indispensable part of its religious practices (Sinha, 2008: 169).

According to Sinha, around 24 Hindu temples are built in South Indian style in Singapore, which is colourful and has towering gopurams, domes featuring figures and motifs from Hindu architecture. In Singapore, during the Tamil month of Thai (in January and February), the road between Perumal Temple in Serangoon Road and Murugan Temple in Tank Road are partially closed for the annual procession of *Thaipusam*, piercing their tongues and various parts of the body to fulfil vows made to the popular Tamil god, Murukan. Recently, ‘Little India’ (the stretch of road between Rochor Road and Lavender Street) are lit with lights during Deepavali. The annual fire-walking festival (*timiti*) is also vividly observed by the people. These events are showcased in the

brochures that promote tourism in Singapore, a description of Indian/ Hindu traditions, and a powerful maker of multi- religiosity and religious harmony in Singapore. Many non- Indian Singaporeans participate in both *Thaipusam* and *timiti*, mainly by the local ethnic Chinese community (2008: 171).

They made not only a mixture of the Brahminical and non- Brahminical traditions, but also an eclectic mixture of traditions from various linguistic groups. As such, the Hindi- speaking, the Telugu speaking and Tamil speaking indentured labourers, living side by side, exchanged their local customs and practices and developed a unique blend of Hindu religious practice. This was facilitated by the fact that the early indentured labourers were bent on preserving what little they had brought with them by assimilating each other's customs and practices mutually, instead of being exclusivist (Pratap Kumar, 2013: 46).

Chandu Panicker, *Theyyam* artist from the *Malayan* community, had donned *Madaichamundi* in France in the year 2007, *Bairavan* and *Potten Theyyam* in Germany in 2012 and *Gulikan* and *Vishnumoorti* in South Korea in 2013. He was called to France by a drama teacher from Trivandrum for 20 days. His group included artist of about 10-12. He went with his helper for ten days to Germany and South Korea; five people for three days. He says,

In all three places, the performance lasted only for 10-20 minutes and tickets were sold by the organizers in front of the venue. There came a huge crowd. It was a stage in France where *Theyyam* was held and open ground in Germany and South Korea. There were more foreigners to witness the performance than the Malayalis living there. A readymade small *kavu* was set up covered with red cloth and a lighted lamp. It was performed just as a dance forms in France and South Korea but with all *anushtanam* in Germany. There was no *thottam* sung, no *kurikodukal* and no speaking to them, but the translator was arranged to introduce what they say before the performance. The organizers well arranged the travel, accommodation and food. The food and weather did not affect us badly as we had carried woollen

jackets as per the agent's instructions. I was terrified for my first performance in France but would like to go again if he gets a chance (personal interview with Chandu Panicker).

He did not specify how much he was paid. The respondent seemed hesitant to reveal it out. He adds that *Theyyam* should be known to everyone. It need not be marginalized.

Balakrishnan Panicker went to France in 2003, Italy, America and Switzerland in 2004 and Nigeria in 2011. He had gone to France twice to perform *Vishnumoorti*, *Karikuttichathan*, *Uchitta* and *Padaveeran* in Nigeria and America and Switzerland as a helper to the *Theyyam* troupe. He recalls how his father has taught him *Theyyam* and now passing it on to his son. He has been approached by phone by an agent from Trivandrum who organizes *Theyyams* abroad. To America and Nigeria, he went with his brother-in-law to perform. In other places, it was a group of seven-ten people. It was performed in all places just as an art form; no *anushtanam* was done; they did not have any *thottam* except in Nigeria or *kurikodukal* rituals. There was arranged a translator for the introduction before the performance. The whole performance took about two hours in total and in some places only half an hour. *Kavu* was set up only in Nigeria on open ground and other places in an auditorium, and no temporary *kavu* was set up. The *thottam* in Nigeria was about two three lines only. The crowd was massive in all these places, but no *bhakti* as people are not aware of the *Theyyam* culture. The crowd was seen appreciating the art form. He says:

During my first travel to France, I had a considerable flight fear but no fear or lack of concentration during the performance. We had to carry all *aniyals*, including flower made of wool, for the performance. There was no disagreement on the part of religious institutions for going out and performing *Theyyam*, and we were issued an appropriate letter detailing their permission. On the days when performances were not arranged, we could roam around the new countries. We got the opportunity of climbing the Eiffel Tower twice in Paris. Food, travel and accommodation were paid to us, and the

climatic difference did not affect us adversely as we had carried all the required stuff. Also, the food and cultural difference did not bother us much. A sum of one and a half lakhs was paid to our group leader, who divided the money among us. In the native land, there are many processes done before the *Theyyam* performances in the *kavu*. For instance, we have *adayalam* first, and then purification of the place where *Theyyam* is to be held, but no such procedures can be conducted when performed in another land. The native is always native, and when performed abroad, it can remain just like a dance (personal interview with Balakrishnan Panicker).

Janardhanan Peruvanaan, a 56-year-old *Theyyam* artist from the *Vanaan* community, had performed many *Theyyams* abroad; *Kathivanur Veeran* in England, Switzerland. *Kandanarkelan* in Italy and *Muchilottu Bhagavathi* in America. He has also performed in Asian Games and Pune Institute for Spic Macay. He had received State Award for Folklore Dakshinachitra in 2015. However, since 2016, he has been banned from performing in the native *kavu* for performing *Muchilottu Bhagavathi* abroad. The *Vaniyan* community, who organizes this particular *Theyyam* in their various *kavu* in the village, blames him for marketing *Theyyam* abroad. He has also been banned from teaching in the Folklore Academy from then. He has been going abroad to perform since the 80s, but the ban came in 2016 accusing him of selling the art form, which is very precious to the *Vaniyan* community (Surabhi & Sahoo, 2021: 364). The respondent comments, “if you think *Theyyam* will be spoiled, that is your mistake. The one that has to stay will stay forever” (personal interview with Janardhanan Peruvanaan).

According to him, the *Theyyam* was performed for twenty minutes on stage in an auditorium. No temporary *kavu* or *thottam* was being sung. There was no interaction between the performance, usually like in the native land. He was contacted through a teacher of Drama camp to perform abroad. He says,

I went as a group with my two brothers and helpers. We were provided rooms of a flat along with travel, food and medical needs. A sum of one lakh was paid for the stay for a period of one-two months. There was much crowd to witness the dance of *Theyyam*. The foreigners are more inquisitive about knowing about Indian culture than the Malayalis (Surabhi & Sahoo, 2021: 365). He opines that all the authors who write books on *Theyyam* elaborates about *mulamanthram* and sell it to everyone should be banned, not those who go out for performing to the people who love to see the performance as by selling such books all ritualistic knowledge which should remain only to the performers are sold. I would like to go again if I get a chance to perform abroad. Before the performance, the audience sees *Theyyam* as a figure, and artistic ritual cannot be showcased in other lands. So, none would even get a feel that of the native land when performed in a foreign land; that is impossible. It should be understood just as a mere dance performance (personal interview with Janardhanan Peruvanaan) (Surabhi & Sahoo, 2021: 365).

Chandran Panicker, another respondent, has donned *Karikuttichathan* in Japan in 1995, *Rakthachamundi* in Paris in 1996, *Vishnumoorti* in Paris in 1998 and as *vathyakaran* to the troupe that the above respondent Janardhanan Peruvanaan took to America in 2000. Chandran explains,

I went through an agent who contacted me through telephone. The performances in all of these took place on a stage in an auditorium. There was no *kavu*, and the performance took place for only 10-20 minutes. Before the performance, the translator gave a short introduction to the art form to the audience. The mediator had arranged for a visa, accommodation and food, so there were no difficulties while travelling. We had carried all *aniyal* with us, but no flowers, and there were some six-seven cartons of luggage with us. There were no issues during check-in at the airport, and our group included six-seven people, including *vathyam*, *chenda* etc... The *thottam* was not sung in any of the performances. The event had all the major dances of Kerala. There came a vast audience who later approached us to know more about the art form. The audience had more foreigners than Keralites. I was petrified to travel on the plane and perform in the host country, but I was uncertain if all the major dance steps of *Theyyam* can be completed quickly. We were paid INR 30,000 per person for a week's performance. The food,

culture and language barrier were a major issue for us. There were no objections from religious institutions of native land, and permission was sought before leaving to perform in the foreign land (personal interview with Chandran Panicker).

The respondent Sahadevan, a senior *Theyyam* artist of 80-year-old and belongs to the *Malayan* community. He has the highest experience among all the respondents in this study as he had travelled to countries in Europe like Germany, France, and England to perform *Theyyam* since 1982. His first trip to London for the *Festival of India's South* was so exciting that he kept all the memories intact (see Figure-16, 17). His second visit to London with the *Theyyam* troupe was in the year 1996 (see Figure-18). While his *Theyyam* performances in Germany and France include *Karikuttichathan*, in England he was the *Mughathezuthukaran* (the makeup artist) to other *Theyyams* such as *Bairavan*, *Muchilottu Bhagavathi*, and *Karukuttichathan* (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 13). “He recalled his experiences” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 14):

I went with a group of 15 people, i.e., three *Theyyam* troupes, including *vathyam* and *chenda*, and our experiences of travel and performing there were full of anxiety, excitement, and happiness. I was called to visit Germany through an agent of folklore academy for a festival celebration of a one-month duration and a month visit to Paris. However, before that, first I went for two weeks to London. The duration of the performances in all these places was between two to three hours starting in the evening from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. ... In London, though the performance was arranged on a stage inside an auditorium, there was no *anushtanam* done prior by the performers and even no *thottam* sang for the *Theyyam*. They had set up a small *kavu*, all covered with curtains... The hall was fully packed, and tickets were sold to get the entry into the hall... The Malayali hotels available there made it easy for us to stay for over a month. Initially, I had flight fear... all our travel tickets and accommodation, food and hospitality were taken care of by the agent. Additionally, we were paid each INR 15,000, besides drinks were arranged for the night in our respective rooms... we went to the city site seeing after our performances, and for that, a

bus was arranged explicitly for us. I observed after performing that *Theyyam* is performed abroad by missing many of its rituals. The people over there do not know of it, and those Malayali audiences who were present seldom knew the ritual.... They came to meet us and awed by our performance; they kissed us on our cheeks and forehead, which is very unusual when performed in the homeland (personal interview with Sahadevan) (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 14).

SCHEDULE FOR THEYAM COMPANY

Tuesday 21 May

Transport to: YMCA Indian Student Hostel, 41 Fitzroy Square
Lunch: YMCA (serving time: 12.30 - 1.45 pm)
Event: 5pm, informal artists reception at YMCA, Mahatma Ghandi Hall
Supper: YMCA (serving time: 7.00 - 8.00 pm)

Wednesday 22 May

Event: 10.15 - 10.30 am, Dr A.K Nambiar to meet Anne Hunt at YMCA
Event: 5.30 pm, Covent Garden 'walkabout', Festival stage
Artists pick up time: 5.00 pm (YMCA)
Supper: YMCA (serving time: 7.00 - 8.00 pm)

Thursday 23 May

Event: Covent Garden, Festival Launch (2 performance)
Artists pick up time: 11.00 am (YMCA)
Performance time: 3.10 - 3.35 pm
Performance time: 4.55 - 5.20 pm
Supper: YMCA (serving time: 7.00 - 8.00 pm)
Press reminder: 1.00 pm - photographer from The Observer to photograph making-up. & filmed on stage by Zee TV

Figure 16. Respondent shared the Schedule for the *Theyyam*, where they are addressed as "Theyyam Company". (Source: Surabhi K.).

CONTACT LIST FOR THEYAM COMPANY

Artists accommodation:

YMCA Indian Student Hostel, 41 Fitzroy Square, London W1P 6AQ
Tel. 0171 387 0411

Tour Manager:

Kalamandalam Vijayakumar
(mobile phone no. 0402 083214)

Drivers:

Barbara Vijayakumar and Mark Burgess
(mobile phone no. 0402 083214)

Festival Organisers (World Circuit Arts):

309a Aberdeen House, 22 Highbury Grove, London N5 2DQ
Tel 0171 354 3030

Anne Hunt	Festival director
Laura Lang	Project manager
Gemma Beltran	Festival admin
Martin Lloyd-Evans	Events manager
Marian Pocock	Artists liaison
Moses Nahmias	Artists liaison
Luke Curtulus	Information manager
Emily Crick	Dressing room co-ordinator
Paula Deacon	Volunteer co-ordinator

Festival Press (Communique):

Marie Clements, Sadlers Wells, Roseberry Avenue, London EC1
Tel 0171 278 3537 (mobile) 0421 589783

Emergencies:

999
(Police/fire/ambulance)

Figure 17. The contact list for *Theyyam* Company during his performance in London in 1982. The contact list includes his troupe's accommodation details, drivers, tour managers, festival organizers, festival press and emergency contact details. (Source: Surabhi K.)

 Department for Education and Employment Group Application MARIAN POCOCK WORLD CIRCUIT ARTS 309A ABERDEEN HOUSE 22 Highbury Grove LONDON N5 2DQ	Overseas Labour Service TELEPHONE 0114-259 4983 OUR REFERENCE FHY/9607747/01
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ATTACHED BELOW IS A WORK PERMIT FOR ISSUE TO

WORK PERMIT

IMMIGRATION ACT 1971 DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT OVERSEAS LABOUR SERVICE MOORFOOT, SHEFFIELD, S1 4PQ WORKER REFERENCE No. 9607747 DATE OF ISSUE 22APR96	PERMIT NUMBER E 348510 PERIOD COVERED BY PERMIT Permit valid to 01JUN96
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PARTICULARS OF PERMIT HOLDER	
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PARTICULARS OF PERMIT HOLDER	
EMPLOYER'S NAME WORLD CIRCUIT ARTS OCCUPATION MUSICIAN SALARY/REMUNERATION GROUP FEE	EMPLOYER'S ADDRESS 309A ABERDEEN HOUSE 22 Highbury Grove LONDON

OFFICIAL STAMP	For 13 engagements With THEYAM	PHONE NUMBER 071 354 3030
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PLEASE READ CONDITIONS PRINTED ON THE BACK

OLS 1
Crown Copyright April 1996

Figure 18. Immigration Act Application from the Department of Education and Employment, Overseas Labour Service for the *Theyyam* troupe who had gone to London in 1996. (Source: Surabhi K.)

The last respondent included in this thesis is Late Gangadharan Peruvanaan (1924- 2017), a famous *Theyyam* artist in the Kannur District. He died in 2017 when he was 93 years old, and the interview was given by his son, who resides near *Taliparamba*, Kannur. Gangadharan was the Visiting Professor in the School of Drama, Germany (1988). He has visited places like Mosco, Paris,

Germany, Africa for *Theyyam* performances. He was an active performer of *Theyyam* from 17 years to 71 years. He had performed around thousands of *Kathivannur Veeran Theyyams*. According to his son, he has donned *Theyyam* from his 17 years till 84 years of age, and he is known as the master of *Theyyam*. He has received various awards like the *Sangeetha Nadaka Academy Award* in 1982, *Guruvayurappan Puruskaram* and *Manaviyam Puruskaram* and many more to his credit.

He had gone to various places abroad to perform *Theyyams* like *Kathivanur Veeran* in France in 1984 and Germany in 1989, *Bali Theyyam* in Africa (Harare) in 1985, *Thai Peradevatha* in Paris, *Thekkan Kariyathan* and *Kathivanur Veeran* in Russia in 1984, and to Asian Games in 1982 for a month. His son has also accompanied him to Russia, France and Africa as a *sahayi* (helpman to *Theyyam*). They went through an official passport by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Africa, through Kerala's government, where there was then Prime Minister of India Shri. Rajeev Gandhi, France, as part of Festival of India.

Regarding cultural appropriation, he points out;

There was no *anushtanam*, *thottam mantram*, *komaram*, *velichapad* or *madayan*. It was a showcase of the art form on the Nehru Stadium for five minutes each where 50 *Theyyams* just come and go to the stage one by one, which Pandit Ravi Shankar instructed. The duration in France was 10-20 minutes for the Festival of India in front of the Eiffel Tower. A stage is set up in front for *Theyyams* to be performed where there were zero essences of it carried out. The group with six members then left for Russia (Mosco, Alta and Tiv) on the bus for eight days. The performances in Russia took place in an auditorium for about half an hour, and the crowd had some Indians. Also, *Bali Theyyam* in Africa took place only for 45 minutes in a large pavilion arranged as part of some Indian cultural showcase in some world show along with African tribes (personal interview with Gangadharan Peruvanaan).

Language barrier has always been a barrier for the natives, so is with the artists. There was no guide to translate for them, and the new cold climate did badly affect the troupes who were very little aware of the climate in the other land. Some women audience in France were so much infatuated by the *Theyyams* that they asked them to paint the *mukhathezuthu* on their faces and walked along with them. There were occasions where seeing the performances, some drama students from France came to *Neruambaram tharavad* to witness it again, and the *Theyyams* were performed for them on the school ground.

The *Theyyams* were given quite a considerable amount of about INR 50,000 when performed for Asian Games. When asked about the fee from other places, the respondent was hesitant to tell it out. The accommodation, food and travel were well arranged by the organizers and were well received and treated by them. They had a gap between days to roam around the new places, and the checking in the airport did not have any difficulties where they had to carry all *aniyal* and flowers with them. There were no problems on the part of religious institutions like *kavu* of each *Theyyam* when asked how the religious institutions responded to their performance abroad. Instead, the respondent said everyone in the foreign land should know about our unique art form and said he would like to go again if he gets a chance to perform out.

Little traditions are orthogenetic and indigenous, whereas Great traditions are heterogenetic. There is a constant interaction between the two when the natives go with their Little traditions to the diasporas, making it a Great tradition. The Little tradition has folk artists, locals and all rituals involved, whereas, in Great tradition, there are agents, leaders, translators, reciters/ orators, as one can see in the case of *Theyyam*. There was a change in the Little tradition with civilization, trade, colonisation, but greater heterogeneity comes with Great traditions when rituals move to the

diaspora and further changes when appropriated for stage performances termed as ‘Appropriated’ tradition.

Little tradition, which is simple, indigenous, thus moves to a greater, heterogeneous Great tradition, but there is always a continuation of Little tradition, whereas, in Appropriated tradition, there is no continuation of Little tradition. Great traditions when go to the diasporas do not give up the culture that is deeply rooted as our culture is very diverse. Little tradition, thus, is not entirely wiped out when becomes a Great tradition. There is a shared cultural consciousness between Little tradition and Great tradition, but there are not any when it goes to perform on stage events in the ‘Appropriated’ tradition. In the case of *Theyyam* when performed in the diasporas, the rituals often happen in an open ground, school grounds or auditorium attached to a temple with a lot of Malayali diaspora to relate to it. The open ground gave the performers an aura of the native land as *Theyyam* is held on open ground in front of a *kavu*. The duration of the performance is three hours in most cases, whereas when performed on stages for events except for Brave Festival, all ‘Appropriated’ tradition happens for 10- 20 minutes. In diasporas, the performances have even occurred for one whole day to make a cultural continuity to the performance at the native land. *Anushtanam* or *ardha anushtanam* were done in most case of *Theyyams* in the diaspora, whereas no *anushtanam* was done in most cases of *Theyyams* on-stage events. Temporary *kavu* and *madapura* were constructed in cases of the performance in the diaspora as well as on-stage events. A translator was also available in both cases. *Thottam*, *thendangu*, *kurikodukal* and *dakshina* were conducted in most cases where the performances happened in the diaspora whereas it did not happen at the stage events. There was no interaction with the audience in the case of stage events, whereas, in the diaspora, there was interaction as language was not a barrier between the performers and the audience. In the case of the performances in the diaspora, Malayalis could

easily interact with the *kolakaran* and had a feeling at home to some extent, whereas it was nil in the case of stage events.

The diasporas are more concerned about spreading the traditions to the second generation as they are unaware of the culture and rituals. Great tradition in the diaspora thus makes unity in the new land through cultural performance and their cultural products. The cultural performances differ from each other in Great traditions and Little traditions. The Great traditions in the diaspora have elite class adopting them, which are less sacred with rituals imbibed a little from the Little tradition. On the other hand, ‘Appropriated’ tradition is the tradition where rituals are not followed and performed without any essence of sacredness on a stage like a tableau. For instance, according to the performances witnessed in the fieldwork, many respondents have performed in the Asian Games to show the Kerala/Indian culture with two minutes or ten minutes performances.

Some more instances of making a Little tradition to Appropriated tradition is when a group of *Theyyam* performers participated in the Republic Day Parade in Delhi in 1960. They also participated in the opening of the Eleventh Asia Games held in Delhi in 1982. *Theyyam* troupe was invited to perform at the international level during the ‘Year of India’ festival held in Paris in 1985 and again in 1989 in collaboration with a theatre company. This trend was again repeated during the *Seventh Festival de l’imaginaire* in 2003 (Kearney 1995).

The immigrant Indians set up “religious and cultural institutions to perpetuate their religious practices as soon as” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 2) the circumstances permitted them. All of them make efforts to preserve their old ways of lifestyle in the host countries they occupy. “Temples, churches, shrines began to appear” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 2) in no fewer time Indians arrived in a foreign country. The first generation always took the lead to teach vernacular language to the second generation to retain their culture. According to Pratap Kumar (2013), “these early temples

and schools seem to have become centres of religious and cultural activities. Reading of the scriptures, storytelling and staging religious plays became the activities of these centres where people could meet, not only for social activities but also religious ones. These centres seem to have provided the much-needed sense of belonging to Hindus as members of the same community. After the nineteenth century, the Hindu temples were built mainly by the professional builders of India” (25). “There were different modes of preserving cultures like the lectures, sermons by visitors, observance of festivals, the performance of rituals and the study of the vernacular” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 3).

...the reproduction is never fully substituted for the original. Thus, the most mass-produced items, the ones with the least unique and personal contact with the leader, have the least value. Charisma does lie in all those objects. It can be reproduced mechanically, but its density and authority seem to dissipate with each reproduction (Weller, 2008: 24).

According to Pratap Kumar (2013), there is *Hindi Siksha Sangh*, a Hindu language promoting organization that teaches Hindi to the younger generation. There has also been established a Hindi Radio Station called *Hindvani Radio Station* to promote Hindi in South Africa (112). The host countries have still religious institutions built uninterrupted to spread and preserve their religion wherever they migrate to feel connected to their roots.

“The ethnic associations and organizations in the diaspora hence play an important role in this process of identity formation and maintenance of the culture and tradition of the homeland. Though it is not always possible for the diasporic to form their identity based purely on ‘homeland culture’, they sometimes produce what scholars argue” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 3) ‘cultural hybridity’ (Kraidy 2005) or ‘cultural creativity’ (Hutnyk 2005).

...the aesthetics of the ritual performance in combination with the monetary value of the circulated ritual objects creates not just a common ritual space but simultaneously excludes some from that ritual space (Salemink, 2008: 166).

In Hinduism, the practise of darshan is essential. It marks the devotion to the deities and regards the image as an acceptable form to seek prayers. Thus, religious image is of paramount importance in Hinduism. Devotion is achieved through ritualistic music, dance, iconography and cloths and enjoyed as a great aura and spectacle.

Talcott Parsons's Functionalism talks about how social life is organised and various structural parts of the society coordinate with each other. He opines social interaction offer life to social structure. In coordination with each other, these social structures lead the individual and institutional needs to give continuity to society. The function of religion in society does the same. It leads to social interaction, stability and social solidarity. Various rituals as a part of religion give relief from emotional stress and make society more organised. This is related to the rituals of *Theyyam*, where one fulfils his prayers by participating in it and watches the aura being a spectator with the society, which leads to Catharsis and indulge in social interaction.

Talcott Parson talks about the pattern variables based on Diffuseness and Specificity. He says there is Diffuseness society is macro-oriented, and there is always diffused interaction. In view of Specificity, the interaction is specific where it is micro-oriented. Taking *Theyyam* in view of Diffuseness and Specificity by Parson, when *Theyyams* are performed in the native land, it is diffused, more affective to the macro level with the whole village witnessing the rituals and *kolakaran* interacting with the devotees, hearing his/her plights and giving aids to devotees' plights. When *Theyyams* are re-planted to the diaspora and on stages like in the Great tradition and Appropriated tradition, respectively, the interaction is more specific. It has more Affective

Neutrality, Universalism than having Affectivity and Particularism when *Theyyam* happens in the native land.

Makarand Paranjape argues that there is no ‘pure’ belonging; there is no ‘pure’ diaspora (2001:11). There are always perceived efforts of migrants to maintain their cultural and ethnic identities. They continuously produce and reproduce themselves anew through transformation and difference. Sustained, long term interaction between diverse communities engenders change. The future contours of the religious domain between overseas Indian communities will be determined by several contextual and intersecting variables and will be variously constructed and contested, but there is little doubt that the constituent religious traditions will continue to persist and thrive (Sinha 2007: 101). “Conventional methods of transmitting religious ideas depend on several social factors. Extended family structure, social and cultural homogeneity and religious institutional structures are some of the factors necessary to ensure a sustained transmission of religious ideas from one generation to the next. When such support structures fail to survive in modern society, especially in the context of migration and resettlement in places far away from the original homeland, either new strategies need to be invented or old ideas and values allowed to decline” (Pratap, 2008: 205).

***Theyyam* and Cultural Appropriation**

The traditional art forms have their own representation. Though they are evolved locally, receive critical acclaim internationally once they are customized according to the global demands, thereby undergo cultural appropriation. The religious composition of the Kerala state in India consists of Hindus, Muslims, and Christians. The Hindus have numerous castes and sub-castes having their own distinctive religious traditions and rituals. The dominant elite art forms of Kerala, such as *Kathakali*, *Mohiniaatam*, and *Bharatanatyam*, have already reached the transnational status as they

are being enacted across the world and consumed by both Indians and non-Indians. However, there are several other folk art forms in India that are yet to achieve transnational status though they have been performing in the diasporas for the last two to three decades. *Theyyam*, which is a very traditional, localised and not a mainstream art form and hence *Theyyam* fall under the well-known Little tradition of Hindu religious practices and the social order pursued especially in traditional India propitiating village deities, distinct from those of Great tradition worshipped all over India under Sanskritic Hinduism (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020).

Recent scholarship has problematized the idea of ‘tradition,’ particularly in the West, arguing that traditions are not unchanging, historical trajectories, but are rather re-formed and adapted to changing political and social circumstances. The past is constructed to suit the identity needs of each generation (Flood, 2003: 201).

“However, for the last few years, the folkart form *Theyyam* has changed substantially, incorporating new trends to woo the Non-Resident Keralites (NRKs), particularly Indians in general” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 5).

In the 21st century, Globalization caused *Theyyam* to be commercialized. Both the government and corporate companies see *Theyyam* as a commercial product rather than has immense potential for contributing to the development of the tourism industry...(Anurag, 2017: 41).

The art form is unique in the sense that the essence, context, history and meaning of “this art form is never carried along with the performers overseas. Also, *Theyyam*, like other art forms, cannot be rehearsed as they undergo long-term fasting, prayers, abstinence and solitary confinement. After these strict abstinences, the *Theyyam* performers don the costume of the deity and enter the divine trance. When travelling outside, it is impossible for them to follow a significant part of the ritual

and tantric karmas (esoteric tradition of Hinduism)” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 5). Hence, *Theyyam* creates its own distinctive cultural identity for the group.

Theyyam is now a money marketing field where performers take the art to other places and countries, but some *kolakarans* still stick to the native land and are in poverty. Professional *Theyyam* groups have emerged where there is no abstinence, fasting. Fields and agriculture have a significant role in *Theyyam* performances. Now the performances happen in places where there are no signs of fields which takes away the essence of such performances

Globalization and “the revolution in information, communication, and transportation technologies have facilitated strengthening Hinduism in the diaspora. For instance, Hindu religious performances in the diaspora – including some of them that were never travelled outside the homeland – today become an inseparable part of global Hinduism” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 14), such as *Theyyam*, *Thaipusam*. It is observed from this study that some religious performances go beyond the traditional approach by mixing with sophisticated western techniques as compared to their original performances in the homeland. Performing the *Theyyam* in the diaspora by the *Theyyam* artists does not involve only the act of crossing the international border but also carry with them the whole essence of the cultural-specific art form. A majority of respondents in this study reiterated that *Theyyam* performance in the diaspora has just become a puppet show now, as one can find there is no *kavu*, *karmi*, *chendakaran*, ancestral house or village folks which are an essential part of *Theyyam*. Even though the diasporic ambience they create is very much appreciable, they cannot construct a proper *kavu* where the *Theyyam* could be performed, like it is originally arranged in the villages (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 14). *Kavus* are usually constructed amidst the flora and fauna for the *avarnas* to pray, unlike the temples. It is *stanam* of the local deities in the shape of a rock where *Theyyams* are performed. It is also a reason to preserve the

biodiversity where a wide variety of plant and bird species live near the *kavu*. When *kavus* that are constructed on stages with just a red cloth with no forests but surrounded by concrete buildings and flats, lack the essence of the folk arts. “Instead, *Theyyam* has to be performed in the diaspora on a decorated stage either in open ground or in a close auditorium without knowing the spirit of the art form. Thus, *Theyyam* becomes only a dance form to be performed according to the audiences’ taste in the diaspora. This has resulted in the complete transition of *Theyyam*, abandoning its original social and cultural essence and adopting the new one” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 14). Martin Baumann (2009: 149) aptly argues that “a crucial feature of every migrated religious tradition settling and accommodating in a culturally and religiously unfamiliar society is its simultaneous continuity and adaptation”. “A similar phenomenon of change was also observed in detail by Pratap Kumar (2013: 58) in the case of South African Hinduism, where even the bhajans, mantras are all misspelt when they are performed by someone who is not a priest” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 14). He further argued how even the rituals performed in the diaspora changed its meaning according to the context:

The rituals in many festivals are the same, or at least similar. But they take on different meanings in different festivals and on different occasions. In this sense, the meaning of the ritual depends on what is celebrated and what is remembered in the context of the ritual. This special meaning is preserved in the myth that relates to the significance of the festival. Each festival has a myth (often many myths) that provides the meaning of the ritual. Thus, the ritual acts are uniform, but the significance of those acts is different on each different occasion (Pratap, 2013: 71).

In Little India in South East Asian countries, Ramlila is played. It would collect all people of Little India across the districts to witness the play and the paradigms of what happens to individuals, in which migrated, exiled people can read parallels to their situations (Sareen 2008: 145).

In the Caribbean context, similar changes in the Indian rituals also observed by scholars. For instance, Derek Walcott, in his Noble Prize speech, while referring to the *Ramlila* ritual, mentioned that “...here in Trinidad I had discovered that one of the greatest epics of the world was seasonally performed, not with that desperate resignation of preserving a culture, but with an openness of belief that was steady as the wind bending the cane lances of the Caroni plain” (Walcott, 1992).

“It is argued that many aspects of the *Theyyam* performance today are misrepresented in the diaspora, such as the broad *arangu*, elaborate rituals, singing, chanting, dramatic actions, inspired feats, interactive dialogue, and dance which are considered as an integral part of experiencing a *Theyyam*. This is why a *Theyyam* loses its meaning when isolated from the context and performed in a theatre or any other platform, unlike its own *arangu*” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 14-15). The audiences can grasp its real significance only when viewed in its natural and ritualistic performative setting (Sreekanth 2013: 31), which seldom happens in the diaspora and never on-stage events, as only the *kolakaran* goes out but without a *kavu* and a *tantri* (higher authorities of the shrine). “The social system that kept the *Theyyam* artists bonded and submissive has made their way to the global marketing business” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 14). “Religion often changes and adapts within its world of institutional possibilities” (Weller, 2008: 15).

Sinha says;

In the case of statues of gods and goddesses there is a corollary shift from ‘material’ to ‘commodity’ to ‘deity’ and perhaps back to ‘material’ at the end of the consumption cycle, depending on the trajectory of its use. The life cycle of flowers reveals that they move through different and alternating phases of ‘sacredness’. While they are potentially sacred prior to use, their divinity is actualised and enhanced as they are used ritualistically (2011: 196).

Many of the *Theyyams* are being marketed to foreign countries like France, Germany, Poland, Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea, Japan, United States, and the Gulf countries. The trend of

selling it and their exploitation overseas has started in the 1980s (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020). There are neither *thottam* sung nor any *anushtanam* done. A small temporary *kavu* is arranged by a Malayali in the diaspora in many cases. But the artists sing the *mulamantram* before performing *Theyyam* from the green room to retain its essence. In the foreign countries, the performers say was a mere showcase of the art form like any other dances performed on the stage. The performers usually go in a troupe of artists varying from 5- 15 in numbers, including *chendakaran*, *vathyam*, set maker, helper, etc. The performers are given all the facilities like food, accommodation, travel tickets, but the difference in food culture and exploitations by the agents in giving the promised fee make the stay all worse. The *kolam*⁹⁶ succeeds only when he is the embodiment of singing, dancing, speaking and the village people who take that into their hearts, if not that it is a failure and is just like any other dance form.

Theyyams are marketed to the Malayali diaspora by various agents. The rituals and essence of *Theyyam* are never carried out to the diaspora, and all arrangements are made available according to the availability of resources. The performances, which in actual in the native land, include a lot of fasting varying from 28- 41 days, and the duration from one-three days just lasts for less than two hours in the diaspora and five-ten minutes on the stages. The *kavu* is just a stage in the diaspora with no cultural value or essence of this art form carried out and is performed to add colours to their programmers for the club inauguration or club anniversaries. *Kavu* is reduced to a small lighted lamp covered by a red cloth, and it is the stage that dominates in the diaspora rather than the *kavu* like in the native land.

Dasan Mannarakkal believes that with the performance of such *Theyyam* out of place, the allocation of space, time, sequence, duration, and everything is controlled from without.

⁹⁶ The person who plays and personifies the deity or the hero is generally known as Kolam.

Consequently, a culture-specific ritual gets reduced to a mere object, the spectacular display of which is solely aimed at satisfying the voyeuristic eyes of the national elite (2012).



Figure 19. A newspaper cutting from the *Gulf Daily News* about *Theyyam* performance that happened in Bahrain. (Source: Surabhi K.)

Sanskritisation of *Theyyam*:

‘Sanskritisation’ is coined by “Indian anthropologist M.N. Srinivas, initially in his seminal thesis on the Coorgs of South India, in which he wanted to challenge the notion that caste is a rigid and inflexible phenomenon” (Gabriel, 2010: 72).

Theyyams were looked upon as superstitious rituals, especially by the westerners. *Theyyams* were a Dravidian art ritualistic form but became Aryanised with years with the domination of upper castes. The rituals remain the same, but the names of the *Theyyams* have been Sanskritised to make it *savarna* gods. Aryan concepts of Vaishnava, Saiva and Sakta were added to the legend of *Theyyam*. *Vishnumoorti*, *Bagavathi* became new deities for worship. "...goddess Valli of Sangam period was worshipped as *Kurathi* through Teyyattam in later period was merged in the cult of *Bagavathi* in the course of Aryan migration" (Kurup, 1973: 22). Hinduism is an amalgamation of Aryan and Dravidian rituals, and the latter was further modified through Aryan domination and influences.

...Aryan temples and Brahmanical gods still have a domination over the Stanams or shrines of the lower castes. For annual festivals and ceremonies, in Stanams, the auspicious wick and fire was supplied from the local Brahmin temple. So, the Stanams became subordinate to the temple authority. When the teyyattams are conducted in shrines of the Nayar and other privilege classes, the teyyam deities of the lower castes in the local area present their offerings. This custom became an integral part of the feudal structure of Kolathnad (Kurup, 1973: 32).

Theyyam gods are linked to the pan- Hindu gods and goddesses in order to Sanskritize. For example, *Pallanthayi Kannan* was the actual name of the now *Theyyam Vishnumoorthi*. *Vishnu* being a superior *savarna* Hindu God in the temples, the legend's local name was gradually erased and made a Brahmanical name.

Sinha says, from the early decades of the 20th century, there was a trend of Sanskritisation of Hinduism in the diaspora. When the domination of Brahmanic and Sanskritic strain of Hinduism came, there resulted a censure and critique of folk practices such as trance sessions, ecstatic ceremonies, self-mortification rituals and animal sacrifices. These shifts of social reform and

modernity refashioned Hinduism. The folk traditions are still persistent in the diaspora but making it a more Brahminised and Sanskritised form. The diasporas go for more novel ways that would appeal to the novel audience leading to new religious innovations. Indians overseas have added dimensions to their new inherited tradition through hybridisation and syncretism, leading to the emergence of new and distinct religious movements. In this process, they identify local gurus, new deities, festivals and rituals, and new forms of interaction and liaisons with other cultures and religions (2007).

In the multi- religious, multi- ethnic and secular context of the diaspora, Hindu communities face additional pressure to organize, modernize and bureaucratise. Official constructions of Hinduism lean towards textual, philosophical and Brahmanic dimensions, sometimes leading to tensions within communities as folk Hindu practices still find strong support, and in some places even show signs of revival (Sinha 2007: 95).

Theyyam faces gentrification these days, which led to the collapse of sacred groves. Sacred groves found amidst the forest are very rare today, and the forest is all cut down to make more space for the *Theyyam*. *Kavu*, which is occupied by wilderness, is constructed more like a temple today. Now *Theyyam*, a significant tourist attraction, is more of entertainment than a ritual. The performance is more like a dance act and totally became an art form to be enacted. Thus, *kavu* is cut down, and *Theyyam*, which was performed in nature's domain loses its sanctity and performed in a wide *verandah* in front of *kavu*.

As mentioned in the second chapter on Kerala history, the Dalits were the first inhabitants of Kerala who were subordinated by the Aryans and the Vedas were kept away from them to keep the Dalits away from knowledge. Sanskrit literature as a mark of knowledge was not the right of these untouchables, but they had their own songs before Brahmins entered their land.

...the dalit language, according to Kaviyur Murali, became sidelined and subordinated to the brahmanical culture. Their songs and literature were later known as nomadic songs and the literary field totally was closed to them. If a writer broke these barriers, they would be incorporated into the socially accepted forms of literature. Thus Tola (Thola), the first Tamil poet was a sudra, but came to be incorporated in to the brahmanical literary tradition, because the ideologues of that tradition traced his lineage to a Brahmin father. This example shows how Brahmins appropriated lower caste culture to establish their own cultural superiority (Kottaparamban and Sulaiman, 2016: 326).

Thulasi Kakkat in *The Hindu* writes about a sacred grove (*kavu*) in Kasargod district in North Kerala. He talks about a *kavu* called the *Periya Bhagavathi Kavu* where he illustrates the changes in and around all sacred groves. *Theyyam* has not been happening there for years, and with the villager's initiative, the ritual was revived. They consulted an astrologer who advised them, re-consecrate gods in a temple outside the grove as the gods and goddesses were cramped inside the sacred grove. A priest came to invoke the gods and consecrate the gods in the temple with an annual *Theyyam*. With this, the *kavu* became *Periya Bhagavathi* 'temple' from *Periya Bhagavathi kavu*, and such transformation has occurred to many *kavu* in North Kerala. According to Kakkat, in Nandapuram Sreekrishna Temple, where the Vishnumoorthi *Theyyam* and the *Gulikan Theyyam* happens annually, the *Theyyam* ritual itself has been replaced with more conventional Brahminical temple rituals to obtain divine favours. With *kavu*, ritual performances are also erased gradually but completely (2019).

Folk traditions represent the social and cultural history of a society, but today politics also involve *Theyyam* in it; they often use *Theyyam* pictures and symbols in political demonstrations to take advantage of the simpler folks in the village, playing with their emotions thus undermining the cultural efforts reflected in *Theyyam*.

Indianness is related to food, looks, attire, the festivals we celebrate- this is how we articulate our identity. Identity is a production that is never complete but always in the process of ‘becoming’ and ‘being’. Past is as much as important as the future as identities undergo constant transformation.

The manner in which the new diaspora imagines India is therefore to be understood in terms of the logic of this dominant culture, of which it is an ambivalent or unwilling part. While the old diaspora was cut off from the motherland, the new diaspora has unprecedented access to it by virtue of its unprivileged Non- Resident Indian status. What we see, then, is a narrative logic of continuous incorporation and appropriation which reinforces the self- validating logic of the new diaspora (Paranjape, 2001: 10).

Globalization has had both homogenizing influences on local culture and has also promoted the societies and countries to integrate, providing a vast number of people with new opportunities and well establishments. Globalization is more than a flow of capitalism and goods; it is the flow of culture. Money, people, and ideas flow through the network with great rapidity, transforming religious and cultural experience in many countries. According to Arjun Appadurai (2005), with globalization, the world is shrinking and becoming smaller. He stresses the emergence of new spaces that transverse the national and are characterized by their mobility and differences. He puts forward a typology of five ‘global cultural flows’. They are Ethnoscapes, Mediascapes, Technoscapes, Financescapes and Ideoscapes. Ethnoscapes indicates the landscapes inhabited by those human groups who constantly live on the move even if they have to settle in a single place. This space includes nomadic individuals ranging from refugees to tourists. Mediascapes refer to all media products such as newspapers, magazines, films, etc., which mediate information at a global level. Technoscapes refers to landscapes formed by the diffusion of both mechanical and informational technologies around the world. Financescapes form the transnational economic

relations as a result of the flow of capital. Ideoscapes refer to the landscape of imagery, political ideologies, discourses of human rights, democracy, freedom etc., that are associated with a particular state. The global flow as a result of globalization led to new forms of social imagining and ‘diasporic public sphere’ that are disassociated from the territoriality of the nation-state.

Religious leaders from several traditions travel from India each summer for tours of temples, ashrams, churches, and homes. They both teach and learn. Visits back to India and other South Asian countries are secular holidays to visit families and religious pilgrimages to renew associations with religious leaders and practice. However, this has indeed appropriated the local to global where the essence and uniqueness of local culture, traditions and rituals of the native are lost forever. The identities, cultures are lost and appropriated to new modern culture. Globalization aimed to bring about socio-economic integration and development of the entire world with the free flow of goods, services, information, opportunities, and knowledge worldwide. While doing all these, globalizations has lost its hands on local and indigenous and built-in prosperity and hegemony.

According to Loy (1997: 275), the market “is becoming the first truly world religion, binding all corners of the globe more and more tightly into a world- view and set of values whose religion we overlook only because we insist on seeing them as ‘secular’”. Whereas Agnew (2003: 12) argues that the power of the commodification process lies in its ability to “convert ‘all of life’ itself into a ‘paid- for experience’”.

The chapter talks about religion, transnationalism and the commodification of *Theyyam*. The chapter begins with Malayali diaspora and how with globalization, there is transnational marketing of religion and Little traditions associated with religions at the native land. It focuses on Little

tradition, Great traditions and Appropriated traditions analysing the fieldwork data of *Theyyam* performers who have gone to diaspora and also to stage events to present *Theyyams*. Little traditions are often found in villages in its pure, sacred form that tends to be the Great tradition primarily when traditions are replanted in the diaspora that is less sacred than the original tradition and to an Appropriated modern culture that is a very generalised imitation of traditions like that of Asian Games with no essence at all. Little traditions express the wholeness of societies. If Little traditions are altered into modern Great traditions, the pure, sacred traditions will survive with little relativization and when they are altered to Appropriated traditions, the Little tradition will undergo major relativization adopting no essence of indigenous traditions.

Conclusion

Migration is the physical transition where an individual moves from one social setting and enters another one where they remain connected with their homeland, virtually and physically in the present scenario. According to Rajan and Singh (2016), migration or human mobility consists of a whole spectrum of movements, and for this reason, diasporas are not homogenous. Migration is a factor in the erosion of traditional boundaries between languages, cultures, ethnic group and nation-states. Migration is the process or act of migrating, which means the movement of people from one place to another. There are various push and pull factors for migration. Push factors force people to migrate, which can be political oppression or poverty or lack of employment opportunities. Pull factors are attractive offers that tempt people to move for a better lifestyle. Mostly, migration happens from a less developed country to a well-developed country.

With the emergence of the internet, shipping services to transactions- personal or business, shipping commodities online, making agents, booking tickets, travelling are made so hassle-free. Social media helps migrants keep in contacts with far and near relatives and friends, explore interests, and create a blog and write-ups. According to Natarajan (2010), the homeland becomes accessible with electronic and satellite communications due to widespread migration.

Consequently, the contemporary episteme- or the way of knowing the world- is ruled not by experience but by images- images that, by their sheer proliferation and scope have become more real than anyone could have anticipated even a few decades ago. Transmitted across space and time through electronic networks, fax machines, and video screens, these images play a crucial role in diasporic subjectivities (Natarajan 2010:13).

Diaspora communities always are in the run to maintain their identity, culture, and the links that help them be in touch with their countries of origin. Ethnicity and religious groups are recreated and transformed in the geographical and temporal transitions.

Ethnicity is a product of a local environment; hence, migration always transforms ethnicity as migrants create new groups in new contexts and revise their personal and group identities to enable them both to maintain some continuity necessary for psychic and social health and to adapt to the demands and potentials of a future in a new social location. Ethnicity is not something transferred from one location to another; rather, it is created new on each setting (Williams 2007a: 151).

Globalization has entailed the diffusion of communicative networks from places of origin to various parts of the world. With these increased networks, various religious symbols and practices went to the West.

...Hindus- based religious ideas (karma, reincarnation, self- realisation) and practices (yoga, medication, mantras) have saturated Western culture since the mid- 1960s, aided by the large-scale immigration of Indians to countries like the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States and the proliferation of Hindu gurus in Western countries. These teachers often create organisations and institutions to propagate their versions of Hindu philosophy and spirituality, versions that are often adapted to Western norms and interests (Robbins and Lucas, 2007: 231).

This diffusion of Hinduism occurs among Westerners and among Indians who have migrated to the West in search of economic betterment and opportunity. To place their new homeland in a new land, the diasporas transmit religious and cultural traditions- mosques, temples, churches,

gurdwaras in their place of settlement. Religion and its rituals are [re]created for the construction of identities.

Religion is an aspect of culture and folklore that forms our identity; it gives a submerged feeling of identity and solidarity. It is an essential aspect of the identity of an individual in the diaspora. Through religion, diasporas reproduce and represent their tradition and culture as part of identity formation and constructing community. The sense of loss makes the diasporas indulge in more religious activities. There are various religious organisations in the diasporas to reproduce cultures and traditions.

Diasporic communities try to remain local and provincial as memories of their tradition and people bind them to their homeland as home and homeland are where one's feet and heart are, which one can never leave behind. Diaspora is the space of overlapping boundaries- leading to hybridity as they assimilate and integrate as some suffer rootlessness.

Folklore and Religion of Kerala

The folklore and the associated myth of a society form its social and cultural history as it represents the collective identity of a community. The myth and folklore of Malabar reflect the evolution of folklife and religion in this region through centuries. These different cultural aspects and social phenomena in their native land form the history of the people of Malabar, especially Kannur and Kasargod (Kurup, 1977: 1). For the predecessors, art was a significant part of living. Art cannot be separated from traditional life and beliefs. It is a vital performing art form that influences the life and culture of Malabar. It extends the root and elixir of the culture of *Kolathunad*. The thesis

has also made a comparison, differences and the commodification of the folk cults like *Thaipusam* of Tamil Nadu, *Bhuta Kola* of Karnataka.

Ritualistic arts have a significant influence on social life in Kerala, which has numerous performing traditions. *Theyyam* stands a prominent ritualistic art form in Malabar, indulging in pantheistic practices where a *Theyyam* performer transforms to a god and whole strata of society come to pray. *Theyyam* is the voice of the marginalised and an outlet through which the marginalised voices are heard and is seen as a god for a short period only in the particular season where *Theyyams* are performed, and the other castes pray to it. *Theyyam* is seen as a social equaliser bringing together people from all strata of society to mingle with each other. The human becomes the divine helping the marginalise community like *Palayan*, *Malayan* and *Vannan* to make an identity of their own through their performance and the divinity that gives them respect. The long hours of performances with their people witnessing *Theyyam* in awe make them indulge in Catharsis. The rhythms, vibrant performances, and the beats of the drums and accompanying musical instruments lead to Catharsis. As Pallath (1995) points out, the ritual organised throughout a night with loss of sleep makes the devotees know their inner energy. The rhythmic dance along with jumps, *thottam*, vibrant colours, elaborate costume, crowd and the trance of *Theyyam* induce in the audience a participatory trance and has a lasting effect on the people as a result of Catharsis. However, with this deliberate gift of divinity given to the *Theyyam* performers, they are silenced to raise their voices against the atrocities of the upper caste community. The powerless are given power for a short period to remain powerless during their everyday lives, as discussed in chapter three. The performer is given respect only when they don the *Theyyam* costume, or else they are looked upon as a lower caste man with no value.

As a mark of luxury, *Theyyams* are often sent to perform at various Malayali club inauguration ceremonies, associations functions, *Onam* and *Vishu* celebrations in the diaspora and various other stage events and competitions. The Little Tradition, the very sacred and pure tradition of the villages forms Great Tradition when performed in the diaspora, making it less sacred and a completely commodified and impure form on stage performances as mere dances with no rituals carried on which I termed as ‘Appropriated Tradition’ using Grounded Theory Method.

Diasporas, when dwelling outside their homeland, they carry their traditions along with them. Keralites try to bring their ‘Malayaliness’ through various traditions. They indulge in the identification of the roots through a particular art form. However, in this process, there is indubitably commercialisation of rituals and traditions. The traditions and authenticity are negotiated and redefined to form a new art form that suits the new environment and people. In this context where the traditions are altered and addressed to the people in the diaspora, the people feel oneness being a part of the native art form, making them indulge in Catharsis in the diaspora even when rituals are altered according to the new space and people. Their traditions and cultures in their altered form lead the new communities and new generations of the diasporas aware of the traditions and rituals.

“Dance is a primary vehicle for ethnic identification, an articulation of cultural identity” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 2). However, “*Theyyam*, like other art forms, cannot be rehearsed as the performers need intense practice in martial arts, they undergo long-term fasting, abstinence, prayers and solitary confinement and then dons the deity’s costume to enter the divine trance. When travelling outside, they do not involve a big part of the rituals due to change in the cultural environment” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 5). Thus, *Theyyam* cannot be looked at as a stage profession.

“Globalization theories cannot describe contemporary global society as merely the extension of a particular society and its culture (that is, as one part becoming the whole) because these also change dramatically in the process” (Beyer, 1994: 9). Globalization does not exclude but includes all rituals that are considered pre-modern or traditional. With globalization, the local comes to terms and (re)constitutes global by which the “global cannot be global but as plural versions of the local” (Beyer, 2007: 98). This is why Beyer (2007: 98) says globalization is always also glocalization. Traditional religions and their “particular cultures express the wholeness of societies, and if particular cultures have to survive in the modern global context with their altered form, the religious traditions associated with them also survive, facing serious relativization challenges” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 6).

Commodification helps redefine religions as market commodities as well as exchange in the spiritual marketplace. It is further expanded by the transnational connections of religious organisational and market networks.... The increasing popular usages of the term indicate how ‘market relationships have expanded’ and how ‘consumer culture has spread’ (Strasser 2003: 7-8, as cited in Kitiarsa: 2008: 7).

The thesis shows how in the transition from localisation to globalization, diasporas yearn to witness the local culture by performing religions like the practices, beliefs, and interrelation with other aspects of social life despite the cultures and rituals undergo hybridity. While in the transition from Little Tradition to Great Traditions and to Appropriated Traditions, there is a loss of cultural traditions that been carried on in the homeland.

The coming centuries would focus on the commodification of the art form within diaspora with widespread globalization. With dwindling monetary savings *theyyakaaran* gets at the hometown for his performances, he would indubitably opt for a performance in the diaspora. The thesis questions “how the commodification of the art form occurs from the villages and how they are

appropriated in the diaspora” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 15). “Through the example of *Theyyam* performance, the thesis highlights how the traditional art forms of the homeland are represented and misrepresented in the diaspora and if the meanings and symbols associated with the rituals have changed” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 15) or remained sacred, unlike the stage performances where it has completely erased the sacredness of *Theyyam*.

The qualitative study used for the research has both primary and secondary data. Informal interviews and indepth interviews are taken for the study as primary data. Questions were both open-ended and close-ended. Snowball Sampling, Observation and Indepth Interviews were the major source of collecting ethnographic data. The methods of data collection were Grounded Theory Method where a theory is generated that is ‘grounded’ in the data that is been collected by systematically analyzing it. Participant Observation, Interviewing and Collection of Artifacts and Texts were used for the Grounded Theory Method. Ethnography and Observation was another methodology where interaction with the *Theyyam* performing groups led to understanding that particular group and their social practices. Indepth interviews, which were direct and detailed questions to the respondents, were both open-ended and close-ended. A total of 20 *Theyyam* performers were interviewed in detail. Purposive Sampling was another methodology used where the informants were taken into account by choosing only the *Theyyam* artists who performed in the diaspora and various stage events outside Kerala. Snowball Sampling, which requires identifying someone who meets the criteria for the study and then moving it forward to other subjects for the study, is another methodology used for the study. The respondents were asked to nominate others, leading to more respondents, thus forming a chain of respondents. For secondary data, articles, newspapers, journals, books, and magazines are used. Magazines and books of both Malayalam and English are used for further understanding. Materials are collected from the IGML

Library, University of Hyderabad, CDS (Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum) and Folklore Academy in *Chirakkal* of Kannur district. The Internet has always been an essential source for secondary data collection.

Folk religious performances have its own identity though it has varied and evolved from time to time. It is interlinked with cultural studies, history, sociology, anthropology, political science, linguistics etc. Folk arts and literature are always attached to dance, music, and its people. They are related to the masses with the shared expression of collectivity. The folk religious practices, religious performances, ritual acts adapt and alter while moving from the native origin. Folklore is an echo of the past, but they are the voices of the present at the same time. The diasporas connect to the people through these folk religious performances. There is a shared expression for the migrants in the diaspora who attaches to the native country through folk religious performances. The folk rituals and traditions that inculcate religion help society function in social integration and social stability. Although the theme changes, the sacredness is not entirely erased in the diasporas, whereas when they are called to perform on stages, the spirit, essence and sacredness are wholly wiped of its purity, making it an Appropriated culture.

Religion has been studied for a long time in social sciences, but its importance never shrinks in disciplines as religion tends to alter with time-period and social change. The social processes and the change in religion are interlinked. The economy, politics, markets, migration, the emergence of new technologies alter the performing religions of a particular region. Dynamics of religion with cultural change due to migration and its effect in performing religions is a study of much relevance. Coming years might look for an arrangement where *theyyakaaran* would not have to carry bulky ritualistic costumes (*aniyal*) and related materials to the diaspora, leading to further appropriation of the art form. “Future research should explore in detail how the commodification

of *Theyyam* takes place in the diaspora” (Sahoo & Surabhi, 2020: 15) with the ubiquitousness of globalization. The future might see a commodification of *aniyals* and flowers required for *Theyyam* performances, which would lead to an emergence of commercial industry in the diaspora and stage events. It would have mass production of appropriated *aniyals* of *Theyyams*, plastic products and flowers, making a transference from all-natural, sustainable products to all fake, unsustainable products to be sold for every event.

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Questionnaire

(This is only for study purpose and collected data will be highly confidential)

Centre for Study of Indian Diaspora, University of Hyderabad, Telangana

Diaspora and Transnationalism: A Study of *Theyyam* in the Indian Diaspora

Part I

1. **Name:**
2. **Age:**
3. **Place:**
4. **Education:**
5. **Profession other than *Theyyam*:**
6. **Monthly income:**
7. **Caste:**
8. **Names of *Theyyams* performed in native place:**

--

Part II

1. *Theyyams* performed outside Kerala and abroad? Yes/No If yes,

a. Which all locations and countries?

--

b. Which all *Theyyams* performed?

--

c. Remunerations received

--

d. Year of *Theyyam* performances

--

e. Did you face any objection from native *kavu* authorities? Yes/No. If yes, what are those?

f. Were all *aniyals* carried? What all did you carry?

g. Were anushtanam, dakshina, kurikodukal all performed?

h. What were the difficulties in travel?

i. Who contacted you to perform outside native place?

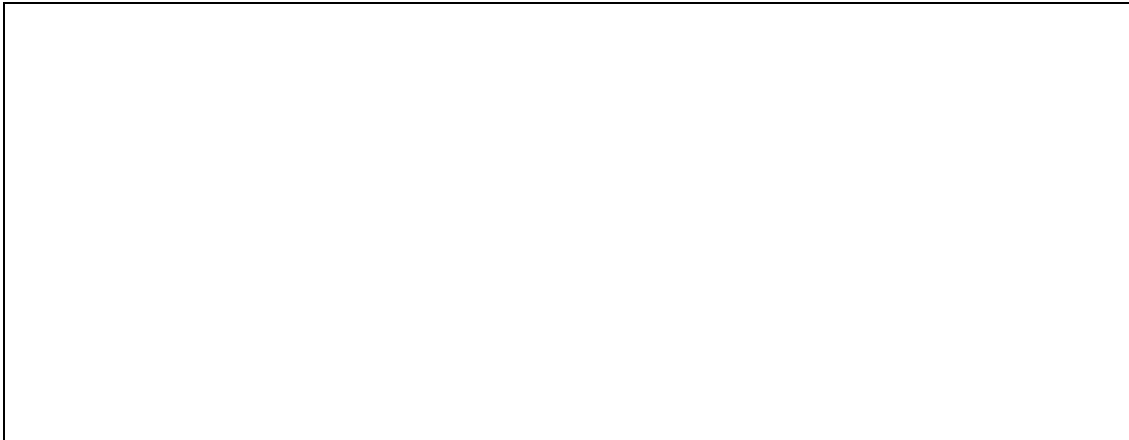
j. Were *kavu* made available in all places you performed?

k. What are the cultural differences you faced?

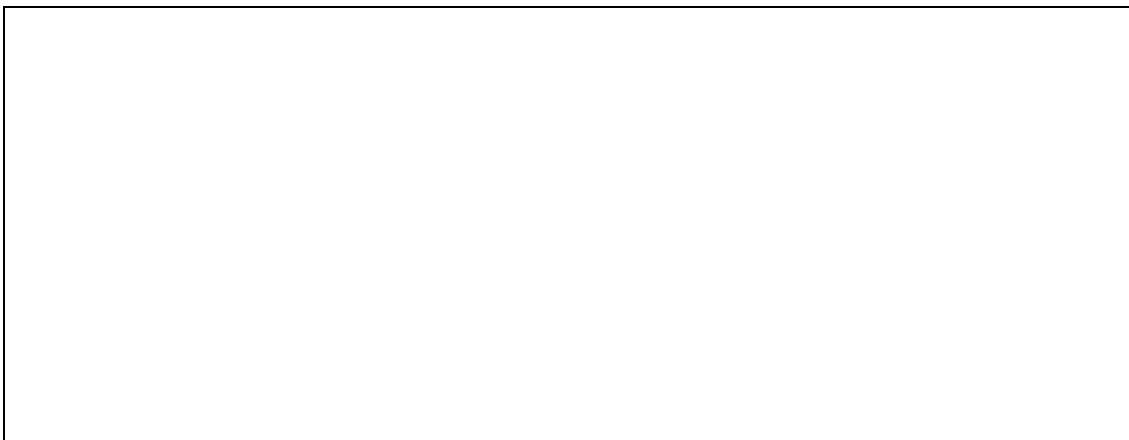
Part III

1. Differences between *Theyyam* performances in native place and outside Kerala.

2. Why did you choose to perform abroad?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the respondent to write their answer to question 2.

3. Your expectation before performing outside native place?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the respondent to write their answer to question 3.

4. Were you satisfied with the performances outside native place?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the respondent to write their answer to question 4.

5. If you get another opportunity, would you like to perform outside Kerala and abroad again? If yes, why?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION

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by Surabhi K

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