

ORAL NARRATIVES OF *TEYYAM*: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

**A thesis submitted during 2025 to the University of Hyderabad
in partial fulfillment of the award of a Ph.D. degree in Folk Culture Studies**

by

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled **“Oral Narratives of Teyyam: An Analytical Study”** submitted by **Santhwana Santhosh** bearing Registration Number **17SFPH03** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for award of Doctor of Philosophy in the Centre for Folk Culture Studies in the School of Social Sciences is a bonafide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

This thesis is free from Plagiarism and has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this or any other University or Institution for award of any degree or diploma.

Further, the student has the following publications before submission of the thesis for adjudication and has produced evidence for the same in the form of acceptance letter or the reprint in the relevant area of her research.

1. Santhosh, S. & Puthussery, J. (2025). Stor(y)ing Memory and Totam: Perspectives towards Oral Narratives. In S. Rani & R.I. Raj (Eds.), *Memory Studies in the Digital Age: An Interdisciplinary Perspective* (pp. 217-225). Routledge. DOI: 10.4324/9781003508564. ISBN: 9781-003-50856-4.
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Course Code	Name	Credits	Pass/Fail
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FS804	Review of Literature- Topic Related Course	4	Pass

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DECLARATION

I, Santhwana Santhosh, hereby declare that this thesis entitled “**Oral Narratives of Teyyam: An Analytical Study**” submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of Professor. Joly Puthussery is a bonafide research work. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this University or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma. I hereby agree that my thesis can be deposited in Shodhganga/INFLIBNET. A report on plagiarism statistics from the University Librarian is enclosed.

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Among 17 goals (<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>), under which SDG the work incorporated in the thesis will be addressed:

The work incorporated in **the thesis addresses a few ethos encapsulated** in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), **especially SDG 15, ‘Life on Land’**. How the work incorporated in the thesis addressed the above SDG (in 250 words):

Aligning with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by the United Nations, the work incorporated in the thesis addresses a few ethos encapsulated in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The thesis revolves around the folkloristic and narratological inquiry into the oral narratives, *totam* associated with the living tradition, *Teyyam* of North Malabar of Kerala, nestled in the southwest of India. *Teyyam*, meaning god, is a cyclical, ritual and socio-cultural phenomenon rooted in the beliefs and aspirations of the folk of the region. Folk from all walks of life gather in the sacred groves to witness an apotheosis, involving humans clad in elaborate red, deified to critique the illwills directed against the people who were relegated in the name of caste, gender and creed. *Totam* catalyses the apotheosis and critiques the society by blurring the divisions to create a sense of collective belonging. As an outlet of human expressions and imagination, *totam* calls for the ethos reflected in the SDGs: freedom of expression, inclusivity, and well-being.

The penultimate chapter is exclusively in tandem with the SDG 15, ‘Life on Land’. The focus is on the entanglement of the flora, fauna and folk in the complex. *Totam* emphasises the intrinsic value of the environment around through zoomorphic and floral expressions and imagination. *Totam* rendered in the sacred groves transcends the attention beyond the human-human interactions to non-human-human interactions, calling for an ecological consciousness that celebrates the web of lives, where the flora, fauna and the folk flourish with prosperity and peace.

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\o/

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Source: The photographs are captured during the fieldwork and live conduct of the *Teyyam* forms.

Chapter 1

Introduction

“Futile this drear existence —but no, it’s
possible to be a god tonight.”

(Faiz, 2013, Trans. Kumar, p. 17)

“Who is this God Person Anyway?”

(Adams, 1992, p.16)

To set the tone, the above lines from literature are drawn to ponder over stories, storytelling, storytellers, and the power of word, the world it builds, and the worldviews it reflect. The folk¹ of the region of North Malabar in Kerala, nestled in the southwest of India, would retort to the aforementioned question as *Teyyam*; colloquial for *deivam*, that is, god in Malayalam.² The folk gather to witness the complex,³ an apotheosis as a mortal transcends into a god, clad in red, usually in a sacred grove. Accompanied by the drumbeats, the narrators render *totam*, the oral narratives to catalyse the tran(ce/)sformation.⁴ The complex constitutes lore that is steeped in the locale and retained in the expressive tradition in the form of oral narratives among the folk.

Beguiling are cultural manifestations around the world, of which is the time-tested mode of expression of oral narratives, lush with human imagination. India abounds in stories expressed through her rich and diverse traditions that involve multiple legends, myths, tales, proverbs and songs from various regions. *Teyyam* is a living folk tradition, artistic, ritualistic and performative, conducted in the sacred groves in North Malabar for the prosperity of the folk of the region. A unique and dynamic complex, it encompasses the sacred space/ grove, *kav*, the one who takes up the form of *teyyam*, *kolakaran* and the one who narrates *totam*, *totakaran* accompanied by drumbeats. The complex instils awe among the folk, from all walks of life, who come to witness the grandeur, irrespective of caste and creed. During the months of mid-October through mid-June,⁵

Teyyam is conducted in the groves, community shrines and ancestral homes to invoke and worship deities. The complex forms a pantheon as numerous forms of god(desse)s are apotheosised aided by *totam*.

Significance of the Study

Oral traditions are integral to human expressions, imagination and culture. Making sense of the world, oral narratives pave ways to come to terms with reality. For centuries, narratives and studies on narratives have seen exceptional significance as fields of inquiry. Interpreting, understanding and conceptualising cultural expressions, especially the oral narratives of people, has been a preoccupation among literature enthusiasts and social scientists. The study pertains to *totam*, the oral narratives of *Teyyam*. The study seeks to look at the patterned oral expressions, communications and performances to holistically understand the formulations, compositions and representations within. An interdisciplinary theoretical and interpretative treatment of *totam* as oral narratives opens up several perspectives revolving around the system of knowledge of narratology. A folk-oriented analysis is relevant to understand the perspectives put forth by folk in the oral narratives of the region. *Totam* is unique to the region and are tales that are topographically tied, shaping and shaped by the cultural expressive imagination of its folk. On the significance of analysing oral traditions, A. K. Ramanujan in the introduction to *Folktales from India: A Selection of Oral Tales from Twenty-two Languages*, writes, “Anyone studying the culture of India needs to study not only its written classics but its oral traditions, of which folklore is an important part”(1994, p. xvi).

A repository of socio-cultural expressions, the complex establishes several links among texts at different levels and operates on its interlinking dimensions. The study considers the texts as vital in stor(y)ing⁶ the lives of the folk and fostering a shared sense of belonging. Also, the beliefs, values and aspirations of its communities are reflected in them, and is a sensitive topic. And, they continue to bridge the past and present, holding on to their significance even today. Deeply rooted traditions, folk’s experiences and agency are reinforced by them in the fast-changing world that is dominated by capitalism and globalisation, and they are also instruments of socio-cultural

critique. At this juncture, the recognition, relevance, production and reception of such expressions call for a critical analysis.

Nature and Scope of the Study

A wide variety of studies have been undertaken in the fascinating realms of oral narratives, opening up a horizon of perspectives. The scope of the study is vast and paves the way to enhance the understanding of the dynamics of culture with interdisciplinary perspectives. Where to find narratives is not a difficult question, as people and places are replete with stories. The terrains of *teyyam* and *totam* are fertile for research. The complex has been an oft-explored area of work. From the collection of verbal and visual folkloric products associated with the complex to the transcription and documentation of material, it has been a subject of inquiry. The attempt here is to look at how textualisation operates in the complex. The study's potential scope thus lies in analysing select *totam*. *Totam* could be considered as texts in the complex and could be identified, collected, and interpreted. The study attempts to look at the relevance of *totam* in the *teyyam* dynamics, its characteristic features, composition, function and patterns. Also, the socially oriented look at the texts directs to the questions like what story is told and who tells the story for whom. Who has the authority to narrate? What are the consequences of the versions of events that are narrated? The focus is also on the target audience and the ways of representations. The study thus looks at *totam* as cultural constructs, how the story demands the way it is to be told, and how the demands are determined by the people involved. The manoeuvring of the narratives across media is significant to the study of the transmission of the narrative material. The scope can be extended to the influence of technology on *totam*, its rendition, its construction and reception with respect to the new media is touched upon. The entanglement of texts and contexts in the complex is problematised. Further, the oral narratives are related to cognitive dimensions in terms of formulation and transmission. So, the study is also geared toward the operation of memory in the complex. The conduct of the complex sees the tradition bearers perform and communicate the art. Hence, a look at the scope of performance studies and verbal arts is incorporated. Given the situatedness of the complex in sacred groves, the interconnectedness of oral narratives, expressive traditions and the

surrounding environment is also looked into. The nature of the study is an interdisciplinary analysis of the complex with narratological and folkloric approaches, cutting across fields and drawing on diverse approaches spanning performance studies, memory studies and ecocriticism to bring out the perspectives of the folk and how these are expressed in the complex.

The geographical scope of the study is confined to the specific regions of North Malabar in Kerala. The complex is usually conducted between the areas demarcated naturally by the rivers⁷ of the region. The complex is unique to the region and widely witnessed by the folk. The sacred groves, *kav* are common in the region, along with community and lineage shrines known by various names like *kav*, *kotam*, *paliyara* based on the forms being conducted and are significant to the complex. For instance, *madapura* is the space of *Mutapan teyyam* and *kotam* is the space of heroic or ancestral forms. Such spaces are integral to the dynamic and are often dedicated god(desse)s that take the forms of fertility deities, mother goddesses, animal deities and ancestors. In these regions, the worship of *Teyyam* is prominent also in the ancestral homes of various communities (For details, see the section on socio-cultural milieu in Chapter 2) and some forms of *Teyyam* are organised in individual households as a part of a vow or offering. The performers of various *Teyyam* of respective communities are also from these regions. The complex is geographically straight-jacketed within the north of Malabar, bringing in an immediacy between the land, lore and locals.

The limitation of the study lies in the access to the material related to the complex due to its context-specificity. Being space and time-bound, the rendition is considered sacred and is done only when the space and time demands. The conduct of the complex is generally annual in nature, where specific narrators narrate on specific days at specific groves. Hence, to catch a live tradition is extremely spatio-temporal bound. The specificity limits the narrators to narrate *totam* in an induced and informal setup. Further, the live conduct of the forms was stalled during the pandemic. Another concern is that the oral narratives are sacred to the communities who possess them and sometimes contain certain chants, prayers and oracles that are silently recalled at the sacred groves which are beyond the capacity of recording.

Review of literature

The review of literature of the material collected that serves as a starting point is categorised into the following sections.

- Literature related to the theoretical and conceptual framework
- Literature related to the concerned areas from vernacular material
- Literature related to the methodology

Acknowledging the existing literature can widen the horizon of understanding the topic of the study, to look into the unexplored questions and possibilities in the concerned area of research. The framework borrows from multiple theories and concepts of culture, narratology, folklore, performance studies, memory studies and ecocriticism. A review of certain theories from various schools of thought paves the way for critical understanding, extending from the classical Plato's representation and Aristotelian elements prominent in basic narrative material to the relevant theoretical developments.

The literature review related to the theoretical framework aims to provide a skeletal structure to build on the thesis. The attempt collects major readings relevant to the fields of narratology, oral narratives, culture and folklore. Thus, the approach is interdisciplinary and draws on several authors as follows.

Motif-index of folk-literature⁸ (1955) by Stith Thompson is a classification of narrative elements in the items of folklore including folktales, fables, ballads, myths, and legends. Categorised into seven sections, the sections include mythological motifs, animal motifs, motifs of taboo, magic, the dead, marvels and ogres.

Albert B. Lord (1960), popular for the ground-breaking work, *Singer of Tales*,⁹ focuses on the composition of oral narrative poetry to answer the Homeric question to cognise the fashion in which the composition, learning and transmission take place. And comes up with the following aspects associated with oral narratives. The description sees oral epic song as narrative poetry. The composition pertains to the diverse singers, across several generations of the singers of the tales, who possessed oral literature and sang songs, but did not

know how to write. Lord comes up with a new look at oral tradition to identify 'formula' as a set of words which is regularly used under metrical conditions, that are the same. And, 'formulaic expression' consists of either a line or at times, half a line arranged based on the pattern present in the formula. And, 'theme' represents some of the incidents that are reiterated and the passages that are descriptive in the narratives.

Arnold van Gennep (1960) in the book *Rites of Passage*¹⁰ analyses ritual behaviour. The book explores the core of ceremonialism and proposes that its organisation and content reveal three distinct stages. The scheme integrates to develop the rites of passage with the pattern, firstly separation, secondly transition and thirdly incorporation. In the examination of the complex, the threefold categorisation could be considered apt as it essentially involves transformation through apotheosis.

*The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography*¹¹ (1961) of Antti Aarne translated and enlarged by Stith Thompson is a fundamental goto for the classifications of narrative materials. The classification provides an index to stories from several countries as a basis of reference. The tales are classified into five sections namely, animal tales, ordinary folk-tales, jokes and anecdotes, formula tales and unclassified tales.

William Bascom (1965) in the article "The Forms of Folklore: Prose Narratives"¹² provides a discussion of a few basic terms related to folklore. The terms focused are folktale, legend and myth and are described as the commonly recognised categories, definitions and classifications of the items of folklore given. The term prose narrative is proposed in the article for the categories of verbal art. These forms of prose narratives are studied in the backdrop of "subsidiary characteristics" (p.5) such as characters, the setting and time.

Dan Ben-Amos' (1971) "Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context"¹³ throws light on the multiple definitions of folklore and suggests the differences in aspects related to semantics and theories. Probing the various definitions of folklore, from the focal points such as anthropology and literature, the article touches upon the earlier definition by William Thoms as 'popular antiquities' to

identifying folklore forms as “superorganic in the sense that once created their indigenous environment and cultural context are not required for their continuous existence. Background information may be essential for the analytical interpretation of the materials, but none of it is crucial for the sheer existence of the folklore forms... In sum, the materials of folklore are mobile, manipulative and transcultural” (p.4). Also, folklore forms are organic in the sense that it is integral to culture. In the backdrop of both natures, Amos tries to categorise the common aspects in the definitions of folklore as ‘a body of knowledge, a mode of thought, or a kind of art’, where, knowledge, thought, and art are wide areas of culture. And, it also depends on ‘social context involving categories like geographic, linguistic, ethnic or occupational’ and their relations with one another.

Joseph Campbell (1973) in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*¹⁴ deals with the journey of a hero. Intertwining mythology, psychoanalysis and narratives the book throws light on the significance of stories of heroes. The structure of the adventure of a hero is broken down by the writer. Drawing from various narratives across the globe, the universality in the stories of the heroes is discussed. Drawing the term from James Joyce, Campbell proposes the idea of ‘monomyth’ where a single pattern underlies the narratives, especially the adventures of the heroes. The Freudian and Jungian psychological and archetypal influences blended with Arnold van Gennep’s deliberations on the rites of passage reflect in the writer’s treatment of a hero in the storytelling and the universality in portraying human experiences.

James George Frazer (1974) in *The Golden Bough: A Study of Magic and Religion*¹⁵ presents a huge collection of beliefs and practices across the world and looks at the entanglement of religion, magic and beliefs. The book gives an evolutionary progression of the different worldviews among diverse sets of people.

Richard Bauman’s (1975) article “Verbal Art as Performance”¹⁶ as the title suggests an approach to look at the aspects of performance in oral traditions. The manifestation of performance in the mode of speaking, the article studies the nature of performance and the communication conveyed through it, thus enhancing the consumers’ experience. Further, the article lists the essential

devices that key a performance, including codes, usual opening and closing statements, stylistic formula, tempo and patterns. The article highlights the culture-specific communicative elements in the performance and their importance in understanding verbal art.

William P. Murphy (1978) in the article, “Oral Literature”¹⁷ emphasises on the need to draw the relationship between oral literature as a form of speech and its ‘communicative place in the social relationships’. Words are considered the chief resource among the several communicative resources that a social group possesses. The article sketches and critically analyses the theories and methods provided by folklorists.

Alan Dundes’s (1980) essay, titled ‘Texture, Text, and Context’¹⁸ in the book *Interpreting Folklore* proposes three levels of analysis as far as forms of folklore are concerned. The proposition put forward throws light on the scope of analysis of a folklore item in terms of the texture, the text and the context of a particular item of the study. Furthermore, the exercise would end up futile if the three aspects are subjected to a fragmented analysis, instead, the key is to look into them as a whole. Another essay titled “The Hero Pattern and the Life of Jesus” brings out the knowledge of patterns in the culture pertaining to that of hero and theoretically looks at the life of Jesus and tries to bring in folkloristic interpretation.

Walter J. Ong (1982) in the work *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World*,¹⁹ studies the differences between oral and written cultures, providing insight into the ‘psychodynamics of orality’, the notion that the sounded word is power and action. Ong popularises the idea that knowledge is a product of language, and that the medium in which the language is communicated, including voice, writing, and print, prompts one to think in certain path-dependent lines. The idea of ‘Ongism’- a place where ‘mind is determined by medium’ is proposed and it is also emphasised that orality is to be understood as a human characteristic.

Jack Goody (1993) in the book *The Culture of Flowers*²⁰ revolves the discussions around the theme of flowers. With geographic and temporal dimensions, the book opens up a discussion about flowers across the world. The

representations of flowers and the multiple meanings they possess are the focus. Across centuries, the use of flowers in different cultures for different purposes is one of the important points of discussion. Also, the association of flowers to the agriculture, theology and social systems is touched upon.

The article by Eric Montenyohl (1996) titled “Divergent Paths: On the Evolution of “Folklore” and “Folkloristics””²¹, put forth the discussions on folklore and folkloristics as a subject and discipline. It covers origin, definitions and a list of genres associated with the term ‘folklore’ and notes, “Stories, customs, ballads, and proverbs could presumably be collected, systematically arranged, and studied in much the same manner as other natural and cultural items.”(232) And emphasises on the shift from ‘item-centered to activitycentered’, reconceptualised notion of folklore as a process than product suggested by Dan Ben-Amos and Roger D. Abrahams; “from the collection and preservation of items to the systems in which people live, the role of traditions in their interactions, and the processes whereby groups and their traditions are generated and renewed.”(p.233) Added to that, the discipline’s evolution is process-centered, context-sensitive and performance-oriented. Also, it remarks how dynamic folklore is by stating that “Traditions are sensitive (in that they are parts of social systems), and thus they are always endangered. Folklore does indeed die out. But it is also perpetually generated.”(p.233)

An Encyclopedia of Beliefs, Customs, Tales, Music, and Art ²²edited by Thomas A Green (1997) is a collection of relevant material to the study of folklore. Spread in two volumes, it has various entries from academic programmes in folklore to xeroxlore, arranged alphabetically. Further, a set of approaches, analysis and methods is incorporated to study the various forms of folklore. To top it off, each entry follows a list of references, to explore further, and a general reference work in English, for further reading.

The book *The Epic: Oral and Written* edited by Lauri Honko, Jawaharlal Handoo and John Miles Foley²³ (1998) is divided into Oral Composition of Epics, Epic Traditions in India, Epic and History and Integrating Oral and

Written, the book features the papers of Lauri Honko, Anneli Honko, John Miles Foley, Minna Skagerrak Jensen, Heda Jason, John Brockington, Mary Brockington, Susan S. Wadley, Doris Edel, Isaac Olawale Albert, Lauri Harvilahti, Kristen Thisted, Jiangbian Jiacao, Jia Zhi etc covering topics like ‘multiforms’, Oral epic texts, oral compositions, mental text, and so on. These papers were delivered on “Oral and Semiliterary Epics” at the XIth Congress of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research held at the Central Institute of Languages in Mysore in January 1995. The work is significant to the study to understand the problematisation of textualisation of the narratives and how the importance of narratives is traced to their cultural and functional aspects.

The article “Gods, Groves and the Culture of Nature in Kerala”²⁴ by J. R. Freeman (1999) discusses *Teyyam* with an anthropological focus in the background of the forests of the northernmost parts of Kerala. It depicts the institution of sacred groves and tries to document the approaches toward groves and forest through folkloric, anthropological and ethnohistorical approaches. With intersecting projections of environmental, historical and human ecological discourses, the perspectives toward the biotic resources are put forth by drawing on the folklore and interviews.

Lauri Honko (2000) in the article “Text as process and practice: the textualization of oral epics” in the book *Textualization of Oral Epics*²⁵ discusses the process of textualisation of oral epic traditions with the focus on the Siri Epic of the Tulu region of Karnataka in India. Honko discusses oral texts of traditions and paradigms related, such as the process, practice, making, thematic orientation and intertextuality. The dimensions of the process of textualisation focus on the synchronic and diachronic aspects of textualisation. The book, as a whole, looks at epics across Europe, India, Africa, North America, Oceania in terms of textualisation.

Lauri Honko (2000) in the article “Text and context in the textualization of Tulu oral epics”²⁶ deals with the poetic culture around the Siri epic of the Tulu language of Karnataka. The content includes the discussion on the format

of oral composition of epic, narrative genres, performance contexts and multiplicity. The article highlights three contexts in its attempt at textualising the Siri epic: profane context, sacred context and induced context. The first one involves the work in the paddy field that incorporates the epic song. The second context presented is a sacred one involving the possession ritual where the epic is rendered. The third is described as the induced one, where a particular time and space is chosen by an individual singer to sing the epic that stretched for around five days at length with a select audience. The notion of ‘mental text’ in the context of the individual performance of the text is looked into.

Gerald Prince’s (2003) *A Dictionary of Narratology*²⁷ is a handy go-to source to have a basic overview of definitions of the numerous terms associated with narratology in alphabetical order. Though not exhaustive as put in the preface of the book, it draws from a multitude of thoughts and movements from Anglo-Saxon to German tradition to Russian Formalists to French structuralists to the contemporaries. A number of cross-references and parallels set the tone of the dictionary, allowing scope for further reading. Also, illustrations under certain entries add clarity to the concepts. And, a rich bibliography at the end is a wholesome collection of references resulting in a nuanced understanding of the sources from which certain terms are drawn.

Ulo Valk (2003) in the article “Oral Tradition and Folkloristics”²⁸ looks at the interconnections between oral tradition and folkloristics and emphasises that the objective of work in these areas is not to look at the text as a singular unit but its relationships with the situational, cultural, and performative contexts. These contexts give the textual meanings. Valk also opines to reconsider the established normative definitions from time and again to maintain the discussions. Another important point considered in the article is the role of intertextuality in opening up undiscovered domains of meaning in oral traditions.

Edited by Mieke Bal (2004), the four volumes of *Narrative Theory: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*²⁹ edited by is a set of four volumes discussing in length and breadth the value of narrative theory as an analytical instrument. From ‘prosperous beginnings’ marking the ‘prefatory

session', which includes a general introduction to the field of narrative theory, history, a peek into the past- Plato and Aristotle, the structure of narrative, types of narration, focalisation, disnarration, thus giving a succinct start to the work. The volume is a compilation of major theories from Gerald Prince to Roland Barthes to Jonathan Culler to Ann Benfield to Gerard Genette to Mieke Bal. The second volume brings in insights on 'special topics' such as deixis, time, character/plot knot and narrator. incorporating the articles of, to name a few, Monika Fludernik, J. Hillis Miller, Barbara Johnson, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, Paul de Man. In the third volume, Political Narratology, the discussions range from rhetoric to space to storyteller to gender to ideology to narrative time and focalisation, concentrating on the narratological analyses and tools in the backdrop of power dynamics. The final volume titled 'Interdisciplinary' moves beyond the rigidity of structural analyses of narratives to widen the scope and open up dialogues where narrative theory has a role in interpreting what is not just narratives but also what is not a narrative in its traditional sense. Thus, the volume throws light on narratology and justice, social narrative, narration and psychoanalysis, narration and films, 'science and/ as narratives'. The work is significant to the study of the theory of narratology as it covers a wide variety of theoretical ideas, concepts, approaches and texts from a variety of areas of concern and theoreticians.

William A. Wilson's (2006) *Marrow of Human Experience: Essays on Folklore*³⁰ edited by Jill Terry Rudy with the assistance of Diane Call, aims to 'introduce new and ongoing students of folklore to useful definitions and functions of folklore study.' The work thrusts upon the multidisciplinary and integrating nature of folklore as the introduction notes that "Moving beyond the restricting definitions of *folk literature* to *literature* or from *folk art* to *art*... folklore crosses interdisciplinary boundaries showing a deeply human need to be creative.'"(3) The contents vary from the importance of folklore to folklore in academy and policy to oral narratives to documentation of folklore to folklore and nationalism to folklore and religion to identities.

*The Meaning of Folklore: The Analytical Essays*³¹ of Alan Dundes (2007) edited by Simon J. Bronner is a thematised collection of the essays by Alan Dundes, divided into two parts pointing at a critical inquiry. The parts titled

Structure and Analysis and *Worldview and Identity* contain twenty essays on folklore and its relation to literature, culture, games and science.

Monika Fludernik (2009) in *An Introduction to Narratology*,³² brings in a comprehensive overview of the field of narratology. Fludernik outlines of the theory of narratives, structure of narratives, typologies and approaches to narratives, along with the examples of practical applications to work with texts. A how-to guide that winds up the book enlists clues, dos and don'ts to crack the 'narratological game'. A glossary of narratological terms with cross-references and suggestions for further reading adds to the accessibility and practicality of the manual.

Peter Huhn et. al (2009) edited *Handbook of Narratology*,³³ against the backdrop of vast studies in the field of narrative studies, bringing out a systematic overview of multidisciplinary traditions related to it. The contents include several entries on keywords, concepts and categories of the field from historical developments to recent approaches, along with critical views. A set of topics directed to further reading, investigation and comprehensive bibliography completes the work. The arrangement of the thirty-two entries follows the alphabetical order from author to tellability. And each entry follows a pattern – definition, explication, history of the concept, emergent trends in the field, bibliography and further reading.

Vladimir Propp (2009) in the work *Morphology of the Folktale*³⁴ carries out a study of tales involving the descriptions of the components and the representations. The tales are broken down to compare the themes within and formulated in the work is attributes to characters and their actions. The actions are well-defined and are considered as constant elements in the story. It is the functions delineated in the *dramatis personae* that are important to the study to understand the course of the action.

Jack Goody (2010) in his work, *Myth, Ritual and the Oral*³⁵, discusses myth, orality and their relation to aspects of social life by collecting the various versions of the myth of LoDagaa, Northern Ghana. Goody points out that fancy or imagination is not the entitlement of just one culture. The thrust here is that recitation as a collective and cultural activity could be appreciated only against

the rituals being accompanied in a society. Also, observed here is the flexibility associated with oral creative expressions in contrast to the fixity related to what is written. Also puts forward an interesting idea that there is forgetting as well as creation; and that forgetting entails invention and creation; creation probably entails some forgetting, going hand in hand.

Trevor J. Blanks (2012) edited *Folk Culture in the Digital Age: The Emergent Dynamics of Human Interaction*,³⁶ situating folklore in the digital. The mediation of technology in constructing reality has brought into questions about the dissemination of folklore through new media. On virtualizing folklore, the considerations of folklore, performance, web, internet and virtual communities are a few areas focused upon. The relevance of ethics during the fieldwork, production and dissemination of folk is also taken into discussion.

Anthony Nanson (2021) in the *Storytelling and Ecology: Empathy, Enchantment and Emergence in the Use of Oral Narratives*³⁷ the interweaving of storytelling and ecology. The relevance of oral narratives in connecting nature and people is focused. The scope of such activity in conserving and sustaining the environment and the transformative power is highlighted. Connecting language to societies and ecosystems, the book explores the situation of language in ecological and social contexts.

The literature review of the vernacular works, as follows draws mainly on the topic of *Teyyam* and *totam* in Malayalam. An innumerable amount of vernacular work is available on the topic, out of which a few important ones, relevant to the study, are presented here.

M.V. Vishnu Namboodiri (1998) *Teyyam*³⁸ is a comprehensive reading on various aspects of *Teyyam*, rituals, god(desse)s, its various forms, beliefs and customs. Also, a set of narratives related to these forms find place in the book, ranging from various narratives called *Bhagavati totangal* along with, narrative on the *Mapila teyyam*, called *Bappirian totam*.

M.V. Vishnu Namboodiri's (2005) *Utharakeralatile Totampatukal*³⁹ is a work divided into nine sections dealing with several oral narratives of *Teyyam*. The narratives of different forms of *Teyyam* are usually performed by certain communities. The division of the narratives in the book is done according to the narratives of specific communities. For example, *Bali totam*, *Marakkalatamma*

totam, *Veerarkaali totam* and so on by the community called Vannan; *Raktachamundi totam* and *Vishnumurthi totam* by the community of Malayan etc.

Karippath R.C.'s (2012) book, *Theyyaprapancham*⁴⁰ provides a comprehensive understanding of history, socio-cultural aspects of *Teyyam*, the communities associated with it, their kinship and lineages, classification of various goddesses and gods and their respective sacred groves. Further, a great depth of information is available on the *teyyam* performers, their communities and codes of conduct, rituals, costumes and narrative renditions, that have been keenly observed and documented. Also, the book consists of detailed descriptions of various communities involved and specifications of each community's role. A discussion of types of *Teyyam* such as the mother goddesses, the snake goddesses, the *Mapilateyyam* is made available. The chapter eleven of the book is very important to the research as it deals with *Teyyam* literature and begins with a brief description of *totam* and moves on to discuss the source. The author opines that *totampatu* are personal assets of a few communities linked to *Teyyam*. It is suggested that the written transmission or adding newly coined terms to the *totam* and a change in tune would displease god(desse)s and can bring severe consequences to the people. But changes in these renditions are indispensable with the changing times as various factors influencing the vocabulary. *Totampatu*, according to Karippath, is a vast aspect of *Teyyam* literature which describes the history of the origin of the form of *Teyyam*, *utpaticharitam*, extraordinary and magnificent deeds, *adbutapravritikal* and groves and abodes *kudikonda nadukal* of the *Teyyam* about to be performed. The calendar of innumerable *Teyyam* forms in various sacred groves, situated all along the two districts of Kannur and Kasargod, are highlighted through tabulation in the book.

Karippath R.C. (2014) in *Malabarile Mapila Teyyangal*⁴¹, introduces the array of various *Mapila* (Muslim) *Teyyam* forms like *Aalichamundi*, *Neithiaar* to name a few. The introductory pages of the book note that the attempt to document and understand the phenomenon of *Teyyam* has revealed how the metanarratives and enthusiasts of culture and history have not thrown light on the age-old tales, and thus, they have remained unsung. Such tales are voiced in

the book, especially those that celebrate the brotherhood of Hindus and Muslims and notes how relevant their content echoes in today's society, reiterating the call for religious harmony. And, it sketches a general introduction to the phenomenon of *Teyyam* to the history of a *Mapilateyyam* to detailed descriptions of such *Teyyam* forms.

Y. V. Kannan (2015) in the book *Kanaladimanas: Teyyam Prabhandangal*⁴² presents twenty-one essays related to *Teyyam*. Emphasising that *Teyyam* is a part and parcel of the life of North Malabar, the author draws from his observations and experiences not just as an author but as a *Teyyam* practitioner. The folk life, the influence of local consciousness, and local history interweave to build the essays. The collection reflects on the complex and depicts the social, ritual and historical significance of its conduct.

M.V. Vishnu Namboodiri (2016) *Totampatukal*⁴³ is a collection of oral narratives associated with *Teyyam*. The insightful contributions in the book highlight the culture of the north of Kerala, its rich literature and folklore. The data includes narratives that run to thousands of pages drawn from performers belonging to fifteen different communities.

M.V. Vishnu Namboodiri's (2016) *Theyyamthirathotangal: Oru Padanam*⁴⁴ is a study on the oral narratives of *Teyyam* that took its roots in the author's dissertation, describing the rituals associated, the god(desse)s revered and the songs recited. It highlights the wealth of artistic expressions and cultural heritage of the region of North Malabar by addressing the oral narratives of *Teyyam* and *Tira*, ritual conducts and performances pertaining to the region. The book introduces *Teyyam* and *Tira*, god(desse)s worshipped, incidents related to them, and the associated songs. The second chapter deals in detail with the meaning and origin of the narratives. The fourth chapter sketches stories and myths related to the goddesses and gods. The sixth chapter puts the narratives in the backdrop of the societal aspects like occupation, discrimination and communal wellbeing. The seventh chapter celebrates the literary aspects and stylistics of the narratives – language, style, usages, and tones.

V. Lissy Mathew (2016) in her book *Kathivanoor Veeran: Malakayariya Manushyan; Churamirangiya Daivam*⁴⁵ dissects the narrative of the Kativanur Veeran totam that presents the story of Mandapan, throwing light

on its historical and ritual relevance. It also sketches the geographical connections of the region, especially of Kannur and Kudagu which reflects in the narrative. The book discusses the story of a common man who becomes a god. It depicts the communities, traditions and folk life associated with the character. The narratives involving various components are described in detail along with the ritual components. It is interesting to note that the work draws upon the areas traversed by the character. Moreover, the journey is repeated by the author to bring in the essence of the journey depicted in the narrative.

Y.V. Kannan's (2019) *Theyyangalum Anushtanangalum: Oru Padanam*⁴⁶ highlights the significance of art forms in understanding the culture. It discusses the rituals underlying the art forms. The work focuses on *Teyyam* as an art form, significant to the culture of the region of North Malabar, with specific emphasis on the community of Vannan. It covers the socio-cultural aspects and the songs associated with the form. The book focuses on the specific forms of *Teyyam* taken up by the Vannan community.

The literature on research methodology is as follows. The data from the field using the ethnographic method play a major role in folklore research. "Ethnography is the process of studying and learning about groups of people, as well as the written description and analysis of those observations. It is through ethnographic research and the written descriptions of their findings in the field that folklorists share their ideas (Sims, 2005, p.217)." By its qualitative approach, the thick data obtained through ethnographic research helps in a better understanding of the subject being studied and the context. The folk, lore and field go hand in hand.

Kaarle Krohn's (1971) book *Folklore Methodology*⁴⁷ gives an approach to process folkloristic materials. The book notes that a folklorist's area of research is distinct as it revolves around the thoughts and behaviour of people. With the material drawn from Finnish folklore, a geographical approach to it is directed at. The development, dissemination and changes of folklore are covered to come up with a method to study folklore.

Ruth Finnegan (1992) in the work *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts: A Guide to Research Practices*⁴⁸ provides an anthropological turn to the study of oral narratives. A guide to fieldwork and to employ a huge range of methods

to observe, collect and analyse oral traditions, oral narratives and oral performances, the book directs to interdisciplinary perspectives. Spanning from Africa to the South Pacific to Europe, it exhibits examples of collecting and analysing oral narratives of different cultures, thus focusing on the background and scope of oral traditions and verbal arts, the terminologies associated, the role of theories and methodologies to begin with. Further, it gives an extensive approach to the practicalities of data collection and recording. And, a segment devotes to the observation and analysis of performance – performers, audiences and participants, organisation, situation and framing of performances. Under the subtitle, ‘Production, functions and ideas’, the discussion revolves around the important processes in oral traditions - composition, remembering, circulation and transmission. The section on analysing and comparing texts describes the problems and opportunities in textual analysis, like the feasibility of the analysis, source and nature of the text, its delivery and context, thus emphasising the ‘performance properties’. A significant addition is the process during the handling of the texts, where the engagement with translation is pictured as an intriguing aspect, raising the key issue – ‘what it is that is being translated’, to recognising that translation is not an absolute process. Weaving a tight-knit, intricate pattern around the analyses of verbal artistry, performances and traditions, the guide is a ready reckoner.

Martha C. Sims and Martine Stephens’s (2005) *Living Folklore: An Introduction to the Study of People and Their Traditions*⁴⁹ contains the introduction to folklore with the backdrop of a contemporary setting. The nine categories in the book run as folklore, approaches to interpret it, ritual, tradition and performance, along with ethnography and fieldwork and a few instances of projects involving recommendations for further related activities. The emphasis is on the relevance of folklore in understanding the lives of people who use creativity to show who they are and the values they hold on to. The book provides an overview of various approaches to the study related to folklore, along with relevant examples, also introducing major folklorists and referring to their works and theories. The chapters on ethnography and fieldwork are lighthouses to the vast practical aspects.

*The Sage Dictionary of Social Research Methods*⁵⁰ (2006) compiled and edited by Victor Jupp introduces the key themes and terms related to social research, presented in alphabetical order. The dictionary covers important aspects of social research, such as philosophy of science, research paradigms, research designs, research surveys, data collection, data analysis, research ethics, etc. The entries are structured in a standardised format involving definition, historical, conceptual and disciplinary background. The feature of the associated concept in the dictionary paves the way for cross-referencing for an in-depth understanding of the concepts associated with social research.

*Handbook of Ethnography*⁵¹ (2007) edited by Paul Atkinson, Amanda Coffey, Sara Delamont, John Lofland and Lun Lofland is an ambitious exercise that gives a comprehensive picture of ethnographic methods, drawing extensively from experts in the fields of sociology, anthropology and education. The work generates diverse interpretations on ethnographic research, of which the emphasis on participation and observation is key component. Divided into three parts spanning a series of discussions on the contexts of ethnographical study, field settings, methods of data gathering and ways of interpreting the material collected from the fields.

Lacunae

On reviewing the existing literature so far, it is noted that a vast knowledge on *Teyyam* has been produced and a number of studies have been conducted related to the complex. The various dimensions studies include *Teyyam* under the purview of folk ritual, folk tradition and folk religion. Also, dealt with are socio-political aspects, especially social stratification and caste dynamics involved in *Teyyam*, and anthropological studies of kinship and ritual and its association with *Teyyam*. Most of the work is preoccupied with the chronicling of different types of *Teyyam*. Even though an extensive literature is available on *Teyyam* and its various dimensions, a comprehensive and analytical study on the *totam* is meagre. The studies on *totam* are limited to vernacular readings that are mostly restricted to collection and description. A methodological and interdisciplinary theoretical treatment of *totam*, especially from the angles of narrative research in particular, is scarce.

Hypothesis

Teyyam is elevated as god(desse)s in the minds of the folk and *totam* encompasses their experiences and catalyses the transformation. The complex is integral to the region and could be considered as the combination of sociocultural shared beliefs of the folk. A folkloric process in the society, it mirrors the values, cultures and behaviours of people. The complex is engendered through several dimensions. The dimensions could be marked as texts that are at play against the backdrop of contexts.

In the study of the *Teyyam* complex, it can be noted that several texts at various levels, like oral, verbal, non-verbal, performance, ‘mentifact’ to create a multi-textual dimension that is dynamic. The narratives get verbalized and visualised through performative texts in the ritualistic context. It thus transcends texts and varies from mental text and orality to visual text through performance. There is an interplay of verbal and nonverbal codes that goes into the process of communication. The interaction and reception of these texts play a significant role in the conduct of the social lives of the common people.

The socially oriented critique of culture through the study of *totam* or oral narratives paves the way to questions like what is narrated, who has the authority or competence to narrate, how the telling is accomplished, what are the consequences of events that are narrated and also focuses on patterns of representations in the narratives.

It could be maintained that the patterns of representations see interrelationships with not just the different groups of the people of the region that are part of the complex, but also transcend the human-human interactions to human-non-human interactions. The interactions reveal a zoomorphic transformation and floral imagination as ways of recovery, of a sense of rootedness, a sign of symbiosis of web of lives and a system where society seems to settle and resolve itself.

Aims and Objectives

From the aforementioned hypothesis, the following aims and objectives are derived.

- At the outset, the aim is to collect, record, translate and analyse select *totam* that form the verbal expressions in the complex. The study attempts to look at the textualisation of *totam*. The questions that are dealt with are: how are the texts shaped? How are they transmitted? What are the contexts in which the composition and reception take place?
- The study analyses *totam* to understand the contents in the text and its interconnectedness to the texture and contexts. A few research questions are raised: what are the themes presented in the text and how is it done? How does memory operate in its production and reception?
- The study seeks to look at the characterisation in the texts up close to understand the emerging patterns in the representations of folk to understand how the telling is accomplished.
- The study attempts to present the interactions of categories of nonhuman and human in the folk imaginative and expressive tradition in the complex.

Theoretical Framework

Drawing from myriad contributions from various fields like literary theory, narratology, cultural studies, folklore, anthropology, and performance studies, the following is a comprehensive outline of a framework that aims at a multidisciplinary theoretical approach to the study of oral narratives.

Cultural theories:

Culture, the distinguishing mark of mankind, is earlier associated with the cultivation of crops. Now it is understood as the ‘cultivation’ or development of the human mind and behaviour. Culture, equivalent to expressive behaviour, is dynamic and the theoretical models provide various perspectives to understand and interpret it. The conceptualisation of cultural theories involves

diachronic and synchronic theories, investigating culture over a period of time and at a point of time, respectively. The diachronic perspective of cultural evolution can be further classified as Cultural Evolutionists theory, Myth-ritual theory and Comparative Philology or Solar Mythology. Evolutionary theory proposed by cultural evolutionists is a diachronic approach, emphasising the unilineal or directional advancement of humankind, from simple to complex. Cultural evolution is the notion that culture or a group of people moves from one stage of development to another. It is believed that all culture evolves from savagery to barbarism to civilisation. The Cultural Evolutionists opined that culture develops through various stages. Moreover, the development is not the result of a culture coming in contact with another, but as a result of a psychic unit that forms the basis of all human experiences.

Though in the due course the cultural evolutionists lost the charm, their theory was considered relevant in identifying folklore as ‘survivals’ of the past, which were left behind during the progress of culture, to study the present. The Myth-ritualists addressed the intriguing question of the origin of cultural expressions in terms of myth and ritual. They pondered upon the origin, meaning, pattern and form of myths and rituals of primitive men, including sacrifice and fertility cult. A few of the scholars like Taylor considered myth precedes ritual whereas some scholar like William Robertson Smith, Bronislaw Malinowski, and J. G. Frazer considered ritual as the primacy and myth as the derivative. Another line of thought emphasised by Walter Burket is that myth and ritual are independent and non-coextensive. The common notion is that myths are verbal expressions from which narratives and verbal genres appear in the forms of tale, song etc. And, through rituals come the nonverbal expressions like dance, architecture etc. The theory, through its cause and effect method helped in tracing and understanding the genres of folklore.

Structuralist Approach:

As the topic of research is oral narratives, the framework draws perspectives from various theoreticians of narratology. The structuralist approach which began in the 1920s, emphasised understanding things in the largest context that they are part of and how meanings are attributed to things

by the human mind. This approach has been predominant in the study of oral literature.

Structuralism took root in the works of Ferdinand de Saussure, who studied the modern approaches to language, especially the patterns and functions and how language constituted the world and reality. Widening the concepts of structuralism to human behaviour and actions, Levi- Strauss studied the interpretation of myths. According to him, the individual tale considered as ‘parole’, which in the Saussurean concept stands for language as a system does not have a separate meaning and is only understood if placed in the larger structure or whole cycle of myth or ‘langue’ which according to Saussure is any utterance. In understanding the dynamics of the *Teyyam*, these concepts help in decoding the set of signs which carry cultural meanings.

Narratological Analysis:

What is a narrative? What constitutes a narrative? And, the narrative forms, fields, focalisation and functions, narrator and narratee, the analyses and various aspects broaden the horizon of narratology as a discipline of study.

Narratology came into vogue ‘in the first half of the twentieth-century’ in literary studies, through structuralism, where language is seen as a system of signs, of the 1960s to contemporaneity. An interest in narrative is universal, and the study of narratives was essentially a literary pursuit, especially significant to the exercise of literary criticism and literary analyses. Narratology, closely associated with structuralism is about how the meanings are made and revolves around key ideas of story, plot, focalisation, handling of time in all its brevity, and provides a mechanism to focus on story as a cultural practice. This feature of narratives makes it essential in understanding the cultural context of the complex *Teyyam* dynamics.

The pursuit of studying the constituents of narratives influenced by structuralist linguistics saw contributions of various schools of thought like Russian Formalism and French literary circles. The former associated ‘fabula’ to story and ‘syuzhet’ to the ways it is told and among the latter, are groundbreaking analytical distinctions in the study of structure brought in by Ferdinand de Saussure, who studied the modern approaches to language,

especially the patterns and functions and how language constitutes the world and reality. The attempt to distinguish story and discourse has been a longstanding area of concern in narratology. Though the distinction is not marked in black and white, various approaches have touched upon the matter for analysis on that basis. Also, the structuralist inspired study on culture by Claude Levi-Strauss, especially on food, kinship and myths, contributed an understanding of cultural symbolic system. This approach, popularised by Strauss emphasised understanding things in the larger context that they are part of and how meanings are attributed to things by the human mind, paving the way for paradigmatic structuralism in the context of the study of cultures. The signs which stand for and signify particulars in a culture, where culture is the larger picture or 'underlying system' as Ferdinand de Saussure describes. According to him, the individual tale considered as 'parole' which in the Saussurean concept stands for language as a system does not have a separate meaning and only be understood if placed in the larger structure or whole cycle of myth or langue, which according to Saussure is any utterance. According to Strauss, the narratives within the myths have certain basic and constant structures that are universal and myth is viewed as a sort of language that can be narrowed down to each unit, the units are called mythemes that are parallel to phonemes. The structuralist approach of analysing a plot and the Proppian morphological model of analysing folktales based on the structure of a sentence, in terms of predicate and subject, 'skazki' pinpoints a likeness in the tales around the globe, boiling them down to seven 'spheres of action' and thirty-one 'functions' of narratives. The model consists of thirty-one functions, a set of actions following a sequence that Propp identified as the most essential components of tales, and left a significant mark on the study of narratives.

Further, Roland Barthes' contribution to the field of narratology is remarkable and in the "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives" of 1977, Barthes writes, "The narratives of the world are numberless... under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative...narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself" (Bal, 2004, p.65).

Barthes puts forward an analogy drawing from Roman Jakobson's concepts of metaphor and metonymy to distinguish the levels in narratives, identified as the sequence of acts, called 'functions' and characters' details, called 'indices'; where the former is based on metonym and the latter on metaphor.

The framework includes an understanding of differentiating story or 'histoire' as Gerard Genette puts it or the Russian Formalist David Lodge's concept of 'fabula' as the sequence of events and plot or Genette's 'recit' or 'sjuzhet' as Lodge puts it as events that are being narrated. Further a limited discussion of the history of narratology from the Aristotelian elements of hamartia, the flaw, anagnorisis, the recognition, and peripeteia, the turning point, which are claimed to be present in even the most rudimentary of narrative material, is considered essential to understand the basic themes and moral significance of the story. Genette's contributions are significant in the theories of narratology as his focus was mainly on the process of telling. Genette's discourses on narratives discussed the ideas like focalisation or point of view through which a story is told and how the narrative is packed and designed. In the context of understanding *totam*, Genette's ideas would suggest to seek out for repeated patterns or structures and narrative categories underlying in the oral narratives like mimetic mode of 'slow telling' or diegetic mode of rapid summarising way of events being taking place and handling of the time in the story through references back or references forward which Genette terms as analeptic or proleptic parts of the narrative respectively. These categories help in suggesting how meanings are constructed in narratives.

Mieke Bal's work, often called 'a concise encyclopedia of narratology' spans across four volumes. The chapter concerned here is "Ethnography as narrative" in part two of the fourth volume. The chapter discusses ethnography as narrative and discourse. The author cites the example of her fieldwork on the Native Americans and the documentation of resistance. Bal draws an analogy between a story consisting of the typical beginning, middle and end and a culture which takes the sequence of a past, a present, and a future. The idea of narrative not only as structure of meaning but also as structure of power is emphasised in the chapter. The chapter also looks at the social context of telling. It calls for a wider applicability of ethnography as a narrative.

Approaches to Oral Narratives:

Oral literatures and performance traditions that are passed down over generations are integral to the understanding of culture. A wide epistemological pursuits are carried out in the field, including widespread collecting, documenting, analysing and interpreting of material. The switch is noteworthy as it involves a change from merely collecting the oral narratives to a systematic, scientific and theory-oriented inquiry.

Originated in the scholarly studies of oral epics in the 1920s, 'Oralformulaic theory', also called the 'oral-traditional theory' or the 'theory of oralformulaic composition' is an essential approach in studying the oral narratives on *Teyyam*. Albert B. Lord breaks down the construction of the oral narratives. Grounded on the findings from twenty-five years of collection, transcription and interpretation, Lord's attempt to answer the Homeric question is a breakthrough in understanding orality. The book considers Homer as the singer of tales and the representative of all singers of tales. Treating the epic as not a mere genre, but as a way of life, it looks at the manner in which epics are composed, learnt and transmitted; as Lord puts it, the dynamics of poetic construction. A comparative study between traditional oral epic found in the South Slavic region of Yugoslavia and Homer's lines provides systematic recording, documentation, translation and detailed understanding of how epics work. Lord was influenced by Milman Parry's formulae of the Homeric question. The singers depended on 'formula', 'formulaic expressions' and 'themes'. Each rendition is considered unique and genuine as there was no fixed text as such. The theory is exceptionally helpful in the understanding of the process of textual formation.

Walter J. Ong's contributions revolve around the oral & literate cultures. Understanding orality as a human characteristic, primal and natural, the titles of the third and the fourth chapters, 'Some psychodynamics of orality' and 'Writing restructures consciousness', respectively sums up the crux of the book. Ong popularises the idea that knowledge is a product of language, and that medium in which language is communicated - by voice, writing, and print -

makes one think along certain path dependent lines. ‘Ongism’, thus, is a place where the mind is determined by medium.

Ruth Finnegan discusses certain key terms in the concerned study starts by defining oral and orality from the Oxford English Dictionary thus, “The dictionary definition gives a start : ‘uttered in spoken words, transacted by word of mouth, spoken, verbal. This is frequently the primary meaning in much apparently technical terminology: ‘oral tradition’, ‘oral literature’, ‘oral narrative’, ‘oral testimony’ and so on” (1992, p.5). As far as the background of the study of oral traditions is concerned, Finnegan traces its development from its ‘earlier preoccupations with origins’ to evolutionist model to ‘German Romanticism to ‘Philological scholarship to “more recent cultural interactions in a global framework”(1992, p.26).

Lauri Honko invented novel theoretical tools for the purpose of explaining cultural phenomena, collecting, documenting and analysing the Siri epic of the Tulu culture of Karnataka. One such tool was ‘mental text’ which denoted the epic and its raw materials as they were preserved in a formal mode in the mind of the singer. Another innovation was ‘multiforms’, by which Honko meant content units that possessed linguistic markers recognised by the singer” (Kamppinen, 2014, p.6).

And, the broad category of verbal constitutes folktales, folksongs, folk poetry, myth, legends, proverbs, riddles, laments, chants etc. These expressions are usually repetitive in pattern and are circulated by word of mouth. The expressions can be informative, entertaining or both. The oral transmissions are characterised by versions and variations. Axel Olrik brings in the concept of ‘Sagenwelt’ or ‘Sage’, an all-inclusive term for folktale, myth, legend, and folksong. His idea of epic laws of folk narrative explains the characteristics of these forms. Further, the laws of opening and closing suggest that ‘sage’ does not begin with sudden action and end abruptly. The law of repetition emphasises another important characteristic of ‘sage’, that is repetition. Repetition allows to build tension, completes the narrative by giving it its fullest form.

Folklore theories:

Dan Ben Amos defines folklore in context. The folklore forms-like 'mentifacts' and artefacts are described as both organic and super organic, that is, the continuation of the existence of such forms does not require the original setup or cultural contexts. The background details may be useful for an interpretation of such materials, however, it is not relevant for its existence. The folklore materials are thus described by the author as the ones which are mobile, that can be manipulated and that are transcultural in nature. The complex is organic and dear to a culture. The construction of such material could be influenced by the contexts, both social and cultural. The factors that are influential also include the individuals' aptitudes. The influence is obvious in creating distinct structures and textures of the forms. The three kinds of relationships between social context and folklore according to Amos, are possession, representation and creation or recreation. In its cultural context, folklore is a process-a communicative process.

For the analysis of folklore forms, Amos modifies Dundes' levels as communicative marks of folklore to differentiate folklore and non-folklore. The textual marks that differentiate folklore as a particular sort of communication are the diverse categories of narration, opening and closing formulae of and the structure of actions that happen in-between. The textural qualities like rhythmical speech, musical sounds, melodic accompaniment, or patterned design which are markers to distinguish it as artistic. The contextual conventions like time, place, and company in which actions of folklore occur, provide social definition for folklore in culture, along with spatial and temporal definitions.

Richard M. Dorson's classification of folklore on the basis of form is important to understand the constituents of folklore data. Dorson grouped the matters concerning folklore. The grouping consists of four sectors – 'oral literature, material culture, social folk customs and performing folk arts'. Oral literature involves expressive narratives and verbal arts, the utterances like folksongs, folk poetry, proverbs, riddles, laments, chants etc. These expressions are usually repetitive in pattern and are circulated by word of mouth. The material culture includes the physical aspects of the folk. A few examples are skills, recipes, art and craft, clothes etc. The social folk customs emphasise the

shared beliefs, marriage, birth and death. The fourth sector includes performing folk arts like traditional music, folk drama, folk dance, folk speech etc.

A contextual analysis is vital in understanding the oral narratives. The backdrop of the oral narratives set against the cultural, historical and geographical aspects directs to a broader understanding of the material. Drawing on the context situates the oral narratives into categories and across time and space that can be analysed and interpreted.

Performance Studies:

Drawing concepts from anthropology, linguistics, literary criticism, in the spirit of an integrated tradition, Bauman looks at performance centred approach to verbal art, deviating from the usual text centred approach, emphasising on folklore as a communicative process; to understand verbal art as a way of speaking, performance, communication, and how language is used in the construction of the text. Bauman provides a list of communicative means seen in various cultures serving key to performance. This includes special codes, conventional openings and closings, figurative language, stylistic devices, vocalisation and voice quality and patterns including tempo, stress, and pitch. These trends attract the attention of the audience, binding the audience to the performer. The emphasis is to determine the specific conventionalised means that key performance in a particular community. According to Bauman, the performance event is structured by the interplay of setting, act sequence, cultural themes etc. that provide on the empirical relationship between oral art, performance and society.

Richard Schechner explores performance, play, drama and theatre. The book begins with an introduction to the concept of 'the fan and the web' where, in the former, theatre is the only point reached through rituals, performance, play, dance, sport etc. The latter emphasises the dynamic nature of all the mentioned interacting with each other. In the introduction Schechner notes, "Also not only the narratives but the bodily actions of drama express crisis, schism, and conflict...Theatrical techniques center on these incompletable transformations: how people turn into other people, gods, animals, demons, trees, beings, whatever- either temporarily as in a play or permanently as in

some rituals...All these systems of performative transformations also include incomplete, unbalanced transformations of time and space doing specific there and then in this particular here and now in such a way that all four dimensions are kept in play” (p xi). The book stresses on the interconnectedness of ethnology, ritual and performance.

Ecocriticism and Zoofolkloristics:

The complex is embedded in the interactions between the folk and the environment. *Totam* is rendered generally in the sacred groves and the landscape is intertwined with the cultural beliefs of the folk. Thus, a component of the theoretical framework draws on the notions of ecocriticism and zoofolkloristics, emerging perspectives in the analysis of folkloric process. The turn into non-human looks at the entities of nature far from the anthropocentric notion to an ecocentric one. The theoretical notions involving animals as integral components of the environment around and rooted in the natural as well as cultural landscape bring in newer perspectives to look at the material. The theoretical considerations play out in the complex as discussed in detail in the core chapters. A pragmatic view drawing on several approaches to look at the complex is considered across the succeeding chapters.

Methodology and Sources

The progress in knowledge that involves a structured inquiry and scientific methodology to solve problems and create new knowledge can be considered as research. Research involves systematic observation, clarification, analysis, interpretation and evaluation and widens existing knowledge providing new insights into the phenomenon. In his book *Folklore and Folklife:*

An Introduction, Richard M. Dorson discusses “a number of theoretical points of view that currently vie for acceptance” which include historical-geographical method, historical-reconstructional method, ideological manipulation, functional- anthropological approach and psychoanalytic approach.” The field of folklore overlaps with various fields and the combination involves a pragmatic approach. The discussion on the usage of the terms narratives, oral narratives and stories has been a constant in narrative research (as discussed earlier about ‘*fabula- syuzhet*’). In the case of the complex under consideration,

the organised, context specific narratives are the stories that recount the events involving the folk of the region and resonate with them. The next chapter touches upon the aspect of genre against the backdrop of the study. However, the terms are often used interchangeably without a rigid straightjacketing. The study would be based on both primary and secondary sources.

The primary sources would be the relevant data of oral narratives and folklore about *Teyyam*, collected from the field from various informants. The primary data would be verbal and non-verbal expressive behaviour transmitted orally from people associated with the particular context, custodians of tradition, active and passive bearers. The chapters draw data from the field. The field constitutes select sacred groves in the district of Kannur. Given that there are numerous *Teyyam* forms in the complex and each *Teyyam* has unique liturgical renditions, the *totam* considered for the study are based on its length, feasibility to catch the live performance and the division of chapters comes from one of the prominent classifications that typify *Teyyam* into goddesses, heroic narrative and non-human forms. The live complex is captured in the shrines of *Makkamteyyam*, *Veeranteyyam*, *Nageniteyyam*, *Puliteyyam* and *Devakutu*. The recordings also include interviews with the narrators and practitioners of the complex over a period of months spanning from the start of 2020; stalled during the pandemic and resumed thereafter in 2022 to 2024. A select narratives were transliterated and translated in the course of time. The secondary sources would include widely literary and theoretical, global and vernacular and interdisciplinary works on folklore, *Teyyam*, narratology and research methodologies. A set of qualitative and quantitative methods is used to process the cross-generic data.

Initiated by a quick pilot survey aided in narrowing down the study to a feasible number of oral narratives. The survey helped in sampling the locales of the conduct of various forms of *Teyyam*. A few groves were visited and the interactions with the members connected to the committees of the conduct helped in fetching the contact information of the narrators. Thus, the references are keyed in snowball sampling. Further, given that the complex is seasonal, the *Teyyam* calendars were referred to from various community pages and websites dedicated to information about the complex. The forms feasible to the study in

terms of the strength of material, especially the length of the narratives, the conduct of it in the shrines were identified and visited to observe and participate.

Interview as a research tool to listen and learn from the participants themselves by talking at length and noting the anecdotes that they provide is essential to get qualitative data. Interviews were scheduled in such a way that the meetings do not collide with the dates of the conduct of *Teyyam*. The method involved meetings with individuals, especially the narrators to generate information, brought out through questions and conversation. Interviews, walk and talk, talk in interaction have become pervasive in information collection today. It involves various implications and consequences, hence, it calls for a neutral manner where the interviewer has to take a moral and professional stance. The basic format of an interview includes questions by the interviewer to the interviewee(s), which were recorded with the consent of the interviewees. Turn by turn format, mixed formats, multiple interviewees were used to gather data on the complex. In interview-based research, the key is often to grasp the aspects of experiences of the interviewee and notions of the particular categories of people. Thus, both structured as well as unstructured interviews were apt methods, in order to maintain the flow of the conversation with the bearers of the tradition.

Participant observation is another important tool in research. The observational elements are key to the present study involving ethnographic observation of the performance in the sacred space. The process of narration, accompanied by the instruments and the gestures are important and recorded. The groves were visited to gather data, where participant observation played a key role. It involved participation through observation, where, the researcher does not influence the direction of the group, but is involved as an audience to witness the process. The exercise was interspersed with jotting down field notes. The data collected is analysed and a few excerpts are transliterated and translated

Ethnography is a qualitative research method of close study of a community, the actual setting in which people live. It involves data gathering activities like close observation, asking for detailed descriptions to the active tradition bearers and other members of the community. Ethnography aims at the

very perspective of the subject of the project being studied, providing an insider's picture of the community. A major tool in ethnography is note taking which helps in recording and interpreting data.

The methods are to look up close into the material of “the expressive texts of folklore- brought together in aggregate, traced historically and socially, identified and compared textually, understood in their cultural context, appreciated for their texture or performance, and mined for structure, belief, and symbol- showed patterns that the folklorist was trained to discern, and indeed analyze” (Simon J. Bronners, 2007, p.viii). The patterns emerge in the select oral narratives that are segmented into three chapters.

Chapterisation

The thesis is segmented into six chapters. The first chapter is an introduction to the study, followed by the three subsequent core chapters containing interdisciplinary analysis and the last chapter presents the conclusion.

The initial chapter sets the tone for the study by introducing the complex under consideration, that is, the oral narratives of *Teyyam, totam*. It presents the overview of the study along with its significance, nature and scope, followed by the review of literature, lacunae, hypotheses, objectives and methodology of the study. The review of literature looks at the relevant existing work related to the study in terms of broader theoretical and methodological conceptualisations and tries to fill in the gap. The narratological and folkloric considerations on the complex identify the potential in analysing textualisation in the complex and the aims and objectives are identified. An interdisciplinary approach to the texts calls for diverse methods to look at the complex.

The second chapter attempts to trace the textualisation of *totam*. The complex is set against its socio-cultural milieu. The chapter discusses the realisation of the complex through various textual processes. A glimpse into the classification of the complex and the characteristic features it entails is given. A note on the attempt at translation of the select texts follows. The discussion incorporates oral narratives that feature stories within the complex, spanning across the region that are textualised through several dimensions.

The third chapter analyses the select texts of the complex delving into its text, texture and context. The discussion follows themes culled out from the text, the motifs that are at play, followed by the role of memory in its composition, transmission and reception. The chapter also tries to look at the potential of new media against the backdrop of the text. The conceptualisation is based on a few deliberations spanning from narrative thematic analysis, folkloristics, memory studies, and performance studies.

The fourth chapter attempts to delineate the concept of characterisation in the select text to understand the construction and representations in the text. An attempt to figure out the patterns in the text against the backdrop of certain patterns considered in the theoretical discussions. The representation of the hero in the texts forms the crux.

The fifth chapter looks at the interactions entangled in the complex among human-human and human-non human. Borrowing concepts from ecocriticism and zoofolkloristics, to understand how a few texts in the complex incorporate the connections and multiple meanings among the fauna, flora and folk is geared toward in the chapter.

The final chapter sums up the study. The potential and the difficulties of the research is outlined. The chapter presents the summary of the thesis along with the findings and further possibilities in the line of inquiry.

Endnote

- ¹ The term refers to people, here, the reference is attributed to the notion of a group where members have a common thread with shared traditions. Folk, thus here indicates the members who are related to the phenomenon under consideration, *Teyyam* and the related oral narratives of the concerned locale.
- ² The language of Kerala.
- ³ The usage of the word complex is to indicate firstly, *Teyyam* is an aggregate oral narratives, rituals and performances with drumbeats and gestures, elaborate costumes and movements; involving interactions of human-nonhuman, tangible-intangible, fixed-fluid elements. Secondly, it is believed that on a quantitative note, hundreds of *Teyyam* forms are cyclically performed in ritualised contexts. Thirdly, often intriguing in nature, the notion of god and possession has been mysterious to human faculty. ⁴ The apotheosis sees transformation at various levels; a mortal to immortal, a human to *Teyyam* and so on which will be discussed. The apotheosis is often characterised by a suspended state where a divine sense prevails in the apotheosised.
- ⁵ See *Teyyam* season in Chapter 2 and Calendar in Appendix.
- ⁶ For more details, see the discussion on how memory operates in the complex in Chapter 3.
- ⁷ The area falls between the north of Chandragiri River of Kasargod district to the south of Valapatanam River of Kannur district.
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Chapter 2

Tracing the Textualisation of *Totam*

The chapter seeks to look at the complex as an intersection of *Teyyam*¹, *totam* and textualisation. It is segregated into sections on understanding the complex, from etymological roots to the socio-cultural milieu to categorisation to spatio-temporal dimensions to the ritual and textual aspects with perspectives around oral narratives at the core. The speculations about languages, worldviews, cultures and human expressions are innumerable. However, the interrelationship among these aspects are indispensable to understand essence of such expressions. The oral narratives rejuvenate the lore and the land; and forge connections between the landscape and mindscape. These narratives constitute a significant amount of the literature associated with *Teyyam* phenomenon, well-known to the folk of the region; and are honoured with great respect by the narrators as well as the devotees who come to witness. *Totam* can be considered as literary expression in the complex. The oral narratives provide various perspectives contributing to a wide scope of research.

As discussed in the previous chapter, encompassing sacred groves, its verdure, pitch darkness, crescendo of drumbeats, liturgical renditions of the oral narratives, a human in an elaborate red costume, in trance, gets elevated to the position of ‘god’; and people from all walks of life come together to witness the grandeur that is *Teyyam*. A complex, dynamic, cultural, aesthetic and ritual continuity, it is a living tradition and is integral to the socio-cultural facets of the region. A continuity, echoing towards the critique of power, practicing inclusion by blurring boundaries of caste, gender, race and religion, *Teyyam* often engages in social critique. *Totam* forms the literature in the complex, crafted innately and passed on orally and hereditarily among the tradition bearers of the specific communities (See in detail in the following sections). It can be considered as a set of words and phrases, liturgical chants, oral narratives, usually stories to aid the apotheosis. The expressive resources in the form of oral narratives and its performance constitute organised representations of the experiences of the society. Channelled to dispense justice to the fallen hero/ines by apotheosis, the narration supposedly brings peace, prosperity and

salubriousness in the society. The verbal expressions² praise, emanate and appease the god(desse)s and intricate to the belief system of the commoners of the region. Elaborating the backdrop of the *Teyyam* being apotheosised, *totam* runs on to several hours, a whole night and even beyond. The oral narratives can be identified as anecdotes concentrating on the events in the lives of the characters. The stories contour the circumstances in which the mortals are raised to an elevated position, responding to the societal evils and invariably demonstrate the victory of good over evil. The protagonists are often the victims and survivors of societal ill wills, mostly dead and deified³. The narratives construct and celebrate their identities and aid as vehicle of the physical and spiritual transformation.

The conduct of *Teyyam* is initiated by the rendition of *totam* presented by the *totakaran*, the narrator who invoke the deity being worshipped. Clad in red and light toned costume, *elam kolam*, where the word *elam* denotes light and *kolam* denotes form, renders the *totam* to catalyse the transformation of the *kolakaran* which involves elaborate and heavy costume. The narrator accompanied by the beat of single drum, *otachenda*. The narrator presents the historical narration, the origin, the particularities and the greatness of the *Teyyam*. *Totam* includes narratives, hymns of praise and invocation. The narration begins with an invocation, *varavili* of the deity whose form is about to be possessed. “The *torram- paatas* are correlated descriptively and performatively with each phase of the worship and possession-dance for these deities. There are thus *totam* of invocation, of praise and of description of the deity's appearance and its life history all culminating in the onset of the performer's possession, *uraccil*, effected through a *torram* of that same name” (Mills et al.,2003, p.608).

Etymology of *Teyyam* and *Totam*

On tracing the etymology of the word ‘teyyam’, it is believed that the word ‘teyyam’ is a folk etymology and colloquial form of the utterance ‘deivam’, meaning god in Malayalam. The oral tradition associated with *Teyyam* is known as *Totam* or *Totampaatu*. In an interview with Kunjirama Peruvannan, a *Teyyam* practitioner and expertise in the field of oral narratives of *Teyyam* in Kannur remarks, “to simply put, the word means to make,

undakuka.”⁴ He goes on to say that the act of *totuka* or *totikuka* is to get the ‘god’ manifest in the physical dimension. The conduct of *Teyyam* is initiated by the rendition of *totam*. A singer-narrator who sings/narrates the oral narratives of *Teyyam* is known as *totakaran*. Accompanied by the beat of a single drum, *otachenda*, the singernarrator presents the historical narration, the source, the origin, and the greatness of the *Teyyam* through a recitation mixed with the instrument. The peculiar melody in a rhythmic pattern associated with the presentation gives it a sing-song flavour and is often called *totampatu*⁵, or *totam* song.

According to *South Asian Folklore: An Encyclopedia: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka*, the etymology of the word *totam*, “is important to an understanding of its semantic range, for it derives from a Dravidian root meaning "to make something appear" (torr-), in the peculiar sense of effecting as a physical presence what takes shape as a mental conception. The uses of this verb and its noun, *tōrram*, thus pertain both to creative acts of deities themselves, in mythological accounts, and to the invocation of a divine presence through acts of worship or routines of spirit possession. Further, by a false etymological convergence with the Sanskrit word, '*stotra*', meaning hymn of praise, the word *torram* has come to refer as well to the songs of worship by which a deity's presence is invoked in worship and manifested through possession”(Mills et al, p. 608). The folk holds the belief that the god takes the presence cyclically to shower blessings and the presence is catalysed by *totam*. The cyclical conduct of the complex also directs at the idea of the term *totam* to denote the notions related to rebirth and regeneration.

***Totam* and Social-cultural Milieu**

The complex under consideration covers a wide area extending over the region of North Malabar of Kerala⁶. The region sprawls between the rivers Chandragiri in the north extending to Karnataka and Korapuzha in the south and snuggles between the Arabian Sea in the west and the hills of the Western Ghats in the east. The state of Kerala today was then a geo-political amalgamation of four kingdoms namely, the kingdoms of Kolatunad⁷ (Cannanore/ Kannur),

Zamorin (Calicut), Cochin (Kochi) and Quilon (Trivandrum). The present day North Malabar spans around the erstwhile Kolatunad *swarupam*⁸, a political entity ruled by the chieftain, *Kolatiri* with the base at the area called *Chirakal*. The chieftains ruled the administrative entities in the medieval Kerala⁹. A part of the literature on the complex depicts Kolatunad as a part of Tamilakam and believes to have belonged to the descendants of the Musika kingdom¹⁰. Kolatunad, which came into power after the Perumal state during eleventh century, was a continuation of the Mushakarajya or the kingdom of Ezhimalai¹¹ (which later became Elimala; present Ezhimala) the capital of the Kolatunad.

Malabar, etymologically takes its roots from the words *mala* meaning mountain and *bar* stands for land or country, meaning the land of hills. The appellation Malayalam, once stood for its land and now its language, means hills and valleys. The north of the region in the present forms the districts of Kerala - Kasargod and Kannur. The pre-colonial literature on the region features in William Logan's *Malabar Manual*¹². The reorganisation of the states in India saw the state of Kerala which was part of the Madras Presidency divided further into administrative units. It comprises Kannur¹³ as one of the twelve districts. The geographic scope as noted is narrowed down to the district of Kannur, known as the land of lore and looms taking into account the feasibility of collecting data. Spread across an area of two thousand nine hundred and seventy square kilometres, the district is administratively divided into three taluks with one hundred and twenty five villages. The word Kannur stems from *Kannan* and *Uru*, meaning Krishna and place. It is believed that the name of the place is derived from the name of the deity. The region was considered a part of the ancient Tamizhakam with similar patterns of settlement of the Sangam period¹⁴. The earliest known literature of South India, Sangam literature has an influence on the source of socio-cultural aspects of the region and traces a lot of facets of the complex to the period. It is contended that according to Sangam literature, on Sanga Period of Malabar, the undulating features of the region strikes parallel to the physiographic divisions marked by undulating features varying from hills and slopes in the east to the coast of west, the peculiar positioning aids to its social systems and fabric. Physiographically, the space consists of coastal plains and mid and high lands. The Korapuzha emerges from the hills of Wayanad to flow west toward the Arabian Sea and is characteristic to the division of

Malabar, south and north. Culturally, the region is distinct in the belief system that is upheld. The prominence of coast diversified the region with the presence of traders from several parts of the globe and subsequent spread of Muslims across the coast, especially towards the north. Thus, the region paves ways for cultural peculiarities of which the complex of *Teyyam* and *totam* is striking.



Map 2.1: Map depicts the district of Kannur in the north of the state of Kerala in India

Source: https://www.ina.gov.in/?q=Location_and_Geography



Map 2.2. Kannur District

Source: <https://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/kerala/districts/kannur.htm>

Teyyam is steeped well in the social fabrication of the society as far as North Malabar is concerned. The complex has been a significant socio-cultural aspect that is distinctive to the region. Several socio-cultural interactions at various levels are at play within it. *Teyyam* is conducted at the sacred spaces of worship like the *kav* are widespread, also some are conducted also at houses as offerings

and prayers. According to the social arrangements in then days the *kav* and the local shrines with different deities were meant for different communities. It is widely held by commoners that there are innumerable forms of *Teyyam* conducted and performed by different communities, based on their inheritance. The forms are entrenched in the caste dynamic of the region. In the social milieu, the community's right to perform the particular is assigned by what is known as *koyma*, the principality/authority to conduct *Teyyam* that rests in the hand of the trustees of the *kav*. The right to appear as *Teyyam* and to perform is called *cherujanmam*, or what can be roughly translated as birth right, that follows the pattern of succession. It is commonly understood that not all communities can perform all *Teyyam* forms. The *Teyyam* form and *totam* are solely possessed by the concerned practitioners. The right to take up the form and to narrate the oral narratives is vested in the practitioners of the different Scheduled Castes of the region. The cardinal castes with *cherujanmam* include Vannan, Mavilan, Velan, Malayan, Mavilan, Pulayan. It is believed by the narrators that they are gifted individuals by the grace of god to recite *totam* and are bestowed with honorary titles called Peruvannan, Karanamurti to name a few by the local chieftains¹⁵. And, are summoned to present at the sacred spaces associated with the ancestral houses belonging mostly to the so called upper castes. The complex often sees the familial organisations among castes headed by the eldest person in the families, for instance *karanavar* among the Nair, *tandayan* among the Tiyya who takes the decisions of the ancestral households and about conducting the *Teyyam* forms in their shrines.

The organised, systematic and institutionalised conduct of the complex happens also through the involvement of the committees related to particular shrines. As the narratives are culturally transferred from generation to generation, they usually try to pick up the tradition from quite an early age, trying to recite them with the help of the drum to sync with the rhythm – listening to one's father, grandfather, elder brother or so on. The amateurs accompany the elders journeying from sacred places to sacred places, where the *Teyyam* takes place, to help and learn during the *Teyyam* season. The phenomenon where several *Teyyam* forms are conducted on a massive scale at once is *kaliyatam*, combined of *kali* meaning play and *atam* meaning dance and it is conducted once in many years. The gap in the year owes to the economic

angle, as conducting the complex demands a lump sum of amount. The bigger the gap the richer the festivities and are called *perumkaliyatam*, where *perum* means massive.

To pinpoint the surfacing of the complex poses a challenge given that it is been a traditional continuity, passed on through generations. However, the essence of identifying the complex as folklore lies fundamentally in its anonymity and tradition. To go by the oral accounts, it is often attributed that the complex could have roots associated to animistic beliefs and nature worship. The worship often take the form of possession dance¹⁶ to propitiate the deities. Though Freeman observed “the absence of any absolute chronology” (De Martino, 2016, p.25) his take also reflects the opinion of the scholars who have traced the phenomenon to medieval Malabar¹⁷. The practitioners believe that the initial contents and forms of *Teyyam* goes back in time to Manakkadan Gurikal whose encounter with the then Kolatiri leaves the latter impressed with his moves, dexterity and magic. It is said that the former reaches the place of latter by overcoming the hassles and goes on to showcase thirty five forms of *Teyyam*. Thereafter, the kingdom saw these forms getting conducted over the years as per the chieftain’s order for the prosperity of the society across the sacred shrines of the region, under the sovereign of the Tiruvarkatu Bhagavati, the principle deity at the prime sacred shrine of the region at Madayi.

As far as the land ownership in the region is concerned, the possession of lands were limited to the upper class, especially the feudal land holders, called landlords, *janmi* of the then society, which mostly included Nair households who took up the military activities and Brahmins who took up the dominant status in the caste system. The land owning chieftains often leased the land to the communities in the feudal order who were perceived as so called lower castes. The community engaged in toddy tapping and tending palms, *Tiyya* forms a major influential set of people of the region. Another striking aspect of property and familial organisation is the system of inheritance that is peculiar to the region. The system adhered is that of *marumakatayam* which is matrilineal system of inheritance as opposed to *makatayam*, the patrilineal form of inheritance. This dynamic is addressed in the context of familial organisation and environment in the next and penultimate chapters respectively, against the backdrop of *totam*.

Though the social fabrication formerly saw customarily community based occupations, most of them take up various professions today. For instance, the customary occupations prevalent in the then region of the north of Malabar including washing and weaving, singing, animal husbandry and midwifery, weaving agricultural products with bamboo, basket weaving, tilling, farming were associated with the communities of Vannan, Malayar, Velan, Mavilan Koppalar, Pulayar, to name a few. The *Teyyam* forms taken by the corresponding communities, for example to draw a non-exhaustive list to include *Makkam* and *Neeliaar Bhagavati*; *Vishnumurti*, *Rakta Chamundi* and *Devakutu*; *Parava* and *Kaluruti*; *Karanonteyyam* and *Vanapootam*; *Gulikan* and *Bapiriyam*; *Nagakani* and *Gulikan* respectively.¹⁸

The manifestation of god in the form of *Teyyam* is associated to the humans who were relegated in the society. The function attempts at restoring the good over evil. The manifestation sees the human takes the form of human, non-human deities and back to human. The forms are often connected to highHinduism. Further, the certain religious tones seep into the complex. For example, incarnations of the forms of *Teyyam* from Shaivite and Vaisnavite roots are evident. . For examples, the forms of *Teyyam* like *Potan* are associated with the forms of the Hindu god Siva, the forms of *Teyyam* such as *Palantayi Kannan* or *Visnumurti* are related to the forms of the Hindu god Visnu. Further, the forms of *Teyyam*, associated with *Bhagavati* are related to the principles of *Sakti* and mother goddesses. A few examples include *Muchilotu Bhagavati*, *Makkam Bhagavati*, *Neeliyar Bhagavati*. And, some of the forms are related to tutelary and ancestral worship. A few of the forms, *Puliteyyam*, *Panchuruli*, *Nagakanyaka*, *Devakutu* associate with the elements of nature. On thinking *Teyyam* through waters, the engagement with sea is central many forms of *Teyyam* like *Bapiriyam*, *Aryapunkani*, *Pumarutan* to name a few. Further, the complex often depicts the secular and amicable religious tie of the region. For instance, the forms of *Mapilateyyam* describes stories of characters who are Muslims. The synthesis of sacred and secular colours the complex in distinct tones. The pantheon sees the forms of *teyyam* like *Ali Chamundi*, *Mukri Poker*, *Ummachi*, *Bapiriyam*. In *Introspection and Insight: South Indian Minds in the Early Modern Era*, David Shulman notes “A lively oceanic trade to and from the great Kerala ports complements this picture of a reconfigured, diversified

socio-economic order driven by individuals, inevitably rivals, some of them painted in bold colours like the Muslim pirates of the northern Kerala coast” (p. 34). The cross-cultural nuances are significant in the complex. The *totam* of *Bapiriyam*, for instance, alludes to historical traces of nautical connections and trade in the Western coast. The pattern of settlement also revolved around the region being a sprawling port town. The oral narrative ‘seascapes’ *Bapiriyam*, a *Mapila*, Malabar Muslim, as a sea captain who sets sail in the *marakalam*, a wooden boat, against all odds. It could further be seen as the space of ‘thought’ engaging with the movement of people, ideas and materials through the waters. A cultural diffusion between *Teyyam* and *Bhutakola*¹⁹, as cultures come in contact with one another, are often brought out by the scholars. Owing to the porosity at the borders, *Bhutakola* or *Bhutaradane*, that is the worship of spirits conducted in the state of Karnataka, the two traditions are often linked in terms of possession, dance and ritual.

Through the enactment of ‘god’ accompanied by the telling of the stories, the complex question the oppressions and power play at various layers. It is also believed that the background to the complex could be a counter set up to the denial of access to places of worship to the people belonging to the so called lower castes. Another striking element in the dynamic of the complex is the notion of touch. The idea of haptic reflects how a human from the specified castes was subjected to untouchability. And the complex directs toward a subversion where the apotheosised form heals the devotees through touch. The god touched and holds the hand of the devotees to console and nurture hope. The relegation also saw discrimination in terms of sight, where they were forced to stay far from the vicinity of the dominant caste. The complex featuring a spectacle by the tradition bearers who narrate and take up the form presents a sight to see, showcasing a spectacle thus could be considered as a call for visibility, critiquing the injustice.

The folk imagination addresses trauma grounded in their experiences through the complex- working through *totam* and healing through enactment, in which humour is deployed as a strategic tool. Taking toll on normalcy by overpowering circumstances, intertwining the personal with the political, trauma and resilience operates at several levels in the narrative. The trauma generated is processed collectively in a culturally and ritually mediated space,

making sense of the event. The process takes place at two levels. One, synchronically as the event is experienced by the character, as the mortal being gets transformed. Second, diachronically as the agent of trauma operates and pervades the day-to-day. Out of the many *Teyyam* forms, the *Teyyam* known as *Potanteyyam*, where *potan*, meaning stupid or numskull employs humour as a strategy to fight and upend injustices and societal evils. It is believed that the character belonged to the lower caste was murdered by the upper caste landlord for questioning the caste system – “What colour is the blood that oozes out on jabbing you and jabbing me?” and has been deified for his valour. Critiquing the prevalent power dynamics of caste *Potanteyyam*, often taken up by the specified members of the communities of Pulayan and Malayan, resorts to frivolity to bring in seriousness, mocking hegemonies. The performance sees the *Teyyam* humorously uttering “it is cold out here” coolly lying on the pyre of fire, *meleri* and laughing hysterically about it, to use absurdity to dismantle the establishments. It seems just for jest but the jibe is subtle yet sharp as it goes, “What do I know? I am just a *potan*, after all!” On analysing the content and style of the oral narratives associated with the Clackamas, Jacob Melville describes it as an exploratory exercise writes, “Every plot, act, scene, and motif is a mosaic of processes and ties of diverse kinds. Some may be historical... Still others arise from the social structure which failed to provide formal or permissible outlets for feelings which were then expressed in precultural actors and happenings” (1959, p.122). The apotheosis thus marks the humans from the specified castes getting deified thus, securing a raised position of god; provide agency, identity and legitimacy to their own beliefs and modes of worship in the sacred space and time as discussed in detail in the following section.

Space and Time in the Complex

The cosmological and cosmographical concepts converge in the complex. The interaction of temporal and spatial components in the complex is dynamic. *Teyyam* is performed according to the Malayalam calendar²⁰, from the month of *Tulam*, mid-October till *Edavapati* mid *Edavam*, June with the onset of Southwest monsoon as an annual cyclic ritual, often referred to as the *Teyyam* season. It parallels with the sowing and harvesting of paddy in the region. The groves contour the experiences of the commoners, often consisting of *pali ara*, a sanctum sanctora. The distinct features of this space are firstly, the sanctorum

is a limited, yet defined and discrete space of reverence and secondly the space is not consecrated by idols but by a lamp. The god appears, emanates and no *Teyyam* can be retained in a fixed space. It is believed that the ‘stage’ is where the *Teyyam* is. And, the space is set in tandem with the ritual context where the oral narratives enable an ambience for the complex. The human ascends to the position of god each time the oral narrative is presented in the specified contexts. The oral narratives depicts the locations, whereabouts, and milieu. A confluence of landscape, mindscape a ‘culturalscape’ constitute the complex. A strong sense of place, topophilia operates in *totam* along with a subversive space for dissident voices. The belief that a form of *Teyyam* is not fixed to a space is an interesting aspect of the complex that can be associated with the notion of mobility. For instance, out of many *Teyyam* forms, some narratives portray the tales of deifications of commoners who critiqued the social injustices in the name of caste, gender and so on. Reflecting on the natureculture continuum in the narrative, the grove where the story is performed thus become liminal spaces – the in between of the plants, animals, forested hills and humans living juxtaposing each other- a collusion formed as a result of stories embodied to the space. The groves are commonly associated with the shrines which are under the caretakers who belong to a particular community or particular family. On the situatedness of the complex, Tarabout writes how the complex provides “meaning to the daily lives of their devotees and they are crucial in producing and reproducing ‘locality’ itself – lineages, castes, villages, groups of devotees...” (2005, p.187)

Teyyam occurs in time and does *totam*. The sequence of temporality of occurrence are days scheduled as per the calendrical patterns and astrological deliberations by the stakeholders involved in the complex (See Annexure - III). The practise of deciding upon the dates and timings is called *varachuvekkal*. The elders of the ancestral houses where the *Teyyam* gets conducted approach the *teyyakaran* to aid in the conduct. The narratives are rendered during these period and the narration occur in time. The *totakaran* engages in narration on the specified time in the specified shrine or grove. The required time for the narration varies from each *totam*. A few *totam* narratives stretch for hours together and other consists of limited chants. The time in the complex could be

handled in synchronic and diachronic dimensions as far as the narratives are concerned. The narration taking place in the context is synchronic in the sense that the narration takes place in particular time. Diachronically, the complex has been conducted cyclically over a period of time for centuries. (See more in Chapter 3.)

The stories are delivered via orality and the delivery is significantly dependent on memory. The telling takes place in the shared and sacred spaces of groves and enhances a sense of solidarity among the folk who comes to witness the complex. The storytelling as a cultural and ritual practice as far as the complex is concerned. The active participation is put forth by the devotees, and the narratees as space turns into a locus of imaginative expressions of the folk. The shared telling and listening builds an institution of collective and cultural remembrance. The divide between the past and the present gets blurred. The transmission and dissemination of memory is addressed as ‘mnemonic imagination’ in Michael Pickering and Emily Keightley article thus:

...along the two temporal planes in which it occurs: vertically, through time; and horizontally, in time. It is because we regard memory transmission as involving the mutual interaction of these two planes that we introduce the concept of the mnemonic imagination. The value of the concept is that it enables us to see, *inter alia*, how communities of memory emerge. (2013, p.115)

The calendrical patterns often based on the astrological deliberations and the spatial and temporal dimensions could be relation to the idea of inheriting and disseminating memory. The processes occur within and across time. *Totam* transmits knowledge in a vertical fashion as the oral narratives are passed down to the succeeding generations by the bearers as the novices initiate their learnings through observation, participation and repetition. Invariably the bearers of *totam* describes the acquisition of knowledge via the art of seeing and hearing, *kandum ketum* to pay attention to and grab the oral and visual information of the complex. The horizontal transmission occurs as the *totam* conveys stories in the groves to the folk, the narratees, and the devotees who are physically present to absorb the telling. Further, on relating the narratives to memory, as put in the article “Stor(y)ing Memory and Totam: Perspectives

toward Oral Narratives”, by Santhwana Santhosh and Joly Puthussery, it can be noted that:

Stories and rituals could be considered as products, and reminiscence and representation as mnemonic practices. To extend it further to the considerations here, *totam* and *teyyam* qualifies as mnemonic products and *teyyam* as an event can be seen as a mnemonic practice. The mnemonic products and practices are produced, reproduced and consumed building a sense of a collective, sacred and creative process. As collective concerns are reiterated in the social space, a synthesis of memories is produced; a confluence of memory inherited through generations and acquired through experiencing the complex. The interweaving of the levels forges a connection between socialisation and memory, along the lines of Maurice Halbwachs’ idea on which Jan Assmann in the work *Religion and Cultural Memory* builds – “The socialization process enables us to remember, but the converse is also true: our memories help us to become socialized. Socialization is not just a foundation, but also a function of memory. We can go so far as to speak of a “bonding memory”” (2006, p.4).(2025, p.220).

The complex sees the operation of memory at different levels including personal gestures of remembrances and collective remembering that acts out in sociocultural and ritual contexts. By drawing from the framework of Maurice Halbwachs on memory is incorporated to note the play of memory. The narrator on an individual level utters verbal chants and stories, the performer acts out gestures to make sure that the stories reach out to the audience. At the individual level, memory revolves around the narrator trying to recall the telling and an individual narratee trying to relate to what is being told and attempts to empathise with the characters presented.

On narrated time and narrative time real time in *Narrative Perspectives in Fiction* Paul Ricoeur’s notion is of both ‘emplotment (temporal muthos)’ and the ‘imitation of action (mimesis)’ provides an understanding of the character

and structure of the narrative experience. (p.4) The narratives sets down the descriptions of journeys of several realms. The season is wound up by the festival in Kalarivatukal temple in Valapatinam, Kannur. The examples such details in the case of *totam* is dealt with in detail in the next chapter. The oral narratives and performances, in the backdrop of the phenomenon discussed in the chapters reveals that these are not mere retrievals of survivals of the past. As valuable affective markers, the complex informs identities of individuals, communities and region constructing worldviews even today, bridging of dimensions of spatiality and temporality. (For more, see the following chapters).

***Totam* as Ritual**

The complex has ritual relevance. It is a live tradition being followed in the region. *Totam* can be considered as the liturgical recitation of/on *Teyyam* and takes a place of primacy in the whole wide *Teyyam* complex. The rendition of *totam*, is integral to the *Teyyam* and sets tone to the complex. The practitioner who takes up the apotheosis and takes up the rendition of *totam* believe that they are bestowed with energy; that instilled in them is a divine power to perform. In the introduction to the book *Ritual, Performance, Media* edited by Felicia Hughes-Freeland, it is opined that “The uses of performance analogies and dramaturgical metaphors to give expression to the structures and processes of human behaviour in the social sciences are numerous” (1997, p.3). Rituals are important elements in such expressions. *Totam* functions as a ritual rendering from manifestation, to telling the tale of the god being emanated to aiding the performer and the audience to be in the divine ambience. It becomes a focus of attention as devotees come in to listen to the story narrated as it, thus become a collective listening. As a part of ritual of divination it conveys the message through *phalastuti* or benedictory verse. The rituals also involve sections of rendering that come to the fore not just for manifestation but also during the anointment and adornment of the performer, allowing the performer to get in on the act. The bearers who take up the form and narrate the stories obligatory take up fasting and practice lent for specific days. The period in turn prepares the mind and body to take up the form and bestows the mortal with will power to undergo the transformation. As the *kolakaran* and *totakaran* are approached, they are asked to take up the form and narrate the *totam* by providing them with

betel leaves, *vetila* and money by the in charge of the shrine or elderly member of the ancestral house. The act is termed as *adayalam kodukal*, where *adayalam* means mark and *kodukal* refers to the act of giving. *Totam* includes narrative songs, hymns of praise and invocation. The *Teyyam* performance is preceded by the rendition of *totam*. These are rendered by the narrator who dedicates the songs to deity being worshipped. The *elam kolam* (discussed earlier) with light costume iterates the *totam* preceding the grand performance which involves elaborate and heavy costume. Drawing from Jakobson and Bogatyrev, Honko writes, “For the folk singer solidarity to tradition and social convention is obligatory” (2000, p.5). On adding to the idea, he further remarks on the importance of the folk and collective consciousness in the process of textualisation and notes, “the consonance of a song with the values of at least one group promoting recognition of the singer in question seems to constitute the kernel of collective creativity” (p.5).

The apotheosis sees ritual which spans in the belief systems, composing of fertility cult, serpent worship, animal worship and worship of *paradevata*, ancestral and *taidevata*, mother goddesses conducted for societal well-being and prosperity. *Teyyam* forms a pantheon as discussed earlier and consists of several forms. Each form is elaborate and extravagant from attire, to mask to weapon, to gesture to moves to oral narratives. The classification of forms of *Teyyam* sees a majority of the forms leaning towards the worship of mother goddesses. The mother-goddess worship is considered central in the ritual tradition. In the complex, most of the forms are female deities. The mother goddesses known as *Ammadevata* or *Matrudevata* are symbolised by *Bhadrakali*, *Chamundi* and *Bhagavati* who are believed to be the equivalents of *parasakti*, or the ultimate power²¹. It is a social symbol that helps in constructing a self-affirming image of woman and maintaining a value system.

The ritual involves the presentation of *totam* beginning with *Varavili*, a song of invocation ‘*varika varika deivame*’, meaning ‘Come, come god, be in sight.’ For example, in the case of *Makkam totam*, the invocatory lines go:

Polika, polika
Bhagavati polika,
deepam polika,

pushpam polika,
nadu polika,
nadu vazhum swami polika,
taravadum polika.

Let it flourish, let it flourish
Praise to the Bhagavati,
to the holy perpetual lamp,
to the flowers of offering,
to the land,
to the ruler,
to the *Kadaangot* house.

Another instance is the case of Kativanur Veeran, where the narrator invokes the god: “Njan chollum totam/ Kelpam varika/ Kativanur Veeran” meaning “I render the *totam*, please descend to heed to it/ Kativanur Veeran.” The invocation includes formulaic expressions such as “*hari vardika*” and “*phalam vardika*”, where *vardika* means to increase, suggesting that the call here is for the prosperity and bountifulness.

Often followed is *stuti*, a song of praise usually in the pattern of ‘Will sing of your birth, bravery, sing the fame of you’. Also, some of the *totam* presents the lines of praise to gods like *Ganapati* and *Saraswati*, often considered as gods prayed to for blessings to begin something anew in high Hinduism. For example. In the case of *Puliteyyam* (discussed in detail in the Chapter 6), the gods are addressed as “Karimukhan/ viravodu malar tozhuten/ Tuna taru navil” where the god *Ganapati* is addressed as Karimukhan, the elephant-faced and is pleaded, *tozhuten* with reverence for blessings to speak by the narrators. John Brockington in the article, “The textualization of the Sanskrit epics” notes, “The use of a personal name with a related epithet is particularly common and has often become stereotyped” (2000, p.195). A similar pattern is evident in *totam*. For instance, as seen above, the *Ganapati* is related to the epithet ‘Karimukhan’. Another epithet used to refer to the god is *Otakombudayan*, meaning single-tusked or single-toothed, where *ota*, *kombu*,

udayoun mean single, tusk and bodied. Such strategies are used to introduce the *totam*.

The ritual manifestation involving elaborate costumes is often accompanied by the *aniyara totam*, rendered while adorning the specified individual in the green room / back ‘stage’. For example, in the *totam* of the teyyam form *Urpazhasi deivam*, the description sees the lines:

Neelamaala, Pachamaala, Pavizhamaala

Peelimudi abaranam aninja

Mari mahavyadi ozhicha

Urpazhashi deivam tuna!

Adorned in blue and green corals

And feather-like hair unfurled

Eradicated all ails

God Urpazhasi to the rescue!

On appearing as god, *totam* sees the rendering of *polichu patu* for blessing & prosperity of the folk. The elaborate rendering also include *anchadi* based on the metrical conditions, constituting the description of the origin, story and deeds of the *Teyyam* being performed. The description is organised in the pattern in relations of five as the compound stands for *anch* meaning five and *adi* meaning beat(s). *Neetukavi* involving slow rendition of the deeds of the *teyyam* paralleling the moves and gestures enacted. The ritual manifestation culminates with *Urachil totam* consisting of swift paced and aggressive rendition that accompany the frenzied moves of the *Teyyam*. The complex winds up on a note called, *atmam kodukal*, which is to submit the self to the divine power and in a sense to give back the power to the sacred space. On a note of completion of the conduct the narrative of some forms of *Teyyam* ends on *anugraha vrusti*, where the narrator calls for blessings on the land and its people. The lines go:

Natinum tarakum

Nadu vazhunavarkum

Ere ere gunam varanam

Veera Kolatnuadu

Vazhunavarkum

Gunam varanam

Upon the native land and the shrine,

Upon the ruler of the land,

Let blessings galore.

Upon the powerful Kolatunad

Upon the ruler,

Let blessing galore.

A few narratives end with the closing formula, *yogam varate*, as the narrator wishes for more returns and chances to fall upon to further renderings of the *totam* on a note of fulfilment, optimism and efficacy.

Integral to the belief system, the complex is venerated by the devotees and is considered sacred. The belief often involves devotees presenting offerings to the apotheosised in the form of valuables, in the form of money, gold; and in some cases animals for sacrifice, oil for the lamps and so on. In turn, it is believed that the god often presents the devotees with *kuri*, a powder consisting of rice and turmeric powder. The key here is that the powder has the healing property as most often the *Teyyam* forms are prayed to for health and prosperity. The long-term ritual conventions, are transmitted through generations. The actions in the complex follow in an orderly fashion the commands that are imbibed throughout generations among the practitioners. Often the wrongful rendering as ritual transgression – drawing god's wrath and the sense of reverence prevails among the devotees who come to witness. The post ritual involves rewarding the bearers of the complex. Earlier it ranged from grains to clothing to alcohol. The reward has seen a shift to cash based one today.

The apotheosis signifies the ritual transformation. The individual of the specified community transforms into a god from human form and the transition involves a schema. It marks a shift from one status to another and the transition calls for ceremonies. In this light, the complex can be treated with the schema of rites of passage proposed by Arnold van Gennep in the work *Rites of Passage*.

In the introduction to the work, Solon T. Kimabali writes:

Van Gennep saw “regeneration” as a law of life and of the universe: the energy which is found in any system gradually becomes spent and must be renewed at intervals. For him, this regeneration is accomplished in the social world by the rites of passage given expression in the rites of death and rebirth... Van Gennep, with others, accepted the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane; in fact this is a central concept for understanding the transitional stage in which an individual or group finds itself from time to time” (1960, p. viii).

On several levels in the complex, the pattern emerges. Firstly, as mentioned the complex is an epitome of transformation involving apotheosis and is conducted at regular intervals. Gennep opines that ceremonies that mark the transition of seasons and time periods parallel the rite of passage. On a similar vein, the complex conducted to mark the harvest in the region can be paralleled to rites of passage. Secondly, the individuals of the communities involved goes through a transition marking a change in social positions. Thirdly, the characters represented in the complex sees death and regeneration. The sacred and profane²² worlds are at play in the ritual ceremonies. For instance, in the complex purification involving cleansing of the sacred space and flowing a strict lent by the practitioners constitute the rites that mark pre-liminal stage and separation from the day-to-day lived experiences and ordinary surroundings. Further, in the shrines, often such rites are marked by the crossing of its door and threshold by the mortal who is about to take up the form indicating a divine power being instilled in him. It is striking that the practitioners are from the castes that were once relegated in the society in the name of untouchability. The parallel here is to the idea of purity and pollution in the name of caste and how the transcend of the individual from human to god is acquired by elaborate ceremonies. The elaborate rites are believed to be performed to acquire the

sacred characteristics. Often, the complex ends with communal feast including the rite of eating together, which is associated with the rite of incorporation. From sanctifying the spaces of conduct, to narrators rendering the invocation by naming the form about to be apotheosised to adorning with elaborate costumes to sharing the communal meal, the complex essentially constitutes the schema of the rites of passage.

The ritual transgression could be related to the notion of purity and pollution. The conduct of the ritual aligns with age old beliefs. It involves not just the appeasement of the god that is apotheosised but involves a sense of satisfaction among the members who conduct and among the devotees who witness. Often the ritual is attributed to a sense of satisfaction, *agrahapurti*.

Totam and Orality

The oral narratives in the complex are the told by the narrator as prose and verse alternate to create the storyworld. To the complex hearing is as inevitable as telling as audience, especially devotees are the narratees. *Totam* are considered as prized possessions of various communities who perform *Teyyam* that are passed on orally, shared and learned from generations to generations. The narratives are learnt invariably through the mode of word of mouth, spoken rather than written and are essentially oral in nature. Usually accompanied by the single drum, the *ota chenda* the narratives are presented to tell the tale of the *Teyyam* being performed. The narrative portrays several episodes ranging from the origin, birth, childhood, challenges and resolutions of the heroes or the gods. The narrators through the format involving flow of words or *manipravala* and vernacular words or *vachal*²³ as local register foreground the orature of the complex, comprising of liturgical registers specific to *totam*, usually understood as a mix of words borrowed from Malayalam, Sanskrit and Tulu. The use of *vachal* embodies distinct artistic and aesthetic communicative elements in the complex, different from the day-to-day spoken utterances of the region. The commencement, *tidangal* of the ritual enactment is also marked by beating the drums, *kotu*. The significance also lies in declaration of the beginning of the ritual. Further, the drumbeats facilitate the invocation, *varavili* of gods to bless and manifest in the performer, singing their praises. The manifestation, through orality to reality is channelled through the narratives, rendered with pious and ritual purity maintained by the singers. The

introductory verses are essentially the praise purposed to invoke the god(desse)s to gradually emanate in the performer. *Teyyam*, then is elevated to the exalted status of god(desse)s in the minds of the devotees. It is believed that *Teyyam* manifests through the invocation and appears as opposed to the fixed idols of gods.

How the oral traditions get maintained is an important concern in the work *Memory in Oral Traditions: The Cognitive Psychology of Epic, Ballads, and Counting-out Rhymes*. The key to the easy recalling during the rendition is associated with the metrical rendering and the melody that accompanies it. The tone that is monotonous in nature add to the melody. On the dissemination of what is being recalled, it states:

“Each word recalled provides cue for the next word. The cues involve all the forms of organization that might be involved in recalling the next word. Thus, part way into a ballad the next word to be recalled is being cued by schema, or forms of organization, that involve meaning, imagery, spatial layout, rhyme, alliteration, assonance, rhythm, and motor movements accompanying the verbal output and melody” (p.280).

The practitioners of *totam* also resorts to the beats accompanied on the drum to ease the methods of recalling. The drum used for the process is often the single drum called as *otachenda*. Remembering is parallel with forgetting at times during the telling of lengthier versions of the oral narratives. In *Myth, Ritual and the Oral*, that deals with the LoDagaa myth of Northern Ghana, Jack Goody makes an observation that to imagine or to fancy is not particular to any one culture and is a common aspect in the cases of rendering of the oral narratives. Moreover, the oral cultures are fluid and is not swayed by the rigidity of the written words. Often, the renderings are socio-culture specific and to make sense of it, the knowledge of the ritual that is intact to the telling is essential. The fluidity at times paves way to forgetting, which part of creating. Kunjirama Peruvannan,²⁴ a renowned practitioner of *Totam* and an expert in the area of *Teyyam* points out that improvisation is part and parcel of the rendition even though the recitation is ritual-bound. He believes that it is the status of being chosen to render sacred *totam* to invoke and praise the deities that gives him the power to remember and sharpen the mnemonic

imagination and faculties. The idea of *manodarmam* is peculiar to the practitioners of *totam*. *Manodarmam* could be understood as the command of one's mind. The command moulds the telling to let in a sweet spot of creativity to otherwise ritual-bound narration. The uniqueness in the rendering could also be attributed to this notion as each narrator's repertoire is influenced by his own *manodramam*. The narratives are streamlined as preserves of certain communities, but attributing to several factors like the preferences of the committees, learning interests of the individual, expertise, the narratives are learnt and rendered in spite of the traditional markings. The number of *totam* that a narrators knows is usually dependent on their will to learn. Henry Glassie on discussing performance and tradition in the article "Tradition" observes,

But the performer is positioned at a complex nexus of responsibility. Taking command in the events out of which the future will rise, performers must, at once, keep faith in the past, with their deceased teachers, and with the present, the mumbling members of the audience who seek engagement now and might act upon what they learn (1995, p. 402).

The observation is apt in the case of transmission of *totam* from one generation to another. As discussed earlier, the initiation of amateurs into the narration and other paraphernalia associated with the complex comes through accompanying the experienced, so as to observe, imitate, learn and practise. "One audience member hears, enjoys, forgets; another absorbs the song, becomes a performer and a link in the chain of transmission" (p.402). He further noted, "the artisans tell me, they worked, watched, tried, and, at last, taught themselves" (p. 408).

The oral narratives catalyses the manifestation of god. It is striking that the orality aids a tangible manifestation. The verbal and the non-verbal intermingles through orality and haptics as devotees witness, interact, talk and touch the god to communicate their woes. Also, the idea of touch reflects the limitations imposed on the sections of society by refraining them from the places of worship. Thus, haptics as a counter to the societal setup is inevitable. The dynamics thus involves oral, visual and haptics creating a sensory

experience. *Totam* employs gestures, actions, drums, music to create a speech event to orient to meaning making and manifesting. The composition constitutes several sets of formulae. The formulae accomplishes the narrative functions to carry the story forward. The descriptive phrases, certain stock material, numbers indicating the passage of time are common formulae that recur giving characteristic feature of orality to the telling in the complex. The stories are conveyed through oral devices such as formulae, verbatim repetitions, foreshadowing and so on to structure the telling and links the beginning, middle and end to gives explicitness. *Totam* also embellished by descriptive details of the journeys undertaken by the characters. The instances of such formulae are discussed in the following chapters.

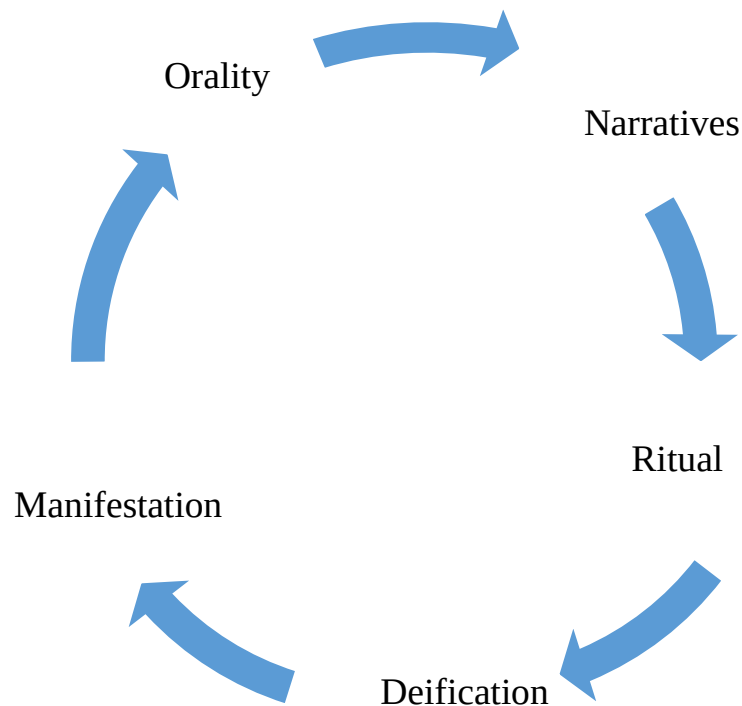


Diagram 2.1: Oral narratives aiding the cyclical complex.

Albert B. Lord in his study of the composition of oral narrative poetry and the dynamics of poetic construction suggests treating oral narratives as not a mere genre, but as a way of life, listening or reading to a story it gets transcended to tales to sustain. It is interesting to note how such a way of life is paved by the narrators in the complex. Lauri Honko notes in the the article “Text

as process and practice: the textualization of oral epics” that “For a fieldworker, oral textmaking is not shrouded in mystery. The “voice” becomes audible through the singer and the “text” takes shape by oral/aural means. It is his/her singing praxis embedded in its social ambience which seems to open up vistas on textualization” (2000, p.15).

***Totam* and Genre**

The genres in folklore, its categorisation and classification help in identifying, locating, understanding, and analysing the items of folklore. The exercise as Trudier Harris puts it in the article “Genre” is to “stabilise” the “folk creation.” (p.514). As folklore falls into various genres, the narratives too are genred into overlapping criteria, with traits of oral narratives, folk narratives, heroic songs, and holy narratives. What genre does *totam* fall into? *Totam* forms the oral literature involving expressive narratives, verbal arts, and utterances in the dynamic, thus could be treated under the overarching genre of narratives. “...genre analysis is also a metafolkloristic problem, because central to the study of narrative expressions is the understanding of what system of expressions they fit into locally” (p. 12).

From the etymology, discussed earlier, it is noted that *totam* often is put under the category of songs in general. Given that the complex revolves around stories, it could be placed in the wider brackets of folktale usually told in secular sphere. On the other hand, as far as further generic subdivisions are concerned, the literature in the complex could be considered as sacred as well, given its ritualistic context which involving chants and hymns. The voracity characterises the stories as oral narrative, the ritual context renders it as liturgical rendition, the recounting of events of tragedy as spoken statement, so as the truth shall triumph, embodies a testimony in it. Attesting to the testimonial value that lies in the oral narratives, Meg Jensen in the article “Testimony” writes –

“Testimonial forms of storytelling that attest to traumatic experience are as old as humanity itself. From ancient myths, legends and folk tales in all cultures, to songs of war, conquest, revenge and violence, both the power and the vulnerability of what it means to be human has been expressed through narratives”(p.67).

Contributing to social commentary, the exchange of dialogues in the complex attributes to its traits of discourse. As a body of creative imagination and expression through words by the folk, of the folk and for the folk, the body of *totam* could be considered as folk literature. The familiarity brought in by sharing the story in a sacred setting for years gives the telling a tone of reminiscences as the characters are local and familiar. Among the folk, the tales are considered historical, local and vernacular, characterising them as legends. “Individual, lived experiences have become as significant in the classifying structure as are tales several hundred years in age” (Degh, 1985, pp. 37-54). Given that the major characters are humans and the lore narrated are local, according to William Bascom’s²⁵ schema, such narratives fall under the genre of legends. As far as the attitude is concerned, the narratives are sacred and are believed to be facts that have taken place by the teller and the listener.

Here, the oral narrative is taken as the broad generic heading. The attempt is not to straightjacket *totam* into specific genre, but to reflect on its genre-agnostic, cross-cutting genres, that opens up various possibilities of interpretation, building up a generic continuum. Thus, the interaction of properties of various sorts is remarkable in understanding the characteristics of *totam*. The oral transmissions are characterised by versions and variations. It is, here, interesting to note that Albert B. Lord in his study of the construction of oral narratives and the dynamics of poetic composition suggests treating oral narratives as not just a genre, but as ‘a way of life’. Moreover, the presence of the texts as a part of the living tradition makes them living texts that are dynamic in nature. Thus, the folk expressions are their worldviews and perceptions of the surroundings they inhabit and are part of and are disseminated through various texts.

Totam and Texts

The complex involves a negotiation of multiple texts, complementing each other. The complex gets textualised in multiple ways. The narratives are realised in multi-textual dimensions that sees the production of several texts at different levels. The texts are realised through multi-texts at the levels: oral, non-verbal, ‘mentifact’ (mental text), performance and digital. To the complex, oral and performance texts are fundamental and in extension by the various means of the elaborate costumes, the colours, the ambience that nurtures a

collective consciousness among the audience. The influence of the complex is evident in the case of day-to-day common parlance among the conversations of folk bringing in the features of orality. For instance, the commoners use proverbs that includes references to the complex, *Totam choyalumpole* 'refers to the *elam kolam* circumambulate the shrine thrice in a deliberately slow and rhythmic manner and is used in the context when someone is too slow and dillydallies. *Teyyam varum pole* is used in the context when someone is dressed up and adorned elaborately. *Teyyam uranjadum pole* is a proverb used to refer to the context when someone is furious and sets off at a furious pace.

The oral text gets visualised through the performative text in its ritualistic context. As discussed earlier, orality is intrinsic to oral narratives, transmitted by word of mouth among generations of narrators. The *totam* of some forms of *Teyyam* emphasises the oral and visual components. For example the narrative constitutes of the following lines in the *totam* of the *teyyam* form called *Gulikan: Totate kelpanum/ Kolate kanmanum*, meaning "To listen to the *totam* / To see the form." The visual text signifies the appearance or the manifestation of *teyyam*. Lauri Honko in the article "Text as process and practice: the textualization of oral epics" observes "The situation of folkloristics as regards textualization is as problematic as that of printed oral poetry. Both the discipline and its material are based on oral culture but bound to written texts, i.e. archived or published documents on oral performance" (p.4). Bringing in the dichotomy of oral and written, *totam* has gone through the textualisation in the written form. The attempts to document such narratives are carried out by various scholar like Vishnu Namboodiri, Raghavan Payyanad, R.C. Karippath, Chirakkal T. Balakrishnan Nair to name a few. The oral narratives are presented full-fledged mostly in induced contexts.²³ However, such a context is often presented in the complex as ritualistic and performative as the conduct happens in the sacred grove and the narrators present the oral narratives at length. The oral narratives thus become the codes embedded in the socio-cultural context and transcend to meta-texts; the oral text to the 'mentifact' to the visual text. On discussing the paradigms of the oral texts, Honko throws light on its conceptualisation and traces the three different paradigms: "pre-textual" (p. 10), "the text is king" (p.11) and "the performance is king" and draws a mediation

that “The “voice” becomes audible through the singer and the “text” takes shape by oral/aural means. It is his/her singing praxis embedded in its social ambience which seems to open up vistas on textualization” (p.15). The interweaving of texts bestows wholeness to the complex. The texts carves out meanings that are put out as the narratives are told, heard, performed, and recollected.

Lauri Honko discusses ‘mental text’ in “Epics along the Silk Roads: Mental Text, Performance, and Written Codification”. The ‘mental text’ is attributed to “in the minds of the singers and audiences alike” (2000, p. 218), and to the singer, it is “the cornerstone of his performative competence” (p.218). On describing the nature of the ‘mental text’, Honko writes that the mental text is not fixed, but flexible as the rendering gets “edited” in the mind of the singer. A similar notion runs parallel in the practitioners of *totam* known as *manodarmam*. It is observed that though the rendering is tradition-bound, improvisation of the telling is inevitable. In an interview, Peruvannan remarks that forgetting is as human as it can get but it is the belief in the hereditarily assigned functional role to transcend into a god and to sing and evoke the god that strengthens the mnemonic faculties of a *totam* practitioner. He goes on to explain the concept of *manodarmam*, which is the command of the mind that shapes the rendering allowing creativity and the inner impulse to seep in and develop the singers’ repertoires. What shapes the narrative structure of the texts? The texts juxtapose with one another unanimously to provide a holistic and dynamic complex. The narrative sequence are more emphatic in certain texts compared to other. For example, the verbal narrative in certain sequences is subtle in its representations and merely hints at the events. Whereas, the same events could be elaborate and pronounced in the visual and performative texts.

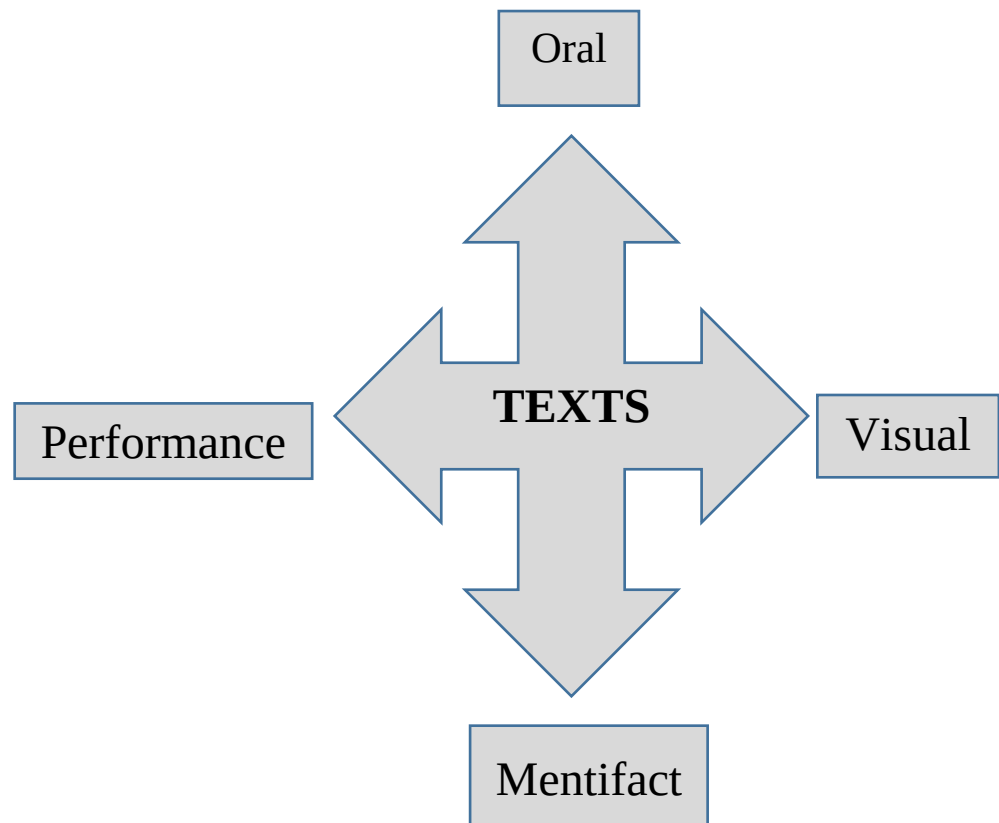


Diagram 2.2: Multi-textual dimension of Teyyam complex.

The complex takes up the role of a communicative system as texts blend (discussed in detail in Chapter 3.) The communication keys the performance in its presentation of the characters and juxtaposition of narrator and narratee, performer and audience, and god and devotee. The model of communicative performance (discussed in detail in Chapter 3) could be identified to the one proposed by Roman Jakobson emphasising on effective linguistic communication. The factors that key an effective communicative ac, according to the linguist are marked by encoder who sends the message or code via the channel which is received by the decoder in a particular context, which can be represented as shown in the Diagram 2.3 The features that develop the context of the complex is significant to the study of texts of oral narratives. The setting of the oral narratives in its natural context or being removed from it could make an impact on the telling. Thus, the text and context could be seen as dependent to create meanings in the narrative matrix. (Discussed in detail in Chapter 3).

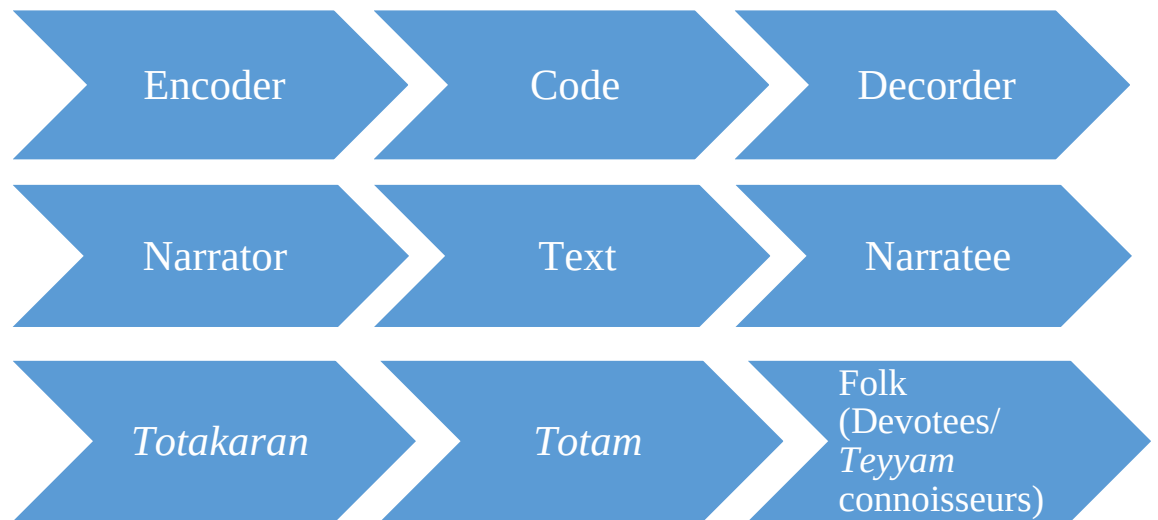


Diagram 2.3: Model of communication in the complex

In Situ/Ex Situ: *Totam* and Digital

The entanglement of *totam* and textuality today also see the dissemination in the digital space in the digitally-driven arena. An extreme proliferation of folkloric items of narrative in the digital realm is indispensable in today's digital-driven world. From presentation to analysis, the role of technology in dealing with the creative and communicative corpus is dynamic, thus enriching its multiple existence, versions and variations, cutting across space and time. To reflect upon the complex in light of digital mediation is inescapable as the complex focussed here has undergone inevitable changes in the due course of time.

“The emergence of digital sees a widening of local consciousness to wider popular consumption. The potential that the digital opens up is immense as oral narratives get preserved, collected and documented turning into a site of cultural and digital repository. The verbal properties are sound-recorded and the visual and performance are photographed and filmed. A quick entry of ‘*Teyyam*’ as the keyword in a search engine gushes out a great deal of information, plenty of images and heaps of videos of the complex. The kinesics and acoustic elements of the complex go around in the new media, mostly edited, streamlined and eliminated of extraneous noise. The scope of intermediality in the dissemination of the narratives and mediational space for knowledge production is enhanced

in the digital sphere. The article “Between Local and Global *Teyyam* Goes Cyber and Beyond” discusses the “fading boundaries” of the local-global praxis of *teyyam* and opines, “*teyyam* is gathering strength to become, with the aid of new technologies, a traveling sacred space” and calls for “probing the local and global perceptions” (De Martino p.23, p. 44). The digital presence of *Teyyam* is remarkable in its externalisation inviting a global outlook on the phenomenon; for instance, its presence especially in the promotion of tourism by the state. Also, transmediality has resulted in diffusion of folkloric aspects of oral narratives into popular entertainment from organic sacred domains to digital domains. However, the potential problems the sphere presents cannot be elided. In terms of linking digital to the complex of *Teyyam*, the digital revolution sees *totam disseminated* digitally transcending the oral quality, resulting in discontinuity of oral memory. In its wide circulation, the tendency of externalisation, manipulation and decontextualisation of the complex is a concern among the practitioners as the authenticity of whose voice is put out there in what context and the ethics related to its tellability get essentially called into question. In the digital arena, being-in-time gets problematised as context which is a distinctive essence of the complex gets reshaped and the amplitude of the vernacular of the complex attenuates. In its dissemination in the digital venues, though the textual, visual and aural get transmitted, the immediate functionality associated with the complex conducted to commemorate and celebrate the local characters in a shared sacred space for prosperity and the notion of sacrality, spatiality and divinity in the physical realm get problematised. On the other hand, in the mental realm, it is solidified through the virtual evoking a sense of nostalgia. This notion holds especially in the case of the *Teyyam* complex as the diaspora from North Malabar is ever-growing. The digital aids the urge to visit and revisit in space and time offering

simultaneity and continuity, an alternate spatio-temporality to the complex virtually. The longing for the local in the dispersed gets addressed as the digital quality transforms the spatial, experiential and embodied quality of the complex making it ubiquitous and space-bound at once as *Teyyam* is just a click away. (Santhosh & Puthussery, 2025, pp. 223-224).

The conclusion that can be drawn is put as follows.

The digital turn and its scope in the complex and the discussion of new media, oral narratives and memory presented seek liminality in the interaction, in the hope of retaining the reach of the complex through digitalisation and yet not being ensnared in it (p. 224).

On Translating *Totam*

Translating a few select oral narratives from the source language, Malayalam to the target language, English is attempted. To look into the translation, language and culture in the context of *Teyyam* and *totam* becomes challenging as it is deeply rooted in the cultural and performance context. To bring in equivalences in the translation are tricky and untranslatability is inevitable. The untranslatability may arise as the nuances and subtleties get lost or distorted in the process especially as oral narratives, transferred from generations to generations are considered to be dynamic versions and variations of shared stories with spatial and temporal significance. Moreover, a story told twice is never the same.

To streamline the process, the framework followed is Andre Lefevere's different strategies in the theory of translation. (Bassnett, 1980). The translation of initial lines of the narrative adopt the blank verse strategy, unrestricted by metre or rhyme. The free translation eases the flexibility for a sense-for-sense translation as the sense or the content of the source text is translated to the target language. The strategy of poetry into prose translation aids in capturing the meaning of the narrative though it is less preferred as the poetic sensibility gets lost in the process. The seminal problems of translation here are linguistic barriers, cultural constraints and the erosion of the materiality of the source text. The process is doubly difficult as it involves the performance aspect of the

Teyyam complex. As the oral text gets visualised through the performance text in its ritualistic context, the text in here has the poststructuralist implication of meaning production. The question of translation of *totam*, thus gets intrinsically intertwined with the context of culture as well as performance to an extent that the very performer becomes the non-literary tool of translating the cultural codes following a creative transposition from human to the exalted position of god. ‘Translator, traitor’, (*traduttore, traditore*) here can be tweaked to ‘translator, god’ (*traduttore, dio*). Translation does not limit the possibility of the text and is inevitable as languages, cultures and translations negotiate and renegotiate. The attempt thus focuses at conveying the image and the essence lucidly to get the story across.

Conclusion

As applied folklore, *Teyyam* and *totam* at times transcends the typical context of the groves and cyclicity. Often, it is shown in venues beyond the scope of sacred groves or households where it typically happens. For example, the diaspora of the north Malabar is ever increasing and often the practitioners tend to portray the traditions beyond the geographical terrains of north Malabar. Tarabout observes on the phenomenon, “now also presented as theatre performance in the West” (2005, p.186) discussing it in the context of globalisation, observing “a radical reconsideration of *Teyyam*” (p. 193) from being primitive and barbaric to “become emblematic of Kerala culture” (p.193). The complex serves a cultural icon to demonstrate the uniqueness of the state of Kerala, especially promoting tourism. The discussion goes on to refer to Wayne Ashley to touch upon the debate of the stage over the shrine (p.195). Thus, through various modalities, as the narratives get transmitted, the components that make it a whole are looked into. The chapter attempted to clue in on the complex. The detailed analysis of the oral narratives of the complex is taken up in the succeeding chapters. The text and further characteristics along with the analysis follow.

Endnote

- ¹ W. Ashley remarks “Teyyam as a highly structured ritual folk performance in the Cannanore District, Kerala State, Southwestern India.” (1979). See “The Teyyam Kettu of Northern Kerala.” *The Drama Review*, 23(2), 99-112. doi: 10.2307/1145219. D.M. Menon describes teyyattam as “the folk dance...The stories of the teyyattam concern lower and upper caste persons who infringed caste restriction or notions of morality and were punished with death. To atone for this excessive and ‘unjust’ punishment they were deified.” For details, see “The Moral Community of the Teyyattam: Popular Culture in Late Colonial Malabar” *Studies in History* 1993 9(2), 187. <http://sih.sagepub.com> J. R. Freeman remarks Teyyam as “local deities” in *Gods, Groves and the Culture of Nature in Kerala. Modern Asian Studies*, May, 1999, 33(2), 257-302. G. Tarabout refers to *teyyam* as ritual and “village, family or caste cult celebrating localized deities” in “Malabar Gods, Nation Building and World Culture: On Perceptions of the Local and the Global” *Globalizing India: Perspectives from Below*, edited by Jackie Assayag and & Chris Fuller, Anthem Press, 2005, pp. 185-210. G.D. Martino describes Teyyam as “Teyyam (god) or teyyattam (god dancing)” as “possession dance” and “ritual art”. See “Between Local and Global: Teyyam Goes Cuber and Beyond” (2016, p. 24). Pereira writes, “The word theyyam is corrupted form of Sanskrit daivan (divinity) and refers to a deity – whether a mythologized ancestor, a legendary hero, a Hindu or local god or goddess, an animal or a force of nature – that assumes a living form through ritual performance. F. Pereira. (2017). *Ritual Liminality and Frame: What Did Barbosa See When He Saw the “Theyyam”?* *Asian Theatre Journal*, 34(2), 373–396. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44631305> M. V. V.Namboodiri in his study of *totam* of Teyyam and Tira, *Theyyamthirathottangal: Oru Padanam* (2016) writes that Teyyam and Tira are primary and significant traditional folk arts of North Malabar. Further, writes on Teyyam and Tira and notes that the word *teyyam* arises from *deivam* and *tira* means offering and opines that both the terms have acquired similar meanings today (See p. 23). R. C. Karippath in the book *The World of Theyyam: A Study on Theyyam, the ritual art form of North Kerala* (2019) describes the complex as “the divine dance of deity” (See p.15). T.V.G. Marar in the book *Socio-Cultural Influence of Theyyam* (2016) introduces Teyyam as “a folk ritual art form peculiar to Kannur and Kasargod Districts of North Malabar. The Malayalam word Theyyam is an argot or a corrupt colloquialism of daivam (God)” (See p. 11).
- ² See more in R. Bauman’s *Verbal Art as Performance* (1984). Verbal arts, according to Bauman carries an artistic or “[a]esthetic dimension” (3) that is connected to the specific setting and culture of those participating in the act of the communication. Also, apart from *totam*, the region has verbal expressions in the form of proverbs, riddles, *patu* or songs that are associated with harvests and festivals like Pooram and Onam.
- ³ In the article “Death and deification: Folk cults in Hinduism” in the *History of Religions*, S. H. Blackburn draws parallels between narrative and rituals surrounding death in folk Hinduism and classical Hinduism. “Typically, these are supernatural forms of humans who lived or were known in the locality, who died an unusual death, and who now are worshiped. They may be helpful or harmful, are always accessible, and are usually meddlesome. When the worship of these beings is regularized and

elaborated with ritual, like the worship of other gods, there emerges what one might call "cults of the deified dead" (See p.258).

⁴ Peruvannan, Kunjirama. Personal Interview. 13 Apr. 2022.

⁵ *Patu* meaning song in Malayalam is core of the cultural expressions. In the region, various songs are prevalent among the folk and the song tradition is a significant cultural aspect. For instances, a few song traditions of the region includes *Koytupatu* is sung in the fields during harvest, *Poorakalipatu* accompanies the festivities of *Pooram*, *Kalampatu*, *Kuruntinipatu*, *Kendronpatu/ Gandarvanpatu* are sung by the singers belonging to the community of *Vannan* for fertility and prosperity.

⁶ Tracing the roots of formation of Kerala, the belief goes back to how Parasurama, the sage taking the form of Visnu, with his axe shaped the land from the sea. The legend has it that land formed was divided into sixty-four settlements, of which thirty-two belonged to the north of Chandragiri river in Tulunadu (Karnataka) and the other thirtytwo rested in the north of the river in Kerala. For more detail, see T.V.G. Marar (2016) p.13 & B.J. Mailaparambil (2012).

⁷ *Kola* means raft. See details in the work of T. V. G. Marar (2016). *Nadu* is a conglomeration of agrarian units, see in detail K.N. Ganesh (2009). *Nadu* is referred to as principality, see B.J. Mailaparambil (2012).

⁸ The ruling political entities prevailed in Kerala. The corresponding *swarupam* of present day Kannur, Kozhikode, Kochi and Trivandrum were *Kolaswarupam*, *Nediyiripuswarupam*, *Perumpadavswarupam* and *Venaduswarupam* ⁹ For detail, see Ganesh K. N., 2009.

¹⁰ P.L. Samy in the work *Nannan of North Malabar* refers to Nannan, the ruler of Elimala, present day Ezhimala. <https://www.tamildigitallibrary.in/bookdetail?id=jZY9lup2kZl6TuXGlZQdjZp9lJMe&tag=Nannan+of+North+Malabar#book1/4>

¹¹ For further information, see K. N. Ganesh (2009), P.L. Samy (n.p.).

¹² *Malabar Manual* is a three volume compilation of collections on history of North Malabar by the British collector William Logan brought out in 1879.

¹³ <https://censusindia.gov.in/nada/index.php/catalog/649>.

¹⁴ The Sangam literature connects the topography to the literature and the associated *Tinai* concept consisting of *kurinji*, *mulai*, *marutam*, *neital* and *palai*, that is hill forests, pastoral slopes, crop lands, coastal zones and desert respectively.

¹⁵ For more, see R. C. Karippath, 2019, p.33.

¹⁶ See E. Thurston (1909).

¹⁷ See J.R. Freeman (1991) and F. Pereira (2017).

¹⁸ For an extensive list of *teyyam* forms, the shrines and dates of conduct, see in detail *Teyyam Calendar 2025* in Annexure III; R.C. Karippath (2019, p. 172-183 & 205-210)

¹⁹ The parallels between *Teyyam* and *Bhutakola* are drawn by scholars. See A.K. Nambiar (2000); Giorgio De Martino (2016).

²⁰ See Annexure II & III.

²¹ *Teyyam* is often associated with the Sakti principle. For further details on the classification, see D. Menon (1993); R. C. Karippath (2019, p.2-85).

²² For details, see A.V. Gennep (1960). The dichotomy of the sacred and the profane is dealt as with relevance in understanding the schema of transitions presented as rites of passage.

²³ For understanding induced context, see the Preface to *Textualization of Oral Epics* and the article within, "Text as process and practice: the textualization of oral epics., where L. Honko opines that the oral narratives in its fullest form can be retracted only in induced contexts or outside the limits of its usual performance in his discussions on Siri epic. For details, see L. Honko (2000).

²⁴ See Endnote 4.

²⁵ W. Bascom in the article “The Forms of Folklore: Prose Narratives” gives a classification of prose narratives and discusses the forms: myth, legend and folktale. The forms are tabulated with respect to whether the belief is a fact or fictitious, time and place of the occurrence, and the principle characters involved. See for details, W. Bascom (1965).

Chapter 3

(Re)membering Makkam: An Analysis of *Totam* of Makkam

The chapter, alongside the succeeding two chapters, attempts to understand select oral literature associated with the complex of *teyyam*. The analysis contours the elements of orality, textuality and narratology in the narratives preserved in the tradition of *totam* and their interrelationships. The present chapter focuses on the narrative analysis of the oral narrative of Kadangot¹ Makkam, *Makkamtotam*. The components under consideration span across text, context, texture, performance, memory and motif. The major narratological aspects probed into are story, setting, characterisation, narrator and voice, narrative time and space. The analysis unfolds against the backdrop of the theoretical approaches. The chapter employs theoretical understandings drawing on textual and contextual approaches, performance studies, folkloristics, and memory studies.

Out of the many *teyyam* forms, etched in the hearts of scores of people is Makkamteyyam, which portrays the story of Kadangot Makkam. With respect to the representativeness of the text, the oral narrative of Makkam, merits analysis. The narrative is a tragic and poignant tale of Makkam and is believed to be the longest *totam*. The recital would start in the evening (discussed in detail in the section on context), to continue into the night until the sunrise. The narrative, is significantly long compared to the other oral narratives of the *teyyam* pantheon. The tale stretches over to thousand nine hundred and ninety lines, constituting sixty-three pages in the version presented in the book *Keralabhashaganangal*². Pointing out relevance of the lengthy narratives in text-based analyses, Ruth Finnegan opines such analyses might “be rewarding... where there is plenty of ‘meat’ in the verbal forms themselves” (1992, p.150). A version of the story of Makkam is presented as follows.

Narrative in Brief

Unicheriya of Kadangot *taravad*, the ancestral house, in spite of having twelve male children, was in despair over not getting a female heir. She prayed fervently to be blessed with a girl. Makkam was born as a result of prayers and

penance. She was petted, adored and loved by all around her as she grew up. The twelve brothers regarded her with special favour. Bestowed with the best of everything, she grew into a beautiful woman with a very pure heart. Her brothers competed with one another to fulfil her wishes. As days passed, the unrivalled affection of brothers aroused jealousy among her sisters-in-law. They plotted an intrigue to get rid of her from the brothers and the ancestral house. They feigned kindness but their minds were full of evil. Unfortunately, their husbands could not read their minds. In a fit of jealousy, the sisters-in-law made the best of the opportunity when the brothers left for war. They plotted against Makkam to make her fall into disgrace by outrageously lying that she had an adulterous relationship. Down in the dumps, she is immured in the darkness of a room. Seized by a bout of panic she realised that the glow of the waxing moon is gone, now is the time for the waning moon, the warmth of the spring is gone and now is the time for searing heat of sun. Profound stillness lurked around. All colours faded from her life. The brothers' anger and hatred towards her knew no bounds. They decided to get rid of her by feigning to take her to the festival, *kovilulsavam*. Though, the behaviour of the brothers aroused suspicion, she willingly set out for the festival along with her children and brothers. In a moment, she fondly remembered her husband who lived afar. Travelling on foot, in the scorching sun, the brothers remained indifferent to their sister and her children's thirst and hunger. She realised that the journey is not bound for the festival but it is the beginning of punishments for the crime that was not committed. The elder brother asked her, "Do you see the star shining at noon?" Unsuspecting betrayal, when she lifted her head towards the sky, the brothers swung the sickle across her neck and beheaded her. Her head fell off into the well. The dumbstruck innocent children of Makkam were butchered mercilessly. The witness was also killed. Nature responded angrily- the sun dimmed, dark clouds gathered and lightning struck. In the ensuing storm, trees shook violently. The brothers got terrified. All on a sudden they misconstrued each other and their destruction was brought about as they killed each other. The trees were uprooted and the sisters-in-law raved madly. The home was engulfed by fire and the twelve sisters-in-law were burnt alive as their cries went unheeded. It is believed that the strong holy aura of Makkam was instrumental in avenging the sinners of the ancestral house. It is from then onwards that she

has been revered as a goddess and celebrated in the form of *teyyam-Makkamteyyam*.

Narrative in Detail

The analysis attempts at the structural breakdown of the narrative in a narratological approach. The following is an attempt to unfold the form of the narrative along with its detailed description. On segmenting the narrative of Makkam, for an analysis of its form, it is noted that the *totam* of Makkam commences typically with a brief invocation called *varavili*. The rendering involves two singers/narrators – front/lead, *mun totakkaran* and the second singer, *bai totakaran*, alternate the narrative in leaning on orality. The invocation is recited by the front/lead narrator. The first word of the oral narrative, *polika*, meaning prosper, suggests a tone of invocation that calls for prosperity. The formulaic opening, “*polika, polika*” translates to “Let it flourish, let it flourish.” It sets the tone, establishing the locale, the grove or the abode where the event of Makkamteyyam is to take place, transporting and enrapturing the gathering. Following the invocation, is *stuti*, a benedictory verse, where the narrator goes on to praise the goddesses and gods. The recital commends the divine power to be bestow blessings to the devotees, to bestow prowess upon the narrator and to grace the space and the occasion. The verse seeks guidance of the divine for unhindered recitation so as to accomplish the telling. The song of praise is relatively brief and simple. On naming the goddesses and gods, the narrator embarks on a narrative trail, where the memory is set along with that of the devotees. There are no distinct indication to specify the end of *varavili* and the beginning of *stuti*. The lines act as introductory verses to the setting by naming the land, the place and the people announcing-

Polika polika

Bhagavati polika

Deepam polika

Pushpam polika

Swarupam polika

Kolatiri mananum polika

Kadavangod veedum polika

Unicheriyayum polika

Angalamar pantiruvaram polika

Kadangot Kunjimakkavum polika

Let it flourish, let it flourish

Praise to the *Bhagavati*

to the holy lamp

to the flowers of offering

to the land

to the King

to the Kadangot taravad.

to the mother Unicheriya

to the twelve brothers

to Kadangot Makkam

The beginning of the narrative is marked by the verses addressing the situatedness of the narrative, performance, locale and characters of the narrative. The narrative proceeds to deliver the story of Makkam. At the outset, the story presents the plea of Makkam's mother, Unicheriya, to be blessed with a daughter. The narrative opens with a quandary as the mother is worried as she does not have a girl in the family and she does penance in the sacred groves to give birth to a girl child after having twelve sons, as the family followed

matrilineal succession. From a narratological perspective, the dilemma calls for curiosity among the narratees, as the narrators presents her woes as-.

Kelkenam Bhagavati

Trichevidale

Elelam illam vazhuvan santati undalo,

Ente taravadu vazhuvan varam illalo

Evde venam njan varam irapan?

Pakal udikum adityanodo?

Ravil vilangum chandranodo?

Oh, dear *Bhagavati*,

Lend me your holy ears.

All other families are blessed with progeny,

but my *taravad* has no such luck

Where shall I go to do the penance?

Should I pray to the Sun god?

Or the Moon that shines in the night?

The quest presented in the beginning is followed by fixing the mother's quandary. Her prayer is answered as she earned the god's grace and she is promised to be blessed with a daughter as she sojourned through the forests, appeasing the gods through chants and offerings in the form of plentiful milk, rice and sugar, *palumariyubanjaraum* The narrative moves forward to depict a dream sequence, where, the mother dreams of cobras, *nagapambu* and *murkhapambu*, winding round her waist and hair, followed by a parrot, flown from afar to lay on her lap. The sequence also features a baby girl being fed by

her. On discovering her pregnancy, she asks her twelve sons to help build a space for the childbirth, *eetillam*, with seven storey and rooms, *ezhukalliumezhutatum* by the seventh month marked by the passing of the moon seven times, *ezhuthingal*. The mother enlists the seven requirements in the house – “one to rest, one to store, one to cook (prepare medicine), one to bathe; one for the cradle, one for the midwives and one for a courtyard to walk.” Also, the narrative goes on to mention the mother being given milk, ghee, sweetened rice pancake, and a sour drink *pulikudi*, the ritual followed in the seventh month of pregnancy. The stylised number seven finds resonance in the narrative.

The narrative goes on to portray the ceremonies after the childbirth, beginning from infant growing in a beautiful cradle for the next six months, marked by passing of the moon six times, *aarutingal* - “As six months pass, let her grow in the cradle./ How beautiful is the cradle!” The description of cradle ceremony, *totilketam* is quite dense. Throughout the description, the narrative refers to the luxurious cradle as embellished, golden and suspended, rocked by midwives who nurse and sing lullabies. Related to the ceremonies, the narrative moves on to richly portray the spectacular adornments, *chamayabaranam* for the new born. The traditional ornaments of various shapes and sizes, rings, necklaces and bangles, carved with design motifs like elephant’s face, *anamukham*, pipal leaf, *arrayal kodi*, tiger’s claw *puli motiram*, symbolising good health and fortune, is made to order with the help of fourteen goldsmiths through the auspicious days of the months from *Makaram*³ to *Kumbam*⁴. The description goes on to mention further traditional jewellery like round and glimmering chokers, *chakrataali*, *elakataali* and golden accessories of lotus motif for hair and so on. The richness is evident in the depiction of five rings for each finger and the generous presents for the goldsmiths and their families to live well. The narrative further develops to depict the rice-meal ceremony, *choroonu*, where the six-month old is introduced to first solid food. Also, it mentions about some astrological calculations by the fortune-teller, *kaniyan* regarding the birth, naming and meal ceremonies of the child. It describes that, the child is born on the *aayilyam naal* (Clinging Star, corresponding to the star clusters of twenty- seven lunar mansions.) The meal ceremony gets planned out as invites with betel leaves and areca nuts, *vetila adakka*, signifying auspiciousness and hospitality are given to the relatives from ten ancestral

houses whose names appear in the narrative. The ceremony sees arrangement of sumptuous meal, *mrustanamoonu*, description of which is detailed and rich – four sorts of chutney, four sorts of side dish, four sorts of sweet pudding, *payasam*, of beaten rice along with nearly seven maunds of ploughed, pounded and boiled rice. Thereafter, the celebration witnesses naming the baby ceremoniously, as her name, Kadankotu Kunjimakkam, is whispered in the right ear while covering the left. The guests were seen off with *vetila adakka* as a token of hospitality and gratitude, ensuring that they depart to their houses safely.

As the narrative moves forward, the passing of time in the story is paralleled to numbers denoting the Makkam's growth from an infant to a child, indicating her haleness. The years are counted off in the narrative denoting her growth and wellness adequate to that of *orand*, a year, *erand*, two years, *muand*, three ears, *naland*, four years, *ayyand*, five years, referring to the passing of five years- "A wellness of a year old/ wellness of a two-year-old/ wellness of a threeyear-old/ wellness of a four-year-old/ wellness of a five-year-old." As she turns six, the narrative throws light on her brothers, who ask their mother, "Mother, who initiated us to letters?" The cue here is to the ritual of *ariyil ezhutu*, an initiation into learning at the age of six, where a learned preceptor, *kurikkal/ gurukkal/ guru/* teacher holds the learner's fingers to run it on a spread of rice, forming initial letters of wisdom. Makkam's mother retorts that it was Kandanchola Kurikkal who initiated her sons to the world of knowledge and wants nothing less than that for her daughter, only to ensure that he does it for Makkam too. The description sees *kurikkal* seated on the floral carpet, *poomantiri*, surrounded by Makkam's brothers who entertain him, and ask him to bestow their sister also with initial letters as done to them. They are asked to set up the spread of rice on a plate, *talika*, flattened rice, *avil*, paddy pop, *malar*, banana, *pazham*, coconut, *tenga* in the courtyard. Also, placed is lamp, *vilak*. Makkam is seated on the lap of the *kurikkal* who writes the sacred words *hari* on her tongue and holds her fingers to write fifty-one letters, *aksharamaimbatonnum* on the rice spread on the plate. The ritual of *ariyil ezhutu* is followed by *manaladi puja*, the practice of writing on the sand followed by writing on the rice, seeking blessings from the goddess and god, Saraswati and Ganpati. The narrative mentions that Makkam is also taught the

epics of *Ramayanakata*⁵ and *Maavaratakata*⁶. Also, it shows that her mother is asking the teacher not to teach her too much, as it might persuade her to yearn for spirituality giving up on the materiality of life. She is also taught numbers to keep track of income and expenditures. The *kurikkal* on leaving is conferred with silk, jewellery and coins as *gurudaksina*, a fee of teacher, to roughly put, paid as a token of gratitude. The following part of the narrative encapsulates the tradition of ear-piercing, *kaatukutu*, as Makkam turns seven. The auspicious time to pierce the ears, *kundalayogam* is noted with the help of an astrologer. As the piercing is done, her mother wipes the ears with cloth soaked in salt to remove the puss and gently applies oil to cure the wound. The ritual also involves serving a sort of sweet porridge, *kaatu kanji* and rice cake *kaatu ada*.

Further, the narrative comprises of extensive detailing of the festival of *Pooram*. Makkam on her way back home after spending time with her friends who insist her to mull over the *pooram nomb*, the ritual vow the young maidens engage in during the Malayalam month of *Meenam*⁷. The vow observed by young unmarried girls to appease the god of desire, the *Kamadevan*, involves offering of nine different flowers for nine days, from *Kartika* to *Pooram*, by creating Kama's figure with the flowers. A series of dialogue, in the question and answer format, breaks out in the narrative as Makkam and her mother discusses *pooram nombu*. As Makkam's mother asks her to take the opinion of her brothers, she exchanges *taraku*, documents of cadjan leaves, expressing her wish to observe the vow and that she would appreciate their presence at home. She further asks the messenger to take the message to her brothers and promises him plentiful of porridge and umpteen cakes, *topan pooram kanji* and *pooram ada* respectively – "Can you go to my brothers, convey the message?/ I would offer surfeit of *poorakanji*/ And *topan topan pooram ada*." The reply, *maru taraku* sees brothers fulfilling her wishes as they promise that the arrangements of the *Pooram* are on them and the sisters-in-law, *natunmar*; and that they will soon be with her. – "Observe the vow, as you wish, Makke." Further descriptions outlines the four types of vows related to the festival – *Katipooram* with nine types of flowers, *Katirpooram* with seven types of flowers, *Vapoonilam* for healthy teeth and hair and *Poopoonilam* for fierceness. The dialogue is seeded further to discuss the various flowers for the festival.

Makkam's mother says, "I am telling you a thing or two/ before the bee feeds on the bloom/ you go, get the flowers from the bower." The conversation leads into the discussion on the kinds of flowers required, Champak, *Chempaka poov* and Alstonia, *Pala poov*. And, Makkam with her friends collect the flowers in a woven basket after praying to the sun. The following chunk of the narrative recounts the three specific spaces of ritual observances meant for placing the fresh fragrant blossoms— at the water bodies, at the front yards and at the thresholds of the houses on the first, second and third day, on the fourth and fifth day, and on the sixth and seventh day respectively. Further, a sacred clay model of Kamadev, *Kamanar* is made with the help of a potter, *kusavan*. The narrative paints the search for fine sand poetically - "The potter seeks fine sand,/ Like a mongoose digs for its burrow,/ Like a boar forages *nilapana*, *ground palm*, *black musli*/ Like a serpent scours fields and farms." The sand collected and prepared by the potter is compared to churned butter. The narrative describes how little Makkam takes a look at the several models put up around the neighbourhood, disappointed to find all models of *Kamanar* looking deformed, and rushes back to the potter asking for a perfect *Kamanar* with eyes, nose, ears, hands and feet along with miniature forms, *kutikamanar*, of *Kamanar* on its left and right; to which he agrees and bakes seven bright models. The *kamanar* is adorned with several flowers –Indian Rhododendron, *atirani* on the waist; Hogvine, *vayarapu* on the stomach; Medlar, *erinjipu* for the bellybutton; Screw pine, *kaitapu* for the hands; water lily, *kumudam* for ears; and betel nut blossom for the hair. Further adornments include, mirror for cheeks, lotus stem's fibre for the sacred thread and lotus leaf for a parasol. *Kamanar* is offered *pooram kanji*, a sort of porridge rich with rice, coconuts and plantain prepared by the sisters-in-law; and, *pooram ada*, a sort of a sweet pancake made of rice flour, banana, coconut and jiggery, steamed in leaf of jackfruit tree, *pilavin ela*. The festival is wound up as the young girls bid *Kamanar* farewell, praying to visit them soon. The narrative depicts Makkam weeping her heart out, crying and screaming, out of grief of separation from *Kamanar*. Along with the help of her mother and companions, *Kamanar* is placed under the jackfruit tree, after circumambulation of the tree, and is sent off. The festival is concluded with *utra vilaku*, on the day which is marked for celebrations involving various dances – *pooram kali*.

The narrative progresses to depict Makkam's marriage at the age of twelve with Kutinambar, after the description of the festival of *Pooram*. He is shown to have taken up *adayeytu*, where a prospective eligible partner aims and releases arrows at seven cakes, *ada*, to split across, so as to be chosen as the bridegroom. The marriage of Makkam is depicted grandly from the fixing of an auspicious day, *vidicha naal* for marriage, to bridal garments of *pandal pudava* and *manukodi pudava* to elaborate invitations, *kshanam* to drumbeat, *vadyagosam*, to glowing lamps, *vilaku*, to sumptuous meal. Makkam is adorned, ushered and seated on a wooden plank, *aamanipalaka* made of the timber of jackfruit tree. The grand wedding, *veli*, is witnessed by many and the meal is so rich and abundant that it is paralleled to a hill of flower-like rice, showered with melting ghee along with *papadam*, a thin crispy wafer as big as slipper pad/sole of an elephant and several items of food of essential flavours of cardamom, ginger, lemon and pumpkin. The narrative moves forward to depict the puberty ritual, *tirandkuli*. On the onset of Makkam's menstruation, she is seen hiding, scared and shy, in the granary, where paddy is pound. The mother-in-law makes her feel comfortable and is fed with the snack, *ada*. The narrative moves to depict Makkam's pregnancy as days passed. The passing of months is marked by the passing of the moon – fifth moon as Makkam is fed with ghee, sixth moon as she is decked, and seventh moon as she is taken to her home. And, the house is renovated to welcome Makkam, as the narrative marks her mother saying, "After all there's no woman who does not give birth after 'seven moons' / After all there remains none after seventy who is not dead." The narration sees Makkam on reaching home, circumambulating the house, seven times, with rice and flowers in both her palms. Further, she is depicted offering the rice and flower, held in her right palm to the Sun god, *adityabhagavan*, and tossing the rest towards the roof of the house to fold her palms to utter a prayer. The rendering describes sharp aches and birth pangs of Makkam as '*kodum nombaram*', where she expresses her labour throes as unbearable to her mother who tries to console and the midwives come to attend her. The narrative reveals that she is blessed with twin babies. The narrative poetically depicts Makkam urging to ease her pain to the sacred kite, *tiruchembaruntu* and the wind:

“Maanakam parakuna tiruchembarunte

Orika vanu ente maru kulira vitupoyate.

Mala arike viyyuna malankate

Orike ente maru kulira adichu poye.”

“O sacred kite that spans the sky

please glide over my bosom.

O balmy zephyr that blows across the hills

please gently fan my bosom.”

The portrayal marks the passing of ten months and ten days, and she gives birth to her two children. The reddish yellow tones of the new-borns are likened to the colours of twilight, squash blossoms and morning mallow flowers. The postbirth ritual involving *pula*, often practised as defilement, is recounted in the narrative, observed till the fifteenth day after the birth. The naming ceremony, *paal kodukkal*, where the new-borns are given cow’s milk by the relatives, and the remaining is described as poured out in the well and pond.

The narrative marks the six months as the children are rocked to sleep in the cradle and also hints at the sisters-in-law harbouring bitterness as Makkam overhears their conversation about how Makkam and her kids would have more hold on the house and more prosperity would come her way. To which Makkam says, “Let fate decide.” Further, the narrative unfolds to reveal the omen of things to come, foreshadowed by the fourteen goldsmiths who were invited to make gold articles for the children – “Adorned with all the gold, while growing up, / the fate would have it to leave for an alien land / and a bloodshed in the family.” It is soon dismissed as the narrative goes- “Speak no evil.”; and sets forth to present the account of gold adornments made to order for the children - chokers, *chakrataali*, *elakkataali*, tiger’s claw motif jewellery, bangles, rings and earrings, one for each of the two. The rice-meal ceremony, *cheroonu*, conducted on an auspicious day is depicted in the narrative where the

infants are adorned with kohl and accessories and the relatives are invited and provided with a sumptuous meal. The boy is named Chandu and the girl is named Cheeru, as their names are whispered in the right ear while covering the left.

The chain of events recounted in the narrative follows the battles among the then popular kingdoms of the North Malabar. The Kolatiri, king's order, considering the brothers fit to fight and win the battle against the Neriyaotu *Swarupam* is described, to which they agree with no hesitation. Makkam is distraught on hearing the news and inquires to her brothers:

“Ayyo ente ponangalamare, padaku poneram

Enakum makalkum aru sakhi anu.

Natumaara sakhichu pokarutu

Eneyum makaleyum kandukudalo

Ningalodoru putuvachanam njan parayunu

Pada kanan njan varate?”

“Ayyo! Dear brothers, while you wage war

my dear children and I will be left alone.

Please do not leave us with sisters-in-law

for they loathe us.

Let me tell you a thing or two.

To see the battle, shall I accompany you?”

Makkam implores her brothers to take her along to the battle field, to which they try to reassure by promising to take her to the *vilakumaadam*, a sacred site where

lamps are lit for prayers. Meanwhile, the conversation is overheard by the sisters-in-law. The narrative gives account of brothers leaving for war and asking Makkam to ensure the kids' safety and to watch over them well. They also ask her to regularly light the evening lamp, *antidipam*. And informs her that oil for the lamp will be provided by the *Emman*. The narrative proceeds to depict the sisters-in-law plotting against Makkam, fearing her prosperity.

The narrative describes the brothers set for the battlefield, collecting the essential equipment – stacks of bows and arrows to fight. The narrative hints at the impending danger as the elder brother trips on the doorstep. The description goes on to show that the brother tries to undo the omen as he goes back to the house to leave for the battlefield all over again. They reach the ruler, crossing the fields and rivers, where they hear the battle cry, summoning the warriors. The following part of the narration briefly depicts the battle. The warriors are portrayed in the narrative with the bronze combat helmet, padded with leather, as a part of their armour carrying the battle paraphernalia on their back; crossing the river on the rafts to take on the rivals, Neriyotu force. According to the narrative, the combat is described in terms of number of rounds – *onamvatam*, *randamvatam*, *moonamvatam* and *nalamvatam* and *nalamvatam* sees the fall of the rivals as the Kolatiri force rejoices in their victory. Further, on returning to the Kolatiri at Valapatnam, the victor salutes the king with the swords who are welcomed with oil to bath followed by sumptuous meal – flower-like rice and golden heap of side dishes, followed with betel leaves and areca. And, as a reward they are entitled as '*achan*', an appellation signifying honour. They seek permission to return to their houses and the narrative depicts them crossing Kalarivatil, Valodam river and Kolatu fields.

Meanwhile, the narrative depicts Makkam making necessary arrangements to place the evening lamp in front of the *Veerachamundi*, only to realise that she is running out of oil for the lamp. And, she gets necessary sesame to be pressed and hands it over to Vaniyan Emman, who is in-charge of oil. Before he brings back the oil, the sisters-in-law plot against Makkam- "We cannot be here any longer/ Let us go get *tali* and wood". On the pretext of getting hibiscus leaves, *tali* and wood, the sisters-in-law makes sure they are not available around when Emman comes with the pressed oil. The narrative shifts

to briefly depict the Emman preparing the sesame seeds to be pressed, soaking and pounding to extract oil. The narrative shows the oil being carried by him and as he reaches the destination, the sisters-in-law glimpsed him near the house and hide; followed by an exchange of dialogue between Makkam and Emman:

“Makkame, Makkame”, enu vilichu Emman

“Ivde arum ille?”

“Teendanu vaniyan Emmane”

“Ningale natunmar evde poyi, Makkame”

“Avarellam talikum virakinum poyi.”

“Ningale ponmakal random evde poyi?”

“Makal ene vanu totu poyi”

“Enna ent venam? Kanatitu enaku sahich koode.

Njan kond poykote?”

“Oru kalu ullil vacho,

“Akatu vatilkal vacho”

“Makkame, Makkame”, Emman calls her

“Is there anyone out there?”

“Refrained from soiling the oil”

“Where are your sisters-n-law?”

“They went in search of *tali* and wood.”

“Where are your dear children, Makkame?”

“They came in contact with me.”

“What about the oil? It is too heavy. Shall I take it back? ”

“Place one foot inside the room,

“And leave the oil inside, near the door.”

As soon as Emman leaves by leaving the oil inside the narrative unfurls the sisters-in-law seemingly appear from collecting wood, pretending to wonder what is happening only to allege that Makkam conveniently sent the brothers on war to be with Emman. Makkam in shock tries to retort, “Without a cause why do you blame? /Are you not women too?” The sisters-in-law rage against Makkam as they tell her to leave the house before the brothers return. The narrative depicts the plight of Makkam as she sobs with great sorrow unable to answer her children who worriedly ask – “Why *Amma* , why are you crying?” A set of omens is presented as the narrative moves forward. As the brothers return victoriously from war, crossing the Ramapuram river, firstly, a tender coconut leaf falls across their way, secondly, a tender coral tree, *muriku* falls across their rout, and thirdly, a red-headed chameleon crosses across their path. Though they try to undo the omen by rerouting, the elder brother asks “What does it mean if the red-headed chameleon crosses?” To which the younger brother replies – “It is a sign of bloodshed in the family.”

The narrative moves on to show brothers about to reach their house, are met with their wives sitting outside the house. The brothers ask what is up with Makkam and her children – is it something unpleasant or pleasant, *dukhaphalamo sukhaphalamo*? To which the sister-in-law retorts not to ask about her or utter her name and that they do not know what or how to tell what had happened. But goes on to say that Makkam was caught red-handed with Emman and has marred the prosperity of the household; and is neither fit to welcome you back with showering rice upon you nor fit to welcome you back by serving you water as she has to refrain from defiling the ancestral house.

Further, in a temper they turn down Makkam's offers of rice and water as soon as they saw her. Sensing that something went odd, Makkam pleads her brothers not to heed to the false rumours of the sisters-in-law as she reminds them that she had pleaded not to leave her and the children back as the sisters-in-law despised them. To which the brothers ask her to accompany them to the sacred shrine with her children. She urges them to believe her, so distressed that she swears by her brothers and her children that she is no sinner and that she would rather leap into fire than be a sinner.

Before setting off, Makkam overwhelmed with agony and anger, is presented in the narrative where she is seen rushing to the room where the oil is kept and applies it on her children and her hair and pours the rest on the threshold of the house. She further showers her children and adorns her children with a few jewellery. She brings a pile of cloth set on fire to throw it on the threshold and pounds the remaining gold and tosses it into the pond. And, she prays her heart out to her ancestors that truth shall see the light of the day eventually before leaving. She also pleads spare her children, to which her brothers retort that they are her children and must go with her. As they leave, narrative describes sisters-in-law revelling, to which Makkam asks them not to gloat over their exit for the house will burn down with the flame in her heart and that their heads would explode with madness for their intolerable lies have forced her to hang her head in shame.

As the narrative progresses to depict Makkam's journey, it is portrayed that Makkam asks her brothers to stop over to quench the children's thirst. Makkam borrows water from Putiyaveedu at Chala, where the women query her whereabouts. When they recognise Makkam as the daughter of Unicheriya, they offer her milk and are worried if the mother and children would be capable of taking such long and arduous journey in the scorching sun. Affectionately, she is offered to leave her children to be taken care of to which she promises that if she is fortunate to return, she will leave her children there to be taken care of. She gives her necklace as a gift in gold to the woman who offered them water and bids farewell. The journey presented in the narrative also sees Makkam crossing the sacred sites of Trikkapalam, Munaloor, Peralasery, and Kelanoor. Further, she asks the brothers to halt to quench the thirst and to tend her children.

The narrative recounts the elder brother asking Makkam to look above to see the star in the sky:

“Noku noku, ene Kunjimakke

Natu uchak nakshatram udichu kando!”

Itendoru atisayam enu ninachu

Melotu tala uyarti nokum neram

Chankil pidichu arutu.

“Behold the sky dear Makkam!

How strange the star is seen at noon!”

Wondering at the queer phenomenon,

Upward to the sky she did look

Just then unsheathing the sword

A cruel blow killed Makkam.

The narratives reveals that Makkam’s children were stabbed to death and the Katadiyan who witnessed is also stabbed. Unfurled in the narrative is the inevitable chaos that followed as brothers construing each other, forgets themselves to lift the sword and stab one another. The ancestral house is described as scorched by fire in the afternoon, completely charred. The sisters-in-law, depicted in the narrative are seen going insane, facing gory death as the house ravished in flames.

The narrative of Makkam is rich and dense where it depicts the story of Makkam, recounting the heroine’s journey from birth to death revolving in/around the ancestral home. Following the invocation and benedictory verse, the initial verses open up to the quandary of the house, where the members long

for the birth of a daughter. In the ensuing verses, the voice of Unicheriya praying for a girl child is presented and the following is the story of the girl who is born and episodes cover the childbirth and ceremonies, her childhood and the festival of *Pooram*, her puberty and marriage, her children and family and the final section gradually depicts her journey and macabre and poignant end. The narrative ends with the closing formula, *yogam varate*, as the narrator wishes for more returns and chances to fall upon to further renderings of the *totam* on a note of fulfilment, optimism and efficacy.

Context in/of the *Totam* of Makkam

The section attempts to look at the interweaving of text, texture and context in the oral narrative of *Makkamteyyam*. The framework follows the positing of Alan Dundes who stresses on the interdependence of the textual, textural and contextual aspects to understand oral narratives as a whole. The narrative of Makkam is employed by rendering it wholly, in the sacred domain, and continues to be relevant, aesthetic, affective and emotive as it is situated in the ritual imagination and belief system of scores of people in a 'specific social situation'. The narrative of Makkam is usually performed as a living tradition in the spatio-temporal and context specific phenomenon of *teyyam* in the North Malabar of Kerala. The complex takes place at predetermined time and space. Significant are the contexts embedded in the cyclical ritual lives where the actual event takes place annually on the tenth and fifteenth of the month of *Kumbham* at Sree Kadangot Makkam Bhagavati Kshetram, Kunhimangalam and Sree Kadangot Makkam Bhagavati Kshetram, Chala in Kannur, Kerala respectively, where Makkam was apotheosised into a goddess. The sites where the ritual complex of Makkamteyyam take place are the sacred groves situated near the ancestral houses of Kadangot and Puthiyaveedu, in Kunhimangalam and Chala respectively. Often associated with fertility, occasionally, the narrative of Makkam is performed in households as a prayer or offering to be blessed with progeny. Makkamteyyam, one of the many is performed by the members of the caste, Vannan, hereditarily. The oral narrative of *Makkamteyyam*, called *Makkamtotam*, depicts the life of Makkam, a local girl raised to the position of 'goddess', as she avenges her death is narrated ritually.

Central to the complex is the liturgical rendition of the narrative, channelled through oral transmission, passed on from generations to generations of the community's specified narrators. The oral narrative begins in the evening and lasts for hours, continuing till the next morning, along with the ritual enactment. The narrative culminates in the apotheosis. The performers and the narrators who are culturally and socially obligated and hereditarily capable are specially invited by the authority or the committee in charge of conducting the phenomenon through *koyma*, the authority to perform. The dynamic is witnessed in large numbers, where local devotees and *teyyam* enthusiasts flock to. Given that the complex is intrinsic to the region, it can be considered as an "artistic communication in small groups" (Ben Amos, 1971, p. 13). It is unfolded in the shared sacred space among the practitioners, devotees and connoisseurs, corresponding to "the fact that folklore is used as a means of traditional communication between humans" (Dundes, 1980, p.13).

The text of the narrative, seemingly rounds out a story with the classic structure of beginning, middle and end as the exposition sees a mother's desire for a daughter, her growing up, progressing to chaos around her marking the fall and ending with a catastrophe that is resolved. The text witnesses an event leading to another, in turn progressing to the next to create a unified whole. But, its juxtaposition with the context reveals a cyclicity of the phenomenon, discussed in detail in the following parts. The text situates the event of *Teyyam* ritually from the beginning, summoning the folk together to witness the event.

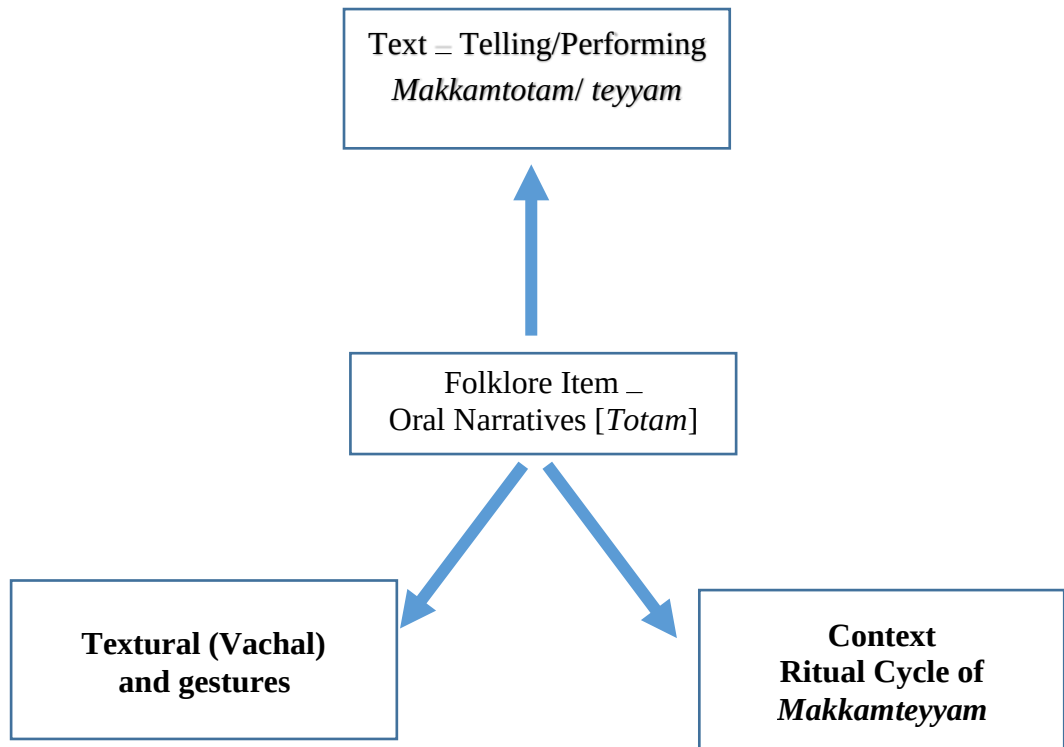


Diagram 3.1: Text, Texture and Context in/of Makkamteyyam complex

The sense of place is quite significant to the narrative as it grows out of specific circumstances. The typicality in the narrative in this regard, root from the traditional context specificities of the North Malabar. The episodes in the narrative cue at the specific areas of the regions and give a sense of where the events are taking place, demonstrating its validity and resonance with the commoners. The narrative opens at the ancestral house, moves to the sacred groves to revert to the ancestral house, to Makkam's friends' places to her husband's house, to the battlefield, to the temple festival and back to the ancestral house interspersed with local geographic detailing. Further, the existence of the narrative is intrinsic to the whole complex, *sui generis* (1971, p. 5), in Ben Amos' terms, shaped by geographical grouping, social context and so on. The lore forms the corpus of knowledge, told and retold, and shared in the groves; witnessed by mass audience collectively, being-in-time.

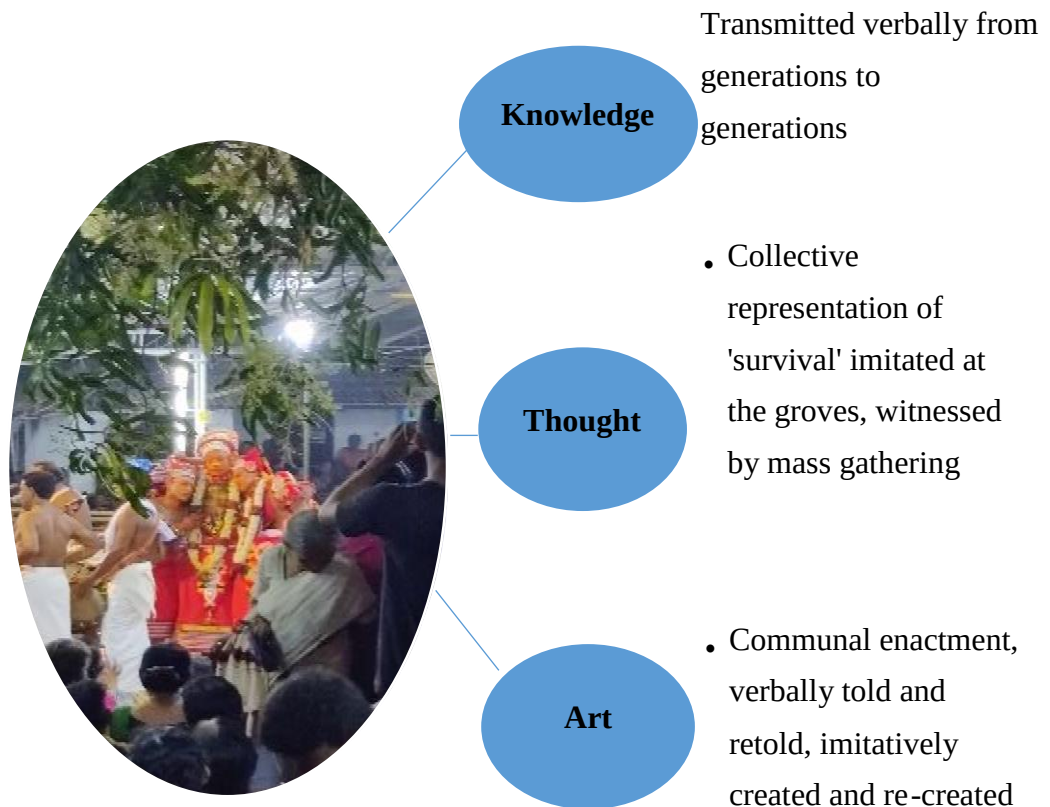


Diagram 3.2: Relationship between Totam and social context, in/of Makkamteyyam drawing from Dan Ben-Amos' definition of folklore in context

Performance in/of the Totam of Makkam

The section aims at looking at the relevance of performance of in the complex of *Teyyam*. The oral expressions, in its entirety, juxtaposed to cultural, ritual, verbal and visual expressive behaviours are pivotal in analysing the narrative tradition in the *teyyam* complex to understand its essence. The potential of such analysis against the backdrop of *Makkamteyyam* is attempted in the following sections. The approach aims to look at attributes of performance involving what goes behind its frame, where the performance takes place, who the performers are, the delivery and the response of the audience and so on. The interplay of these attributes of performance in the complex in aiding the actualisation of oral texts is also problematised.

Spatially and temporarily bound the performance of *teyyam*, is, often a heightened event well- planned in advance. In the section ‘The Patterning of Performance’, Bauman writes:

“We view the act of performance as situated behaviour, situated within and rendered meaningful with reference to relevant contexts. Such contexts may be identified at a variety of levels- in terms of settings, for example, the culturally-defined places where performance occurs...Most important as an organizing principle in the ethnography of performance is the event, or scene, within which performance occurs” (1975, p. 298).

The narration of Makkam commences with a clear setting, in a ritually determined context at a scheduled place and time. The active bearers of tradition, are narrators who have received the principality to narrate through agreements between the narrators/performers and temple committee or the authority of the space where the ritual is to take place. The narrative aids the performance by paving way for the performer, *kolakaran* to apotheosise to *teyyam* or the ‘god’ as the narrator, *totakkaran* initiates the instrumental prelude on the percussion *otachenda* and relying to certain conventions of space, time and delivery. In the case of the conduct considered here, the *kolakaran* was Haridasan Peruvannan and the lead narrator was Nanu Peruvannan. Locating the identities of the performer and the narrators, in the performative setting depends on the social identities, discussed in the second chapter. Initially the narrative becomes a pretext to the apotheosis, aiding the process. Further, the ordinariness in the characters are brought into action through extraordinary performance, far from the day- to- day actions through a heightened spectacle.

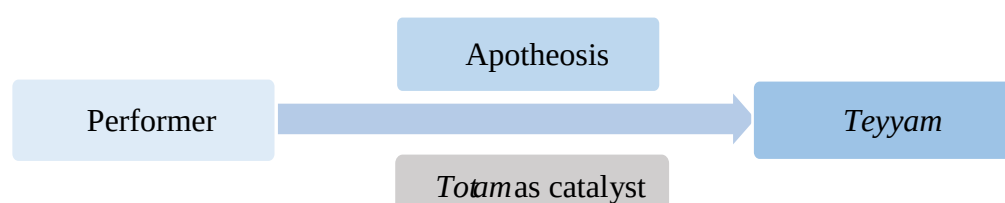


Diagram 3.3: Apotheosis aided by the oral narrative

The site of performance where the action takes place as addressed earlier, is the sacred grove, where at the centre is the space for the lighting the sacred lamp, placed in a shrine essentially making the performance an outdoor one. The spatial arrangements are established such that near the premises of the sacred groves, a ritual space is marked for the performer who would apotheosise into ‘god’ to make appearance in front of the sacred lamp. And, near the entrance to the shrine are stood next to one another, the two narrators, facing the shrine. The narrators are positioned such that they perform the narrative in *mundu*, a dhoti coloured in white and a *melmund*, for the upper body folded and placed on the shoulder with the accompaniment of a single drum suspended from the shoulders, as they beat (*kotu*) it with successive strokes to the match the rhythm, *talam* of the *totampatu*. The position of the narrators is fixed throughout the rendering. The vicinity is arranged such that the audience can gather around to witness the event, around the shrine, encompassing the narrators and the *kolakkaran*. As far as the treatment of the space is concerned, the demarcations are rigid and fluid, both at once in the course of performance, making it as dynamic as the complex, which will be discussed in detail in the following section.

The narration of Makkam involves narrators in pair relying on the verbal narrative and the performer who is elevated as ‘god’ relying on gestures. The rendering involves two singers/narrators – front/lead and the partner, leaning on orality. The lead narrator begins the tale of Makkam with the invocation at first, seeking the blessings of goddesses and gods, weaving prose and verse. The performance often employs stylistic strategies of opening and closing formulae, ‘*polika polika*’ and ‘*yogam varate*’. The narrative of Makkam is dense as the narrators take the audience to the realms of storytelling – the story of Makkam, revolving in/around the ancestral home. After the invocation and benedictory verse, the verses present the quandary of the house, where the members long for the birth of a daughter. In next verses, the voice of Unicheriya praying for a girl child is presented and the following is the story of the girl who is born to her – childbirth and ceremonies, her childhood and the festival of *Pooram*, her puberty and marriage, her children and family and the final section depicting her journey and poignant end. The recital does not see interruptions except for pauses where the narrator sips hot water, but the co-narrator takes up the flow

as a filler. Such pauses are very limited as the narrators believe that they have been blessed to perform incessantly. Also, cessation of narration in the middle is considered as a ritual transgression hurdling the manifestation or the ritual transcendence of the *teyyam*. The exchanges and interactions are not externally obvious but works on a mutual understanding between the front singer and the partner. It is interesting to note that there is no interaction between the narrator and the performer to be apotheosised, but undeniable is the overlapping of the verbal and the visual in the performance. The verbal-visual correspondence results in the intersection of the oral text and performance in *Makkamteyyam*. For instance, the grove sees a shift in the presentation from recounting to enactment. The enactment of the birth of Makkam's children is dramatised in the narrative with gestural interpretations that parallel the liturgical rendering, as the retinue accompanies the performers who portray the children in front of the sacred lamp by covering them (See Photograph 3.5). The diegetic and mimetic converges as the circumstances in the narrative are recounted and reenacted. The combination sees paralinguistic speech markers of emotions involving laughter, cry, and anxiety emoted through gestures and expression in the telling and showing. The shift marks the transformation into a cultural and communicative event with the merging of telling as showing and showing as telling. The following images and diagram attempt to show a progression in the performance.

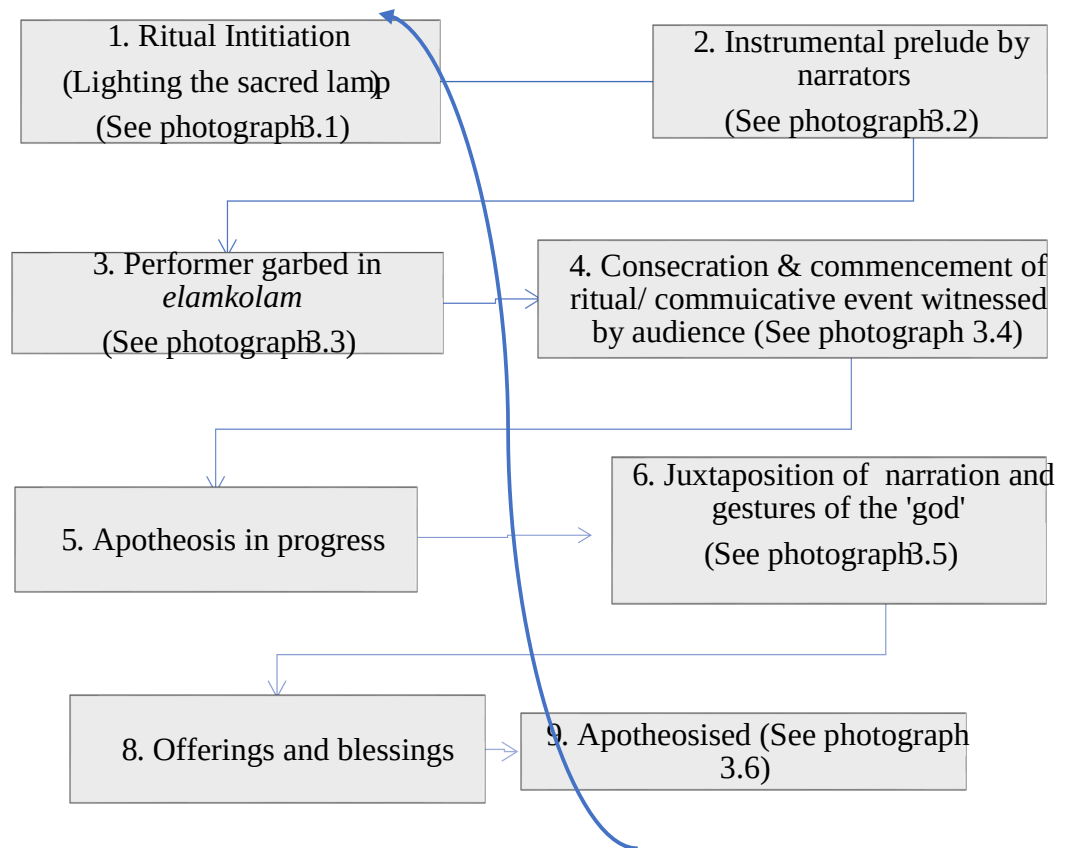


Diagram 3.4: Sequence in the performance of *Makkamteyyam*, corresponding to the photographs that follow.



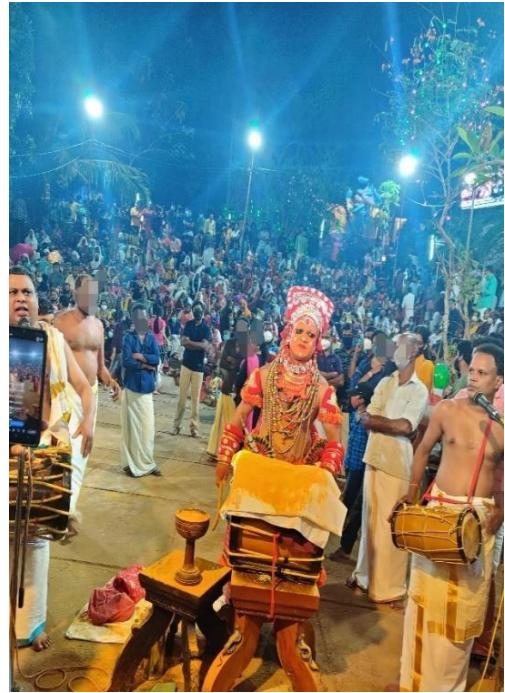
Photograph 3.1



Photograph 3.2



Photograph 3.3



Photograph 3.4



Photograph3.5



Photograph 3.6

Complementary to the narrator and performer is the audience that is integral to the complex. The audience, majorly are local devotees to whom the story is not new to a large extent; it is known, shared, retold, yet the anticipation

remains intact. The pattern of forehand knowledge is common in oral traditions. The narratives correspond to their belief system. Thus, the performance as a complex signifying system generating and interpreting meanings is evident as the performer-audience continuum solidifies. The presence of the audience is significant as the context is ritualistic and majority of the receptors or the primary audiences are devotees. However, the audience in the performance cannot be considered homogenous in nature as different interests of the individuals are at play. The individuals come from different walks of life to witness the performance and the distinction between the devotees and the spectators is inevitable. Though the performance is ritualistic, the aesthetic appeal it holds attracts spectators and aficionados of *teyyam* with no particular religious inclination to the performance, resulting in a composite audience who internalises the performance. The narratives of *teyyam* and its performance become affective markers of mutual witness or collective participation involving its production, consumption and reception and act as carriers of culture pertaining to the north of Malabar.

Being an audience of *teyyam* performance involves differing relations between the performer and the setting. As the space of performance is ritually bound, it is considered sacred and the presence of audience in the space is often demarcated at the time of the performance. The sacredness is physically marked as the devotees come bathed and calmly gathered around barefooted. The audience is engaged in expressing their beliefs and becomes part of each other's experience. During the performance of the narrative, it is a common observation that tears roll down the cheeks of many women which can be interpreted as a recognition and effectiveness of the performance and the story depicted. Also, the result makes it an embodied experience. (Discussed further in the next chapter). The separation of audience from the area of action gets blurred as the conceived distinction of boundary effaces, and a kind of a breaking of the third wall happens as the offerings, in the form of money or clothing are presented by the devotees to the 'god' who 'listens' to them - holding the hands of the devotees, establishing an experience of felt relationship with 'god', and showering them with blessings. The demarcation is blurred also when the devotee proceeds toward the shrine to offer prayers to the sacred lamp. At times, the barriers are formed by humans, or gestured by the volunteers to control the

crowd of devotees/ audience during a performance. In a different capacity, the younger relatives of the narrators and performer who join them to witness and learn, accompany them to assist them and form integral audience of the performance. Also, they can be interpreted as the participants oscillating between the overt audience/ devotees and performers involved in selective supportive acts of the performance. Thus, the dynamic between the audience and the performer is fluid, at the same time firm to the conventional norms of ritual realm.

The formulations of the text are not heavily dependent on the audience. There are no utterances of arranged interjections or choral singing except for the reactions of being in awe or being moved by the intensity of the narration/ performance. But, according to the field notes collected, it is noted that in many cases the audience kept a keen track of the events being narrated as conventional expectations kick in. They tend to point out at or question the narrator, post narration, if certain parts were omitted during the narration due to time crunch or demands of the situation concerned. Though the narrator who is socially positioned so, trained, reputed and competent, recourses to *manodharmam*, or command of the mind, creative and artistic manipulation, suiting to one's individual aptitude, attributes and presence of mind as the individualistic creative potentialities go hand in hand with the cultural conventions of the complex. For instance, quite often, wrongful rendering is taken as ritual transgression, drawing god's wrath. Also, the narrators believe that they are chosen, skilled and blessed with divine intuition and inspiration.

To foreground the performance, in the light of verbal art as performance⁸, a conception of Richard Bauman, is to associate *Teyyam* as a ritual and aesthetic communicative event, where the oral narratives are rendered by the narrators of specific social identities with the conventional obligations to an audience, majorly the devotees of *Teyyam* on a particular event, at the grove, that is cyclical. *Totam* as communication in a performance situation is characterised organically by *kolakaran* and *totakaran* as performers, devotees as audience and *Teyyam* as the event, where both the set of participants are present and are engaged in an interaction that is context specific, where cultural signs are sent and received. Bauman stresses on the responsibility of the performer and accountability to the audience, in terms of 'a display of communicative

competence⁹ owing to the knowledge to speak in a certain way. There is a rolereversal in the negotiation when ‘god’ listens to the woes and offers solace to the devotees. The uses of performance gestures and cultural specific metaphors give expressions to the processes. The oral text is not an autonomous, relegated and secluded text but complement with the performance text in actualising a communicative event of/in the complex of *teyyam*. To accord the complex with performance oriented analysis the diagram 3.4 can be tweaked as

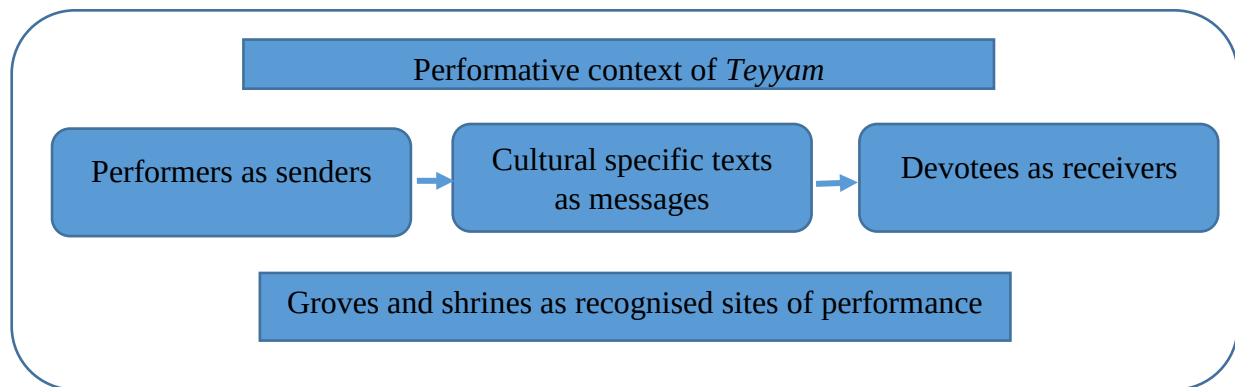


Diagram 3.5: Communicative competence in the complex

Against the backdrop of communicative devices that key the performance, put forth by Bauman, the complex consists of special codes and formulae to announce the performance, signalling opening and closing, figurative language, formal stylistic devices, patterns of tempo and pitch, vocalisation and so on. Further, to draw on the patterning factors for performance for schematic and analytical viability, Bauman’s abstraction of Joel Sherzer’s constellation involving event, act, role and genre is looked into, to understand an ethnography of performance of the complex. In the event, *teyyam* or *kaliyattam*, the performers, *kolakaran* and *totakaran* recite, shout, move, gesture, dance, display agility. On apotheosis, *kolakaran* who has transformed to god blesses the devotees. The patterning can be presented as:

Event	Act	Role	Genre
<i>Teyyam</i>	Move, gesture, dance	<i>Kolakaran</i>	Dynamic visual
<i>Totam</i>	Chant, rendition	<i>Kolakaran</i>	Verbal
<i>Blessing</i>	Speech, chant	God/ <i>Teyyam</i> / <i>Kaliyatam</i>	Interaction

Table 3.1: Representation of communicative devices keying the performance

Given the grimness of the narrative of Makkam, the monotone recitation with melancholy is present throughout, yet it sounds pleasing – especially as the narrator calls for empathy for the heroes, Makkam and her children. The doleful recitation is replaced in accordance with the flow of the action at certain points, where the narrators call for the attention of the audience, not just on the verbal narrative but also on the visual cues. The switch from slow recitation to accelerated one becomes a performance technique as the scene develops to a darker one evokes a burst of emotions among the audience as they are so touched and moved by what is going on. And, what ensue is a special effect or rather a ‘special affect’, calling for a sacred collective catharsis, encouraging to put oneself in the character’s situation and be part of the struggle and its resolution – anticipation, expectations and its fulfilment. The rhythm and the speed attribute to the dramatisation of the societal ill-will, calling for a just response. The progressive intensification of tension in the narrative paralleled by incessant drum beating. The resolution of the conflict presented in the narrative is fully fleshed through the integration of performance. The patterning in the narrative sees the ill will being avenged, but the avenging is full-fledged in larger context not just when the ending marks the ancestral home crash and burn and the brothers and sisters-in-law meet with their impending end, but when the ritual enactment is conducted cyclically, thus reorienting aesthetically for a just society. As far as the narrative organisation in *teyyam* and *totam* is concerned, it’s a interweaving of narration as showing and showing as narration to keep the narrative continuity intact, foregrounding it as ‘a variety of communicative resources’¹⁰ of the region.

Texture of *Totam* of Makkam

The narrative is actualised through the juxtaposition of verbal and nonverbal features. The features emphasise on ‘what had happened’ or how the story is told. The texture can be considered as the quality of being lexicalised in the narrative parlance. As far as the textural features of the narrative are concerned, the liturgical rendition is dependent on it. The narrators through the format involving flow of words or *manipravala* and vernacular words or *vachal* foreground the orature through speech genres of the complex. At the lexical level, the verbal narrative blends verse, prose and dialogues. The language is distinct and comprehensible for a commoner, and can be identified in the light of the familiarity with the dialect spoken in the region, but for certain archaic spoken words. However, the content is diffusible in nature blurring linguistic boundaries. Hence, the textural features of the oral narrative under consideration are part of ‘fixed-phrase genre’ and the content within is ‘free-phase’ in nature (Bauman, 1986). The text contains mostly simple conversational utterances and common parlance without much literary embellishments. The lexicon is rich in colloquialism and vernacularism and is identified as *vachal* by the practitioners. As discussed earlier, *vachal* is exclusive to the narrators of *totam*. The complex sees a situation in the grove marked by the narrator switching to the distinct dialect of *vachal* in the sacred space. It could be identified as a linguistic alternative, slightly different in dialect from the language used by the commoners of the region. The emphasis could be on the several social identities and cultural specificities embedded in the complex. In the article, “Oral Literature”, William Murphy provides an “illustration of the social meaning of oral literary utterances” (p.128) in the usage of proverbs in certain African societies. The proverbs are invariably used by the older members in their conversation with the younger ones. The proverbs tend to denote wisdom and indicate status, acting as communicative devices and social identity markers. In a similar vein, *vachal* could be identified as communicative device and social identity markers as the specific narrators tell the stories of *teyyam*, who is vested with the right to narrate the oral narratives. The oral narrative of the Makkamteyyam is transmitted and possessed within the category of people who belong to the Vannan caste. The knowledge can be differentiated by from the commoners’ knowledge of the story of

Maakkamteyyam. It is in the ritual context and with the textural features of the narrative that both interact.

The oral narrative is rendered by two narrators. The lead narrator is accompanied by another narrator as both articulate couple of verses one after another and, at times, simultaneously, especially as the verses end to gain the flow of words. The flow is maintained by extending or stretching out the vowel of the last word of the verse, as a link to integrate the succeeding verse. As the narrators take turn to render the story in sequence. The narration is in a continuous state, as one takes on from the other to make sure that there is no ritual transgression. The breaks, if necessitated is facilitated through substitution by a third narrator to ensure a smooth rendition. The dialogicity emphasises the orality of the narrative and denotes the conversational elements in the day-to-day exchanges situating the event in the ordinariness of every day. The conversational discourse is interweaved in the narrative. Direct and indirect speech are interlaced in the narrative. The dialogues on one level is the exchange of verses between the lead narrator and the second narrator. On the other level, the dialogues are delivered between the characters in the narrative within the narrative text. The dialogic manner is evident in the narrative, for example the conversations between Makkam and her mother with quick exchanges of dialogues. The variegated repertoire of the narrators include ways to report the events of the narrative. The descriptions are delivered in the third person narration. The repertoire does not resort to first person narrative but rather gives an account in the reported speech style, casting the words of the characters. The events are reported to instil dynamicity in the telling. A series of dialogue, in the question and answer format, breaks out in the narrative as the conversational elements are embedded in the particular social context and are core to the narration of the events. And, it could be noted that the mother prompts the daughter to narrate her day, thus helping to weave a narrative of her own in a cohesive manner directing at a sort of metanarrative telling. For instance Makkam and her mother discusses *pooram nombu*:

“*Innu ent paranju changatimar, mole?*”

Mother: What did your friends tell you today, dear daughter?

“*Innu oru putuvachanam paranju enod.*”

Meenamasam pooram adutinu

Elarum nombu nokkunu polum.”

Makkam: Today, I got to know something new.

Pooram vow of *Meenam* is near

That they are set to observe, it seems.

“Poorapuv kond taran aru ind, Kunjimaake?”

Mother: Who will bring the *pooram* flowers, dear *Kunjimaake*?

“Puv konu taran tozhimarind, Amme”

Makkam: Friends are here to bring the flowers, *Amme*.

The delivery also facilitates the oscillation between past and present as the event gets narrated. The textural arrangement sees the patterned use of the word, *apoludane*, arranged to connect the dialogues in the narrative so as to ease the flow of the narration. The word is made up of *apol* (then) and *udane* (quickly) and gives the meaning that ‘at that time, quickly’. The term is deictic expression of time. The compound facilitates what is reportable in the narrative and aids as time-situating phrase. The component is followed by “*verbum dicendi*, the verb of saying” (Bauman, 1986, p.66) on the organisation of reported speech in narratives. On the dynamics of speech in the narrative, Bauman opines, “Of all devices by which the fusion of narrated event and narrative event is effected in narrative discourse, reported speech is perhaps the most sociolinguistically interesting.” (1986, p.54). The narrative of Makkam thus marks several instances of quoted speech as the narrators recount the incidents.

Another distinctive characteristic, as far as the textural features are concerned is the internal conversational element in the narrative. The elements throw light on the inner thoughts and feelings of the characters. Often the tonality of the rendition takes form of confessions. For instance, the narrated world opens up with the initial plea of the mother, directed to the almighty by the character as she goes, “Where shall I go to do the penance?” Makkam’s mother’s agony of not having an heir for her house is presented through her prayers, rendered in first-person voice in despair. She pleads to cosmic entities

like Sun and Moon for a daughter, “Should I pray to the Sun god?/ Or the Moon that shines in the night? Similarly, Makkam’s agony is also presented as she cries in vain in immurement. The narrative depicts Makkam praying her heart out to her ancestors that truth be unfurled after all. In *Introspection and Insight: South Indian Minds in the Early Modern Era*, David Shulman observes:

“It is something of a scholarly convention, a truism to characterize such devotional tones as reflecting unmistakable individual voices speaking of yearning, struggle, despair and whole-hearted love...the template of the ancient Cankam love poems in order to speak of their intimate agonies vis-à-vis their god” (2023, p.21)

The nuances of Teyyam have been positioned in association with the Sangam literature, in terms of valorous warriors, hero worship and possessions.

An essential component of oral rendering is repetition. The narrative is replete with lexical redundancies. The narration is developed through building words and phrases, which often get repetitive. As far as the stylistic characteristics are concerned, repetition is often recognised as a fundamental technique in oral compositions. Repetition acts as marker of innate quality of oral tradition and its (re)productions. The quality serves to forward as well as delay the narrative, making sure the audience is with the narrators and their inquisitiveness is intact. The patterned use of the word, *apoludane* (discussed earlier) arranged to connect the dialogues in the narrative so as to ease the flow of the narration. The frequency of the occurrence of the word is high, and could suggest structure of the tale that takes shape as the events occur quickly one after the other. The repetition of stock depictions include the passing of time correlated to the moon, the parallels between Unicheriya giving birth and Makkam giving birth and the birth rituals of Makkam and that of her children. The reproduction of phrases is another sort of repetition used by the narrators. The second narrator, as discussed earlier repeats the phrases of the first to keep up the flow of the narration. The exact lines are reiterated and further extended. A few examples of repetitions are demonstrated as follows. First, in the descriptions of Kamanar, “*eniyalepa Kamanare chamayikendat!*” where *eniyalepa* is a colloquial term for ‘now is the time to’. The translation goes as “Is not now the time to deck up the Kamanar!” The phrase is repeated to indicate

the arrangements of the festival. It precedes the description of the flowers, succeeds the conversation of Makkam who goes in search of the potter. Second, “*Apol udane parayunallo Unicheriya, / Kelpatundo ningal ente ponmakale, / Ezhuat pukiya chavtarumila paril.*”; which could be translated as At the time, quickly says Unicheriya, / Are you listening to me, dear children, / There is none on earth who does not die after seventy.” The lines are repeated twice. One, when Unicheriya offers her prayers and two, when Makkam is about to give birth. The repetition emphasises on the continuity of lineage and regeneration. The example also features switch in the use of word *paril* to *bhumiyil* in certain renditions, where both the words mean ‘on earth.’

In the narrative of Makkam, repetition of words, phrases and lines is integral to the narration. The tool enables the performer and audience to conceptualise and keep up with the narrative, facilitating the flow and grip. On drawing on the oral-formulaic theory¹¹ put forth by Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord *totam* consists of sets of stories so as to strategise the telling using the texts that contains features that are formulaic. The invocatory lines could be considered as formulaic opening which goes, *polika polika* “let it flourish, let it flourish.” The themes get repeated to sustain the telling. Here, the descriptions of *Pooram* and the wars among the *swarupam* are recurring themes. The *totam* characteristically begins with an incantation calling for prosperity. *Polika* is a recurring locution in the rendition, intrinsic to *Totam*. It is interesting to note that the word *polika* is colloquially presented for *poliyuka*, which has two contrasting meanings, to prosper and to perish. In the introductory lines, the narrator calls for prosperity of the lamp *deepam polika*, land *naad polika*, Makkam’s mother *petorama polika*, ancestral house *Kadangot veed polika*, and husband *Kutinambar polika*. Also, mentioned are the twelve brothers, *pantiruvar angalamar polika*. A binary opens up inviting a play in the use of the word *polika* with distinguishing meanings at the surface and deep layers. The possibility of associating the latter meaning in the case of the twelve brothers is unmistakable as texture and context of the narrative operate in tandem. Further, the recurrent use of the word also emphasises the function if the narrative rendered for prosperity. The categories of speech genres and textural markers like repetition, formulae, rejoinders that collectively build the

narrative are discussed and are found to be bound to a wider cultural framework and the fundamental in eliciting its production and reception.

Narrative Time and Space in the *Totam* of Makkam

The following section ties to look at the level of the storyworld in terms of temporality. As far as the structure of the narrative is concerned, it seems to be linear in nature indicating the birth and death of the character. The pace of the sequence of events depicted in the narrative aligns with its representation in the performance. But the actual duration of the event is set far in the past as the early years of Makkam, from her birth to adolescence is presented. The presentation moves on to the later stage till death and deification. The performance gets mimetic as the series of actions get described. For example, the representation of Makkam giving birth to Chandu and Cheru. (See in detail in the section on performance and Photograph 4.5). The accounts are detailed in a slow and medium paced speed in most of the narrative time.

Narrative markers	Narrative Events	Sections of the Narrative	Tempo
Beginning	Birth	<i>Varavili</i>	Slow
Middle	Life span	<i>Anjadi</i> and <i>Polichupatu</i>	Slow/ Medium
End	Death	<i>Urachil</i>	Accelerated

Table 3.2: Tempo of the narrative of Makkam.

The oral narrative involves nocturnal stretching from night to twilight to dawn. The use of the narrative device, stretch is apparent in the narrative and its performance. It is seen in the elaborate descriptions of the festival of Pooram and the ritual ceremonies after Makkam's birth to extend the time, so that the performers are elaborately decked up and the narrative is densely built to produce intensity in the subsequent actions. For example, the initial part that describes Unicheriya's offering and dreams runs for almost half an hour. The nine months of conception is paralleled to the nine passing moons as first moon *onnam tinkal*, second moon, *randam tinkal*, and so on. And the description of the house she would like to get arranged goes on for twelve minutes. The

description involves the mother iterating her needs: “one to rest, one to store, one to cook (prepare medicine), one to bathe; one for the cradle, one for the midwives and one for a courtyard to walk.”

Section of the narrative	Unicheriya’s Dream	Description of the house
Time taken	30 minutes	12 minutes
Page(s)	4	1

Table 3.3 : Use of Stretch

Source: Data from the field, 23 February 2020.

The following figure attempts to quantify the narrative time (nt) and the performed story time (pt) during the performance. The narrative sets the tone and gently the *kolam* appears and performs in the sacred space in front of the shrine.

Narrative time		Action time
Narration begins	$nt > pt \text{ } pt = 0$	Action yet to begin
Narration	$nt > pt$	Action
Narration	$nt \approx pt$	Action
Narration	$nt = pt$	Action
Accelerated narration	$nt < pt$	Thick of rapid actions
Narration stops	$nt = 0 < pt$	Action continues

Table 3.4: Quantifying narrative and action time

And, it reflects pivotal turn of actions. Linguistically it can be seen as prepositional phrases and deictic forms that refer to time. The sequence in time is marked by the passing of the moon and deixis like then, *apol*, at the moment/ that time, *neram*, quickly, *vegatale* and so on. The specification of time in the story is adverbial in nature. The oral narrative does not lay out the time the event

has happened. On the other hand, it marks the events leading to Makkam's birth, portraying the time of her growing up through the passage of moon and the subsequent events that causes her death and deification. However, the ending describes when Makkam's head falling into the well is symbolic representation of cyclicity.

The local names embedded in the narrative act as spatial references and serves to boost the vernacularism and situatedness of the text. The names of the places frequent in the text. The appellations of the region signify deictic and spatial references. The opening exposes to the spatial setting of ancestral house in Kadangot in Kolatunadu of then Kerala. The narrative does not specify a particular juncture as far as the description of time is concerned, owing its dynamicity, functioning across the time continuum. However, certain descriptions cues to the period of wars between the *swarupam*. It depicts the detailed account of the locale and its landscape and connects the real-world to the narrative-world. Historical references to locale and a local confinement to the stories narrated, specifically bound to location, familiar surroundings that the folk relates to. Familiarity and localisation is inherent in these tellings that are space and time bound. The narrative-world is majorly static and revolves around the ancestral house except for the descriptions of journeys and some exchanges of places. For example, the narrative details the pilgrimage centre where Makkam's mother offers prayers, such as, Subramaniya temple, Payyanur and Vayatur Siva temple to characterise the local settings. The subsequent descriptions of brothers setting out for war and Makkam being taken out of the house in the name of temple festival elaborately details the route. En route to war, the brothers cross Ramapura, Kolatu fields, Valapatnam river to reach Chirakal. Similarly, the return to their houses sees them cross Kalarivatil, Valodam river and Kolatu fields. The strands of the plot is updated as the brothers return from the battle to the ancestral house as the sisters-in-law update the circumstances, developing the narrative. The journey of Makkam is depicted as Makkam leaves the house she crosses the Ramapuram river and Kolatu fields, passes sacred sites of Agarasalamata, Kanapuratappan, Pappiniseriappan, Vetakoran, Kariyandal Koondavilapan Chirumba, Maankunnu, Chova, Ammuparamba. The use of the description binds the character and the pace.

The depiction could be considered as the marker of the *dramatis personae*. The title *Kadangot* situates Makkam, identifies her with the ancestral house and adds intensity to her character. It builds the momentum, characterising the persona and the setting to signify the relationship of the character, setting and context. In the case of Makkam's association with the place and the ancestral house is significant to the narrative. It is through the displacement a remarkable shift in the action occurs. The realisation and interaction of space and time in the narrative are modes of reference and pushes the plot.

Motifs in the *Totam* of Makkam

Motifs are core constituent components of the narrative and are significant to understanding the narratological strategy. The exercise here attempts to understand the core narrative elements presented in the concerned story. The textual component of analysis here is motif. Motifs are considered as the principle elements of a tale that catalyse and advance the narrative, contributing to the plot development and action. Dan Ben-Amos in the article *The Concept of Motif in Folklore* notes that Thompson's work "is an indispensable encyclopedic reference work" (2004, p.197). The narrative materials drawn from various countries have been systematically classified in the compendium *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography* by Antti Arne and Stith Thompson and analysis of motifs to present the anatomy of tales has been presented in the Motif Index. The system paralleled to the library classification based on the Dewey decimal system, dissecting tales to minimal thematic units into types and themes. Widening the index has been a preoccupation among the folkloristics, envisaging a catalogue of several tales and the motifs in them. Motifs resonate with the lives of the people channelling them to come to terms with their pasts through constant telling and re-telling in its contextual setting. Often reiterated in the narrative, motifs convey the essence of the tale and keep the audience attuned to the subject matter amidst the lengthy telling.

The narrative incorporates multiple motifs suggesting that though the narrative seems linear, the complexity is inevitable. The use of motifs to point out/ represent the tension and indicates themes that run and recur in the narratives. The oral narrative of Makkam bears multiple paradigms and discourses converging within the text. The narrative consists of various strands

of cross-cutting themes running through them. The themes interwoven delineates the discourses of world view presented in the narrative. The oral narrative emphasises various important interests. The following table draws from the indices present in Antti Aarne's work, *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography*, translated and enlarged by Stith Thompson. In the preface to the book Thompson calls the index a "practical listing of tales for a certain area, so that collectors and scholars can have a common base of reference" (p.vi). The index is a universal scholarly tool and classification system to catalogue tales, so as to reveal the major motifs in the narrative. The episodes are cushioned in the themes discussed thus ensuring the narrative continuity. Drawing from Aarne's, later expanded by Stith Thompson compiled on the basis of Aarne's Index of Fair Tale Types to work with folklore plots of the narratives is attempted as follows to understand structural and narrative elements typical to the tale.

Narrative	Motif	Motif Index
Unicheriya wishes for a daughter.	Conception from wish	T513
She falls asleep to have a marvellous dream of having a daughter	Conception through dream	T516
Parrot flew from afar to lay on Unicheriya's lap and she gets pregnant	Prophetic bird	B143

Makkam is born after twelve sons through prayer	One sister and twelve brothers	P253.0.5
	Twelve brothers	P251.6.7
	Child born in answer to prayer	T548.1
Makkam becomes the favourite youngest daughter	Favourite youngest daughter	L51
The daughter is named Kadankotu Kunjimakkam	Naming the child	1821
The moon symbolising the passing of the months as Makkam grows	The months and the seasons	294
Makkam's initiation into learning	Learning to read	1331
Makkam's marriage at the age of twelve with Kutinambar. He releases arrows at seven cakes, <i>ada</i>, to split them open	Suitor's test	H321
Falling of tender coconut leaf and coraltree (<i>muriku</i>). Crossing of redheaded chameleon	Life token	E761

Makkam's sisters-in-law slandered her to her brothers.	The mutilated heroine	706 I. (d)
On the pretext of journey to attend the festival, the brothers take Makkam away from the house.	Treacherous brothers Inexorable fate	K2211 N101
Makkam borrows water.	Old woman helper	N825.3.
Brothers' cruel blow kills Makkam, her children are stabbed. Mavilan, who screams for rescue is killed. Brothers misconstrue and kill one another and sisters-in-law burn alive as the ancestral house gets engulfed in fire.	Chain of killings Ungrateful brothers plot against rescuer Treachery punished	2045B* W154.12.3. Q261
The youngest brother and his wife are saved/ rewarded as they took Makkam's side.	Hospitality blessed	750*

• Makkam is beheaded and her head falls into a well	The sleep at the well	725
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Table 3.5: Motifs in the narrative

The narrative opens in a dream sequence. The exposition sees Unicherya, the mother dreams of cobras, winding round her waist and hair, followed by a parrot, flown from afar to lay on her lap. The sequence also features a baby girl being fed by her. The dream, thus is a motif where future is revealed; as the following verse reveals that she is discovering her pregnancy. She is not barren, does not have a hasty wish as in the motif 307 presented in the Thompson's index. She had already given birth to twelve sons. But, longs for a female heir to the family. A 'framework for folkloristic investigation' put forth by Dundes holds the prospect of "establishing symbolic equivalence" (p.317). In parallel with the idea, it can be read that the mother's wishes and desires are disguised in the motif of dream in response to her anxieties and prayers. The dream sequence encourages not Unicherya's actions but her wish that fuels the plot. Monika Fludernik in *An Introduction to Narratology* refers to Marie-Laure Ryan who opines, "plot is not merely driven by what characters actually do but also by their plans, wishes and possible alternative plot developments. In other words, suspense is generated by our empathetic immersion in the situation of the various characters" (p.47). So, the exposition leaves the audience wonder if the mothers dream would come true.

In the dream sequence, another significant presence is of the parrot. Though the motif, Parrot Pretending to be a God, 243. I and The tell-tale Parrot 243. II are in the index provided by Thompson, it barely reflects in the concerned narrative. Here, parrot can be seen as a harbinger of good omen and a prophetic bird, B143 as it is described as the one that flew from afar to lay on Unicherya's lap indicating her pregnancy. Most of the motifs are not overtly obvious and suggest subtleties. For example, Makkam's arrival is presented as conception from wish, T513 and conception through dream, T516 in the narrative. Also, the dream sequence sees of snakes winding round the waist and hair of the mother. Here, the indication of serpents in pair implies could be read

as a suggestive yet subtle overtones of phallus and mating. Makkam is born in answer to prayer, T548.1 and becomes 'favourite youngest daughter, L51.

Tracing the motifs in the narrative, certain motifs and formulae in the narrative seems to be quite typical, indicating the ordinariness and universality in the narrative. Whereas, a significant number of motifs diverge from the usual categorisation, suggesting the uniqueness and peculiarities associated with the cultural practices of the region. A cultural overtone associated with snake is the serpent worship integral to the belief system of Hindus of the region, often associated with the acculturation characteristic of the region. The motif, thus can also be considered as a mark of fertility, potency and prosperity. Another cultural specific motif is that of flowers. (A detailed take is given in Chapter 5). Though the quest for flower is a significant motif in the catalogue provided by Thompson, with the motif number 467 including 467 I and 467 II, i.e. obtaining the flower and the quest, the narrative in the context sees a divergence as it is not a quest or a search resulted from a demand or an order. Whereas, it is a reflection of significant festive celebrated in the region. Though flower is a common motif in the index, its associations are in the contexts of life-token, magic object, transformation, disenchantments and taboo. However, in the narrative flower is a significant motif and are extensively described in the context of the festival of Pooram and the vow that is central to the festival observed by maidens in the region.

The motif of Life token E761, described by Thompson as object (animal, person) has mystic connection with the life of a person, so that changes in the life-token indicates changes in the person, usually disaster or death. A few lifetokens discussed in Thompson's work are fading flower, E761.3, knife stuck in tree rusts, E761.4.1, track filled with blood, E761.1.3. In the narrative of Makkam, a series of objects described can be considered as life tokens. For instance, a tender coconut leaf, a tender coral tree and a red-headed chameleon are mentioned in the narrative posing as obstacles as Makkam's brothers return from the war. Awaiting them is the inevitable destruction, represented through the motifs. The life tokens presented are considered omens, predicting bloodshed and destruction the cultural symbolism associated with the region. The series of events sees motifs such as Chain of Killings and culminates with The Sleep at the Well, 725 as the narrative describes grotesquely Makkam being

beheaded as her head falls into a well. The sleep discussed in Thompson, *The Sleep at the Well* is a magic sleep where the subject awakes years later and a magician beside the well becomes an agent aiding prosperity in the Thompsonian positing. However, the narrative lacks such an agent, and the character is portrayed powerful to be one's own agent avenging own death and in turn bringing prosperity on being deified.

The motif of profession in the narratives is significant as it throws light on the social set up and is integral to direction that the story takes. Also, it interweaves with the caste hierarchy that was practiced. For instance, the motif of tutor and pupil shows that the ritual of *ariyil ezhutu* (discussed earlier), where Makkam is initiated into writing emphasises on how she is also taught numbers to keep track of income and expenditures. It throws light on how women had to look into the economic affairs as men waged wars. To add, though, wisdom and knowledge is a common motif, in particular to young girl's initiation to letter is absent in the Thompsonian index. Further, the rendering depicts the jealous sisters-in-law lying about Makkam having an adulterous relationship with *Emman*, who belongs to the caste occupied in oil-pressing. The rigid caste quo maintained is emphasised by showing how the sisters-in-law tarnishes Makkam's character and demeans *Emman*, eventually causing the brothers to act out against their sister.

The narrative is replete with ritual motifs, specifically related to the festival of Pooram. The vows are described in the narrative. A seasonal ritual celebrated exclusively in the northern parts of Kerala in the month of Meenam from the day of Kartika to Pooram for nine days. The seasons of Pooram and Teyyam aligns. The festival included marked description of the activities of girls than boys who in their adolescence observes vow to the god of desire. Penance is a common motif in folktales but the difference in the narrative under focus is stark compared to the contexts given in the Thompsonian category.

Relationships becomes an important theme in the narrative along with its social backdrop. The story delineates the themes revolving around kinship, marriage, ancestral household, succession, birth and death. Central to the narrative is the tension and power dynamics of the members of the family in the ancestral house. The familial unit that operates in the oral narrative is a joint

family in the ancestral house. The episodes in the narrative stresses upon family its organisation, hospitality are major interests along with ceremonies and social obligations. The familial affiliations dealt in the narrative ranges from motherhood, siblinghood and spouse hood. Marriage negotiation and ceremonies are described. The mother-daughter constellation is vividly presented. It is striking to note that the oral narrative overtly presents the maternal ties. The narrative subtly hints at a sort of subtextual aspect of the lack of presentation of the father of Makkam. The paternal figures are majorly absent and disnarrated. The paternal ties are covert and considerably lesser description of the household of Makkam's husband; tends imply the prominence of matrilineal lineage that is mostly followed in the Nair households. Intra-familial tension, the root cause of which is jealousy and fear of dislodgment from the position of power. Thus, the familial network help the audience to navigate their ways through the narrative.

Warfare as a social-cultural theme in the narrative. The brothers waging war implies the military status taken up by the men of the Nair household. They were associated with military class and are considered as warriors. The motif of war depicts the historical milieu evoked in the narrative. The events connected to the brothers of Makkam depicts battle scenes. From the war equipment to weapons to enemies to victory becomes part of the narrative. The brothers are ordered to carry out the battles and military activities assigned by the *Kolatiri*. The war is fought among the chiefdoms within the kingdom. Referring to Duarte Barbosa, on the geopolitical setting of the region, Mailaparambil notes, "The Nayars were the military class... knighted directly by the raja himself" (2012, p.19).

Food becomes another interest in the narrative. The food items and the preparations mentioned in the narratives are culturally bound. Often, the narrative portrays the generous helping of meal showing prosperity. Clearly, it is far from the twelve kinds of food mentioned in the Thompson's catalogue. Hospitality is a prominent motif, frequently present in the narrative. Thompson discusses hospitality and inhospitality in the lens of reward and punishment. Whereas, the narrative here focuses on the materiality entangled with hospitality as the host treats the guests with sumptuous meal. Jewellery, clothing and other

tokens as gifts and hospitality are key motifs in the narrative. After Makkam is born traditional ornaments are made to order as fourteen goldsmiths work through the auspicious days symbolising prosperity and health. Jewellery is a token of gift, as the *kurikal* receives it after Makkam's initiation into learning. On the other hand, Makkam pounding the jewellery and flinging it into the pond while forced to leave her house depicts melancholy and adversity. She dons her children up as she senses that something terrible might happen to her and wishes well for her children by imparting strength through the gesture of giving gold. It could also suggest revivification.

The motif of journey is marked by the geographical descriptions are diffused in the story. The names of the locations are related to the characters. The places related to Makkam's birth, her marriage, her relatives and the ones that she crosses in her journey, the ones that the brothers cross on their journey for war are mentioned. Today, these places fall between the Perumba river and the Anjarakandy river in Kannur. The mentioning of the local places in the narrative and interspersing it with the names of rivers thus stabilise and amplify the situatedness of the narrative. Homelike quality and sense of domesticity is inevitable and the descriptions are entwined with the sense of community and collectiveness.

The narrative depicts decapitation and macabre in *Makkamtotam*. According to the symbolic equivalence given by Alan Dundes beheading is associated with masculinity. In the narrative Makkam is beheaded by her brothers on being alleged to have an adulterous relationship and was seen as defamation of the ancestral family. It could be paralleled her femininity is being controlled through the act of disfigurement, as her chastity is put into question. The violence suggests the violation of Makkam's truth and indifference to her words. Makkam's final journey to attend the festival, *kovilulsavam* can be seen as a quest. The trajectory of her journey is one that is undertaken along a path solely defined by an individual. Though it began as a forced dislodgement, she makes up her mind. It could be seen as an exploration of one's individuality based on one's actions and beliefs to negotiate through the difficult situations that shape one's own identity. During this journey she realises the indifferent and callous attitude of her brothers and the need for autonomy. The strand of

subjectivity is strong in her quest. The transformation in her is remarkable that challenges the injustice and the resultant aura demands the cyclical conduct of the form.

(Re)membering Makkam: Memory and *Totam*

How memory operates in various dimensions (individual, collective, cultural) in the spatio-temporal dynamic of the narrative, navigating several modes and media that are fixed and fluid, is looked into in the following section. The interweaving of storytelling, memory and performance is integral in the context of *Teyyam*. On approaching totam from a memory studies perspective, it reveals “these are not mere retrievals of survivals of the past, but valuable affective markers informing identities of individuals, communities and regions constructive the worldviews” (Santhosh, S & Puthussery, J., 2025, p.217).

The sense of collectiveness is built on the exchange of the stories. The space then turns to a fundamental institution of collective remembrance. The narratives bridges the gap between the old and the new as well as the past and the present. The story becomes fundamental to the shared experience of recollections and eventually gets ritualised for collective commemoration and participation. During the conduct of *Makkamteyyam*, the audience seems to be empathising with the character of Makkam. The reverence is evident as the conduct is, at times, seen in the houses of thw worshippers looking for progeny.

On the interaction of memory, performance and *totam*, it is noted that:

“narrators’ identities emerge out of the birth right to narrate, hereditarily, culturally and obligatorily assigned. The narrators essentially are individuals who learn, memorise and remember the oral narratives imitating their predecessors for a sense of belonging. For example, the authority to perform *Makkamteyyam* customarily rests in the hands of people belonging to the caste called *Vannan*, who are initiated into performing *Teyyam*. At this level, the memory parallels private mnemonic practice when narrators learn and rehearse the narratives through repeated utterances, a trained memory, as opposed to the performance in a ritual event involving public commemoration” (p.219).

Memory, thus is structured traditionally, sonically, ritually and culturally evoking material and immaterial, interweaving spiritual and experiential with tangible and intangible in the complex. A resultant of an act of retrospection and reconstruction of the past, the oral narrative of Makkam, through recalling done by the performer, narrator and audience tiptoes down the memory lane; celebrating and raising Makkam, a woman, relegated by her relatives by raising her to the position of a goddess and (re)membered in(to) the society.

Conclusion

The chapter aligns the analysis with respect to formal, structural, functional, contextual, performative and communicative angles. The structural delineation of the narrative aligns with the basic beginning-middle-end. A plot developing to another plot after another creates a whole structure relevant for the narrative to progress. The structure of the text sees Makkam's mother yearning for a daughter and the world inhabited by Makkam. And, the end is marked by Makkam's death and vengeance. Stephen Olbrys Gencarella, in her work *Constituting Folklore: A Case for Critical Folklore Studies* remarks "Folklore is not something that a folk does rather, it is something that, in its doing, constitutes a folk as both an immediate audience and a political category" (2009, p. 173). On a critical note, the narrative is strategised to recognise the hegemony and power dynamics. Here, as the tale progresses the audience realises that the antagonists are Makkam's own brothers and sisters-in-law. The women's connivance play a major role where their husbands become the pawn as they falsely blame her for adultery. The narrative calls out the dominant power hierarchy at two levels, namely gender and caste. The former sees subordination of Makkam by her relatives. The latter sees subjugation directed against her by degrading Vanniyeneman, the oil-presser who belonged to the lower wrung of then feudal and hierarchical society of Kolatunadu. The resolution of the conflict presented in the narrative is fully fleshed through the integration of oral narrative and its performance. The patterning in the narrative sees the ill will being avenged, but the avenging is full-fledged in larger context not just when the ending marks the ancestral home crash and burn and the brothers and sisters-in-law meet with their impending end, but when the ritual enactment is conducted cyclically. The *totam* of Makkam fundamentally

appeals to devotees through sound as it is meant to be heard, thus recalling the aspect of *phalasruti*. According to the beliefs of the commoners, the narratives had to be real. Bridging past and present, real and imagined, sacred and secular the narrative attempts to shape perceptions orienting and reorienting toward a call for just society. The functions that the narrative and its enactment serve are multifold. Aimed at prosperity, as mentioned, *Makkamteyyam* is associated with fertility and is often conducted as offering for offspring. To add on, it can also be regarded as a cultural expression of agency seeking social justice, constructing, projecting and negotiating identity and mobility. Projected through institutionalised procedures and performances of the texts, the oral narrative is suffused with several markers of orality and formal narrative elements. The potential yield lies in looking at the texts in myriad ways, switching back and forth, in lenses that are traditional and novel. An indispensable element of such ways is to take a closer look at the characterisation, especially the arc of a hero. Such an exercise is attempted in the following chapter.

Endnotes

- ¹ Kadangot, also Kadavangot, Katankot situated in the village of Kunjhimangalam, in Taliparanma taluk, in Kannur district of North Malabar, Kerala is the name of an ancestral house, *taravadu*, believed to be the one to which Makkam belonged. Thus, the name indicates the character in the narrative, situating the particular person to the place.
- ² For details, see Balakrishnan Nair (1979).
- ³ The month of Malayalam calendar that falls between February March ⁴ The month of Malayalam calendar that falls between January and February
- ⁵ Ramayana.
- ⁶ Mahabharata. The epics are taught to Makkam in her childhood. The indication is at the intertextuality.
- ⁷ The month of Malayalam calendar, falls between March and April
- ⁸ In the paper, Verbal Art as Performance, Richard Bauman discusses performance as a point of departure in understanding oral literature, situating verbal art as performance, as a species of situated human communication, a way of speaking. (See 1975)
- ⁹ In the introduction to Story, Performance, and Event, Bauman writes on the ethnography of oral literature, “a conception of folklore as things- texts, items, mentifacts – to verbal art as a way of speaking, a mode of verbal communication.” (1986, p.2)
- ¹⁰ See William P. Murphy (1978)
- ¹¹ The theory examines the composition and multiform structure of oral narrative poetry and comprehend the manner in which epics are composed, learnt and remembered. Albert B. Lord in his work *The Singer of Tales* (1960) examined the Serbian Yugoslavic oral epics in Turkish coffeehouses during the nights of Ramzan and noted key ideas related to the composition which aided memorising long verses such as formula, formulaic expression and theme. Accordingly, an oral epic song is composed of a formula, a regularly employed set of words having identical metrical conditions to express an idea, along with formulaic expression which is a line or half line based on the formula or ‘multiform’ and consists of theme that involves repeated episodes and descriptions in the narratives.

Chapter 4

Transforming into Veeran: Hero Patterns in *Totam*

The chapter attempts to cohere around the narrative component of characterisation in the oral narrative of Kativanur Veeran, one of the prominent stories within the complex. The journey of a hero is a classic component of narratology. The trope of hero, adventure archetypes¹ is ubiquitous. The imaginative expression of a hero blends in the cultural milieu of the narratives under purview. The narrative of Veeran draws upon the particularities of his life course, travel, deeds and courage. The attempt is the look at the conjuncture of the construction of hero in the complex and the theoretical deliberations around by resorting to Campbell's study of hero's journey in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, the hero pattern delineated by Alan Dundes and the structural folkloristics consisting of Proppian studies. The primary data is culled out from the live conduct of the complex held at the Cheruvadatil Sri Kativanur Veeran Devasthanam, on 28th and 29th of March, 2024, located in Nanicheri in the district of Kannur. The form is taken up by Shanu Peruvannan and the lead *totam* narrator is Krishnan Koyonkara.

The Veeran and the Teyyam

Totam largely deals with the account of the origin of *Teyyam*, as discussed earlier,. In the case of the form of Kativanoor Veeran teyyam, the account features the hero biography of Veeran, meaning a hero. The oral narrative presents the anecdote of Kativanur Veeran. The narrative particularly concentrates the heroic deeds done and values borne by the character. The tale recounts Veeran as a historical figure. The narrative points to the mercantile transactions around the present day north Kerala and South Karnataka, spanning around Kasargod and Coorg and the battle fought at Mutharmudi². Today, these places lie between Kerala and Karnataka. The actions to raise the character to the worthy of a hero are elaborated in the oral narrative. The region attributes the status of hero to the character of Veeran. The grandiose of the narrative is kept alive through the reiterations of the story and its performance in the sacred spaces. The characteristics of a hero are ascribed to the character of Veeran. The

qualities are heroic in the eyes of the commoners and the concerns expressed in the narrative are universal in its appeal. The narrative centres on the journey of Veeran as the cycle represents the birth to death and subsequent apotheosis. The cyclical conduct of the Veeran reinforces the experiences of Veeran and instills awe among the audience. The formulations in the narrative of Veeran are ordinary and extraordinary all at once and is an amalgamation of poetry and prose.³ The contents unfold the story of Mandapan who transforms into Veeran. He faces life and its struggles. The rendition emphasises the obstacles faced by the character and overcoming the hindrances. Eventually, the apotheosis sees the hero manifest in the hearts of the commoners wielding divine power.

The narrative recounts the story of Mandapan, born to Chaki and Kumarachan in the place named Mangad of the district of Kannur. The biography pattern⁴ sees the birth and origin of the hero. Pertaining to the *totam* of Veeran, these components of the story are presented as *petum pirapum*, meaning birth and origin. The tale reveals Mandapan being born after a difficulty in conception after years of prayers. The narrative begins with the benedictory lines, *stuti*, and it goes, “*Hari vazhka, tante sri namukku/ gurudevam vazhka hare*”; where the *totakaran* sings in praise of the god in the names of *hari* and *gurudevam* and hails the god to bless with *sri*, which stands for prosperity, blessing, Saraswati, the Hindu god of knowledge and Lakshmi, the Hindu god of wealth. Followed is the prayer to the Ganapati, “*Ganapati bhagavane nine njan iranu, tunayad Siva putra,*” that is “Lord Ganapati, I plead, Succor me, the son of Siva,” seeking blessings to mark the initiation of the rendition of *totam*. And. The salutatory verse also goes, “*Saraswati, varika navin mel,*” where, *varika* means to come and *navu* means tongue, indicating the gift of the god, soliciting the blessing of Saraswati to aid in articulating the *totam* verses with eloquence. The benedictory verse presents salute to Kativanur Veeran:

“*Kativanur Veera, deivakaruve!*

Karumana jana vamshe,

Katiravanod tulyam kanti teduna nin mey,

Kamana Kativanur Veera,

Nin pada padmam tozhunen.”

(Drum beats)

Kativanur Veera, the deity!

The born brave,

As bright and beautiful

as the sun, the brave

Kativanur Veera,

Bow at your feet.

As discussed in the preceding chapters, the oral narrative aids the process of apotheosis. In the case of Veeran, the process sees the manifestation of the form of Veeran through the ritual of *putuchuram keekal*, marking the descend of Veeran. The term *churam* means hills and *keekal* refers to descend. The text goes:

Varika venam ,Kativanur Veera, deivame!

Stalam Mangadu Meltali pirakanam.

Balakan balakalatu

Arjunan pole villum

saravum edutangane

tanum changatimarum

Ezhinu meetil Kudakar

mala puki.

(Drum beats).

Do come! Kativanur Veera, the god!

Born at *Mangadu Meltali*

The child, in his childhood,

like Arjun, wields bows and arrows

with his friends.

They reach the *Kudagar* hilltop, at Ezhinu meetil.

Petenu chenu Kativanur.

Kativanur neramamamte

palum chorum vangi adarichu.

Mutharmudi Kudakarude

Padaku puarapetu.

Yudha kalatil vetetumarichu,

deivakaruvai yogam vanu.

Vantar puzha atil neeradi

Kativanur veetil deivamay.

(Drum beats)

Soon he reaches Kativanur.

And, meets his uncle

pays him respect and savours milk and rice.

Then, sets on a journey
to fight the Mutharmudi Kudakar.
Destined to be a god,
as battle is fought.
After bathing in Vantar river,
is raised as god at Kativanur house.
(Drum beats)

Kativanur Veeran

Velichapadu undakunu!

Marichu ennu ezhum patimunum venda,

akat oru puja, purat oru Perunkaliyatam.

Kozhi madhukalasam changatikalku kodutal mati.

Kativanur Veeran

Appears!

Do not consider me dead, need no seventh and thirteenth
day rituals

But, consider a prayer inside and Perunkaliyatam outside.

Get my friends fed and intoxicated.

(Drum beats)

“Komaram illa, Kanaladi illa, deivame.”

“Komaram illenki, Komarethem njan kanditind,

Kanaladi illenkil Kanaladiyem njan kanditind!”

Kudakarku Anukkan Komaravum, Vasuvarkkanaladiyum.

Ucha samayam ponu Malanatilek

Nalvar Tandayanmar.

(Drum beats.)

“Got no Komaram, no Kanaladi, god.”

“If no Komaram, I have one on my mind,

If no Kanaladi, I have one on my mind!”

Anukkan Komaram and Vasuvar Kanaldi for Kudagu.

Towards Malanadu set on journey are

Four Tandayan⁵.

Rande rand muri kindngaleyum talichu

Kativanur veetilvazhipokumbol,

Kelkunu arpum atahasasam.

“Ningal onnum arinjile Tandayanmare

Munam Malanad oru Malayali vanitu

Kativanur neramamante palum chorum vangi aharichu”

Mutharmudi Kudakarde padku purapetu

Yudatil erpetu veti marichu devakaruvay yogam vanu.

Vantar puzha atil neeradi

Kativanur veetil devamay

Avane inu keti peritu kudikuti cheyyuna

Arpanu kekanu tandayanmar.

With two cattle,

travelling toward Kativanur house

four tandayan hear the cries of joy.

“Have you not heard Tandayanmar?

A Malayali from the Malanad

visits his uncle and feasts on milk and rice.”

And, sets for the battle with Kudagu.

After the battle is fought,

he is destined as a god.

On bathing in Vantar river,

is raised as god at Kativanur house.

He is named and his form as god is celebrated

and you could hear the cries of joy, dear tandayanmar!

(Drum beats)

Ponan ennum Azhakan ennum

Rande rand erutu und.

Ameri veetilek Ameri Veera enu per kolikkunu.

Keti perit Kativanureku

Kativanour Veeran ennum peru kondu.

They set out

with the cattle, Ponan and Azhakan.

The god is celebrated at Ameri house

and is named Ameri Veeran.

Also at Kativanur

and is named Kativanur Veeran.

According to the observations made in the *Theoretical Perspectives in Folklore Studies* presented as a part of Folklore Workshop Series II, based on the classification of folklore given by R. S. Boggs, “The Kativanur viran tottam, if we do not consider its context and function belongs to Group C. But this is tottam paattu, therefore a ritual. Since the theme is related to deities it is also a myth. Thus, this has to be considered as a ballad on the basis of form, a myth on the basis of theme, and a ritual on the basis of context and function.” (Fossils, 1997, p 34). The Group C in the classification consists of ballads (C200) and songs (C300).⁶ As discussed earlier, the *tottam* of Veeran can be considered as crossgenre folkloric process. As per the belief system of the folk of the region,

the oral narrative of Veeran is traditionally expressed biography and is legend, folklore, history all at once. The *totam* of Kativanur Veeran is a living text, integral to the live tradition of *Teyyam*, significant to the region. The emphasis here is to extract the folk's expressions on their hero, who crosses the threshold from ordinary to extraordinary, mortal to immortal, and Mandapan, a human to Kativanur Veeran, the *Teyyam*.

Veeran as a dynamic hero navigates through the obstacles on his way. The Veeran's arc shows him as determined and courageous. In the arc, the stakes are escalated when he is left behind by his friends and is forced back to the battlefield to get back his signet ring despite the danger that lurked around. The move is intensified as he realises the mutilation of the little finger which he considered is a mark of victory of the enemies and is reluctant to accept that defeat as it may give the picture of him as a coward. To turn things around, he is determined to face the adversity, only to have stricken by the blow from behind. The description of 'warriorhood' is intricately woven with the description of journey. The sections log the valorous acts and victories on the way. The sudden and violent attack of backstabbing intensifies the death. Moreover, the untimeliness associated with it aids to the intensity demonstrating the attributes of a hero. Blackburn observes, "it is a sudden, terrible death that transforms a human into a deity." (1985, p.261). Further, he opines that the 'cults of the deified dead' is fundamental form of folk Hinduism. The article throws light on violent and premature death and its association with the hero. Further, notes

"To the well-known Hindu perspectives on death, the cult of defied dead add something new. In the Puranas (a death is deified, but in these cults it is the dead themselves who are deified. If elsewhere in Hinduism death separates humans from gods, in these folk cults it joins them together. However, not just any death has this effect; only a special kind makes the dead hero an object of worship. First, the death must be premature, an end that cuts short a person's normal life span. Second, and more important, the death must be violent, an act of aggression or a sudden blow from nature. Many deified heroes are killed in

battle, some in less glorious conflicts; others (especially women) commit suicide. Lastly, the death that deifies is undeserved; the person killed is an innocent (if often fated) victim” (p. 259).

The event of the turn of the character into a hero gets amplified in the ritual and performative context (See the previous chapter). The narrative portrays a human protagonist. Shanu Peruvannan becomes the star of the show with his unmissable and captivating martial prowess. Martial exercises marking the power of the hero. The performance enhances the experience of the folk present. “Performance thus calls forth special attention to and heightened awareness of the act of expression, and gives licence to the audience to regard the act of expression and the performer with special intensity” (Bauman, 1975, p.293) During the performance, the *totakaran* initiates the narrative telling the story of Mandapan and it gains momentum and Madapan gets transformed to Veeran, the hero recounts his story of adventure.

“In these performances, the singing and music often serve as a catalyst for possession by the god of his human mediums. The stories themselves are typically accounts of the origins of the god or goddess, explaining how he or she came to the specific temple in which the performance is taking place. Furthermore, and unlike the mythological stories about more pan-Indian gods, these stories are essentially heroic: their setting is earthly, not celestial, and the main actors are human beings, not gods (though the human actors are often deified in the story). Finally their theme is human struggle – the problems of love and death” (1985, p. 258).



Photograph 4.1



Photograph 4.2



Photograph 4.3



Photograph 4.4



Photograpg 4.5



Photograph 4.6



Photograph 4.7

The Hero Pattern in/of Veeran Totam

To cull out the folkloristic patterns that are prominent in the story of Veeran, the exercise attempted looks at the incidents in the journey of a hero against the backdrop of the standard hero pattern. The pattern considered here is drawn from Dundes' description of patterns proposed by von Hahn, Rank and Lord Raglan. On employing the twenty-two incident pattern of Raglan to the narrative of Veeran, the following patterns are considered. The Dundes's table⁷ of hero patterns drawn from Hahn, Rank and Raglan is reproduced here to extrapolate the traits of Veeran.

	Hahn	Rank	Raglan
1.	hero of illegitimate birth	child of distinguished parents	mother is royal virgin
2	mother is a princess	father is a king	father is a king
3	father is a god	difficulty in conception	father related to mother

4	prophecy of ascendance	prophecy warning against birth (e.g., parricide)	unusual conception
5	hero abandoned	hero surrendered to the water in a box	hero reputed to be son of god
6	suckled by animals	saved by animals or lowly people	attempt (usually by father) to kill hero
7	hero raised by childless shepherd couple	suckled by female animal or humble woman	hero spirited away
8	hero is high-spirited	_____	reared by foster parents in a far country
9	he seeks service abroad	hero grows up	no details of childhood
10	triumphant homecoming	hero finds distinguished parents	goes to future kingdom
11	slays original persecutors and sets mother free	hero takes revenge on his father	is victor over king, giant dragon or wild beast
12	founds cities	acknowledged by people	marries a princess (often daughter of predecessor)
13	extraordinary death	achieves ranks and honors	becomes king

14	reviled because of incest and dies young	_____	for a time he reigns uneventfully
15	hero dies as an act of revenge by insulted servant	_____	he prescribes laws
16	he murders his younger brother	_____	later, he loses favour with gods or his subjects
17	_____	_____	driven from throne and city
18	_____	_____	meets with mysterious death
19	_____	_____	often at the top of a hill
20	_____	_____	his children, if any, do not succeed him
21	_____	_____	his body is not buried,
22	_____	_____	but nevertheless he has one or more sepulchres

Table 4.1 The hero pattern of Hahn, Rank and Raglan.

The table attempts to demonstrate the frequency with which the traits occurred in understanding the hero patterns in the narratives. The traits are not uniform, however, a few apparent parallels are indispensable to the patterns proposed by Hahn, Rank and Raglan. Among the sixteen incidents given by Hahn, only three traits are evident in the *totam* of Veeran and among the thirteen of Rank, five ticks. The character in the *totam* follows the hero pattern to score

the rate of eight out of twenty two. The hero in the narrative is totally abandoned by his father but not entirely by his mother. She is reluctant to throw Mandapan out of the house. However, on his own will he abandons his parental house in Mangadu. Further, he is not raised by a childless shepherd couple, but was fostered by his aunt and uncle along with their son, Anukanan in the far land of Kudagu. He sets up mercantile transactions of crops and oil, with the help of the foster parents who provides him with land to till. The death is extraordinary in the sense that in spite of his victory in the battle with the forces of the foreign land, his circumstances force him to return to the battlefield on a hilly⁸ region in search of his mutilated little finger and signet ring. The triumphant return is not in the literal sense marking a mortal, but takes the form of a *teyyam*. The enemies attack him from behind and he dies young, later on to have apotheosised.

On Proppian analysis of hero pattern of Veeran, the character of Veeran could be considered as the *dramatis personae*. Vladimir Propp proposes a system of structural organisation of texts in his book *Morphology of the Folktale*. The work emphasises the action of the *dramatis personae* and what the action is and how the action is done. According to Propp, function is fundamental to the story to advance. In the chapter, “The Method and Material”, function is defined as “an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of action” (1968, p.21) According to the Proppian description the functions are delineated in the “sphere of action” (p.79). The Table 4.2 to delineate the functions and moves in the story of the hero narrated follows. The first sphere of action following the initial situation sets tone to the action. The initiation situation presents the temporal and spatial determination in the story followed by the composition of the family. The composition of the family of three reveals that Mandapan is born to his parents, nomenclature as Paraka Illathu Chaki and Mangadu Kumarachan in Mangadu after years of childlessness and prayer.

Mangadu Kumarachan

ente achan,

Paraka Illat Chakki

Ente amma.

Paraka Illat Mandan

Ente peru.

Mangadu Kumarachan

is my father,

Paraka Illat Chakki

is my mother.

I am Paraka Illat Mandan

The description of the particulars of the family indicating their well-being contrasts to the misfortune that hovers around and impending complications. The future hero is presented as Mandapan, whose rapid growth is depicted in the story as he takes up bows and arrows and gets well-versed in it along with his friends by the age of ten or twelve. The story also emphasises the mischievousness as his father is angry at him for being obsessed with hunting. The Proppian moves sees absention followed by an interdiction signalling warning. “The sequence of events, of course, actually runs in the reverse.” (Propp, 1968p. 26) The warning is dismissed causing the violation of interdiction. Here, the violation and its interdictions is corresponded and doubled. The command and the denial acts at two levels. One, the command of the father to not serve him food is denied by the mother and the stronghold on the son is interdicted when he decides to abandon the house. Thus the father performs the interdiction, denying food and the mother and son perform violation by feeding and being fed. The following action is the absention performed by Mandapan:

Kelpathundo ni Mandapa!

Okataka pani palatum edukanameda.

Pani edukate

Chorum venda

Arisham paranju Kumarachan

“Are you listening, Mandapa!

It is time to take pursue a living.

If you do not work,

you shall not be fed.”

Kumarachan admonished.

Atukelpate pite nalum kalikan poyi

“Kelkuno ente chengatimare

Eniku vuishakunu.”

“Palu tayo choru tayo, Amme.”

Paying no heed, he goes to play.

“Are you listening, my friends!

I am starving

“Feed me some rice, some milk.”

He is fed with rice as soft as a flower

And ghee that melts like snow.

Definition	Function	Designation	Moves of the narrative
Initial Situation	Introduction and composition of the family	α	Paraka Illathu Chaki and Mangadu Kumarachan in Mangadu longs for a child. Mandapan is born after years of prayer.

Absentation	The form of absenting here is going to work, to the forest, to trade, to war, “on business.”	β	The intensified form of absentation occurs when Mandapan is forced out of his house by his father.
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	Members of the younger generation absent themselves	β^3	He leaves the house.
Interdiction	Putting someone (children) in a stronghold, addressed to the hero.	γ	He is denied food by his father after an argument over the bad company the former keeps and his obsession with bows and arrows. He orders his wife not to feed their son.
Violation	The interdiction is violated	δ	The mother feeds him and violates the command of his father. As a result, his bows and arrows are broken by his father. Subsequently, he abandons the parental house. He decides to set on a journey to reach Kodagu for trade with his friends. His friends refrain from taking him along

Reconnaissance	The villain attempts reconnaissance	ε	On the way, he is met with the locals who yielded tariffs. The news of brewing battle by the local forces of the region reaches him.
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Delivery	Information about victim reaches villain.	ζ	
Trickery	Deception by villain	η	
Complicity	Submission to deception by the victim	θ	
Villainy	The act of villainy results in harm	A	
Lack	A member of a family lacks or desires.	a	The initial lack presents the lack of progeny followed by Mandapan's realisation of the lack of means of existence and intends to set out for trade.

Mediation	The hero is requested or given command The banished hero is transported away from home.	B B₅	The function of hero in the character gets to form vividly here on. The story tends to revolve around his fate after being driven out, following a ‘victimized hero’
Counteraction	A volitional decision	C	

Departure	The hero leaves for the journey. Spatial transference.	↑	The initial departure sees Mandapan leaving home for trade. The second departure is as he sets out for trade and meets Chemmarati. The third departure sees him ready to battle against the forces.
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Guidance	Transfer/ Delivery or Whereabouts of an object of search. The hero is led.	G G ³	He follows the trail left by his friends and the cattle. He takes up oil trade along with agriculture in Kodagu, guided by his relatives.
Struggle	A combat ensues Battle with an enemy	H H ₁	The battle cry ensues and he gets ready for the battle collecting all his weapons.
Branding	The hero is marked.	J	He possess a signet ring.
Victory	The defeat of the villain. The villain is beaten in open combat	I I ₁	He fights the battle bravely and defeats the opposite force.
Liquidation	The peak narrative as the	K	The result of his work fetches him a means of

	lack id liquidated A slain person is revived.	K ₉	existence after agriculture and oil trade. A victory is obtained in the battle. Mandapan is apotheosised as Veeran and takes up the <i>teyyam</i> form.
Return	The hero returns	↓	Mandapan returns as Veeran, a hero. The battle is fought and won. However, he realises that he is missing his little finger and signet ring. As he goes back to find it, he is stabbed from behind and is killed. The nature of return is in the form of Teyyam, as he is apotheosised as Ameri Veeran and Kativanur Veeran.
Pursuit	The hero is chased.	Pr	
Rescue	The hero is saved from the pursuit	Rs	
Unrecognized arrival	The hero arrives home or arrives in another kingdom/ country	O	

Unfounded claims	A false hero presents unfounded claims	L	
Difficult task	A difficult task is assigned to the hero	M	
Solution	The task is resolved.	N	
Recognition	The hero is recognised by a band/ a mark	Q	Accomplished for his hard work and bravery.
Exposure	The villain or false hero is exposed		
Transfiguration	The hero with a new appearance	T	Transfigured to god in the minds of the devotees.
Punishment	The villain is punished/ banished	U	
Wedding		W W*	

Table 4.2 The narrative of Veeran paralleled to Proppian Hero Pattern

The structural elements are apparent in the text of Veeran. The story of Veeran initiates with an evident lack, where the parents are worried about the lack of progeny⁹ and desires to have a child. The narrative goes, “There is no progeny to look after my Paraka Illam.” “*Ente Paraka Illam vazhuvan santati illalo.*” Presenting her worry, Chakki pleads, “Where shall I go to do the penance?/ Should I pray to the Sun god? / Or the Moon that shines in the night?” (See Chapter 3). The initiation of the narrative is through the presentation of a lack.

The lack, it is noted, “determines the next point of the complication... In the first instance a certain act is given, the result of which creates an insufficiency and provokes a quest; in the second instance a ready-made insufficiency is presented, which also provokes a quest. In the first instance, a lack is created from without; in the second, it is realized from within” (p. 35). In the narrative, the lack indicated vividly, one is the lack of progeny and desire for a child, which could be designated as *a* and another one is Mandapan’s making up his mind to leave the house. Soon, he realises the lack of means of existence, designated as *a*⁵, and sets out for trade. On *a*⁵, it is opined, “such beginnings from daily living sometimes develop quite fantastically” (p.36). The story, thus, presents lack of different forms. The lack gives a beginning to the course of action of the story. According to the Proppian analysis of the hero, the story of Mandapan could be considered as one where the boy is forced out and “the thread of the narrative is linked to his or her fate and not to those who remain behind, then the hero of the tale is the seized or banished boy or girl. There are no seekers in such tales. Heroes of this variety may be called victimized heroes.” (p.36). Mandapan decides to leave the house at any cost and the oral narrative goes, “*Shaniyum Budhanum kizhaku yatra ponu/ Njanum koodu porunu chagatimare*”, that is “To travel toward East on Saturday and Wednesday/ I will accompany you, my friends.” The connective incident of parent-senders is relevant to the action of Mandapan’s story. The story tends to begin as a seeker hero but eventually turns into a victimised hero. The departure initially seems to be in search of the goal as he makes up his mind to trade along with his friends in Kodagu. Even after being abandoned by his friends, he is determined toward the goal. But the turn occurs in the story, from a seeker to victim, when he is met with several adventures enroute.

An interaction similar to the function of donor is presented through a weakened testing as Mandapan meets his aunt and uncle in Kodagu on his journey - “*Kativanur ind ente neraammaman/ Tolal pidich marodananju*” that is, “My uncle resides in Kativanur/ He embraced his nephew.” On greeting and interrogating, they realise that the traveller is their nephew and feeds him. He stays there for a while tilling the land and offers his service. Impressed by his hard work he is rewarded with land them. On their guidance he undertakes oil trade.

The form presented is through greeting and interrogation, “interrogation assumes the character of an indirect test. If the hero answers rudely he receives nothing, but if he responds politely he is rewarded” (p. 40). “*Appo parayunu nerammaman/ Pakuti parambum padinjayum Mandapanu/ Pakuti parambum vadakiniyum ente Anukanu*” meaning, “The uncle promises/ Half a land toward west is for Mandapan/ Half a land toward north is for Anukan.”

The spatial transference takes place as the object being sought is usually in a different kingdom. The interrogation brings in a positive reaction of the hero as Mandapan answers his relatives. He reaches the place of his relatives on following the trail left behind by his friends and their cattle. The transgression of boundary is evident followed by a conflict that sees the outcome. Mandapan’s friends inform him of the battle brewing.

Ennayum mari panavum kondu varumbol

Kandallo Kativanur chengatikale.

“Ningal evide pokunu chengatikale?”

“Nee onnum arinjile Mandapan,

Mutharmudi Kudakar pada alle mutirunu!”

Padaku vende ayudham,

Anju ketu ambum villum vangunu

Chelakati ariyavalu vangunu.

On the way back trading oil for money,

He meets friends in Kativanur.

“Where are you off to, friends?”

“Have you not heard, Mandapan,

Mutharmudi Kodagu battle is brewing!”

The weapons to fight,

A set of five bows and arrows

and a knife are bought.

In the ensuing battle, Mandapan defeats his enemies. Victory is also perceived in a negative tone. The negative form takes form as he realises the lack of signet ring and mutilation of his little finger. The plot further develops as the object of quest is obtained. The result of the characters work is obtained after his hard work and the guided journey. The victory is obtained after the battle. However, as it states, “A tale may have another misfortune in store for hero: a villain may appear again, may seize... may kill...etc. In a word, an initial villainy is repeated, sometimes in the same forms as in the beginning, and sometimes in the other forms which are new for a given tale” (p.58). The composition of moves to denote the development of story following one after the other and interweaving develops the story.

The character of Chemarati is introduced who interrogates Mandapan as he encounters her mid journey and requests for water. She offers him water on his plea. In the notes it is put that “the preliminary receipt of water could also be examined as a special form of F (receipt of a magical agent). The second departure is when he encounters Chemarati and the story depicts their wedding after that.

Dundes opines on the pattern, “His pattern ends with the marriage of the hero. In other words, Propp’s scheme does not provide the full life of a hero ending with the hero’s death... Most hero narratives are, or were told as, true stories; they are legends rather than fairy tales. For this reason, Propp’s pioneering morphology of the fairy tale has only limited applicability to the totality of the legendary hero pattern” (1980, pp.230-231). “Propps’s thirty-one function analysis of Russian fairy tale structure ends with the hero’s or heroine’s wedding which further supports the notion that traditional narratives included a

marriage” (pp.238-239). In the case of the Veeran, it is after his wedding that the character sets out for combat and marks the victory. The victory is of negative note as the triumph is succeeded by the death of the character.

The synchronic analysis of the narratives channels to the structures, and syntactical paradigms in the *totam*. Within the narrative there are acts compliance and non-compliance. In the elements proposed by Propp, a few elements in the narrative operate within the confines of the functions presented in the morphology. The fundamental morphology of the narrative of Veeran follows the pattern, $\alpha \beta^3 \gamma \delta \varepsilon \zeta a B^5 I DEF G^3 W^*H^1J I^1K^9 IQT$.

Tranceformation of the Veeran

Narrative makes a mark in orienting to a paradigm of a hero. How is a hero imagined among the people? How is a hero represented in the oral narrative? The narrative casts the character with overlapping identities of a hero, god, son, friend, and lover. The narrative chronicles Veeran as fierce, heroic and poignant, all at once. The *totam* of Veeran ingeniously claims the herohood of Kativanoor

Veeran. In “The Monomyth” Campbell writes, “The hero, therefore, is the man or woman who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human forms” (p.18). The narrative consists of specificities that delineate the heroic deeds of the character, depicting the conflicts between good and evil, life and death, the themes intricate to hero pattern and humanity in its appeal. Mandapan crosses the threshold to a larger-than-life hero to become Kativanur Veeran.

A key factor in the transformation of the character of Mandapan to Veeran, the hero is his realisation that he has lost one of his body parts. His lack of finger instills in him a sense of loss. The lack turns into a representational strategy and implies his determination not to yield. Body thus becomes ubiquitous to the complex, more so when it presents apotheosis, where the god is embodied in a mortal. Thus, body becomes an aspect of semiotic significance in the portrayal of the oral narratives. It is not just in the narrative that it becomes a part of the telling but the telling in itself is shouldered on the gestures and grooves of the narrators and the mortal who takes up the form of the god. As far as the narrators are concerned, both first person narrative and the third person

narrative make use of voice modulation to get the narrative across to the receivers. *Totam* is recapitulated as the narration is progressed. The bodily gesture are extremely significant to the complex of Veeran teyyam as it involves a combination of martial arts and dance movements to elevate the visuo-spatial aspects to convey the heroic deeds. Further, gaze becomes an important bodily attribute, for instance, the use of Veeran's eyes to look at the *Chemarati tara*,¹⁰ the platform erected in the memory of his wife at the sacred space, signals at his overwhelming emotions for her. (See photographs 4.5 and 4.6). The narration engages the positioning of the bodies of the narrator, the performer, the character and the audience in connection with the storyworld.

Discussing the “basic outline of the universal mythological formula of the adventure of the hero” (1973, p. 20), Campbell notes “deeply significant motifs of perils, obstacles, and good fortunes of the way” (p.20). Further, drawing upon “the standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: *separation/departure – initiation - return*: which might be named the nuclear unit of monomyth.” (p.28). Reproducing the figure presented by Campbell:

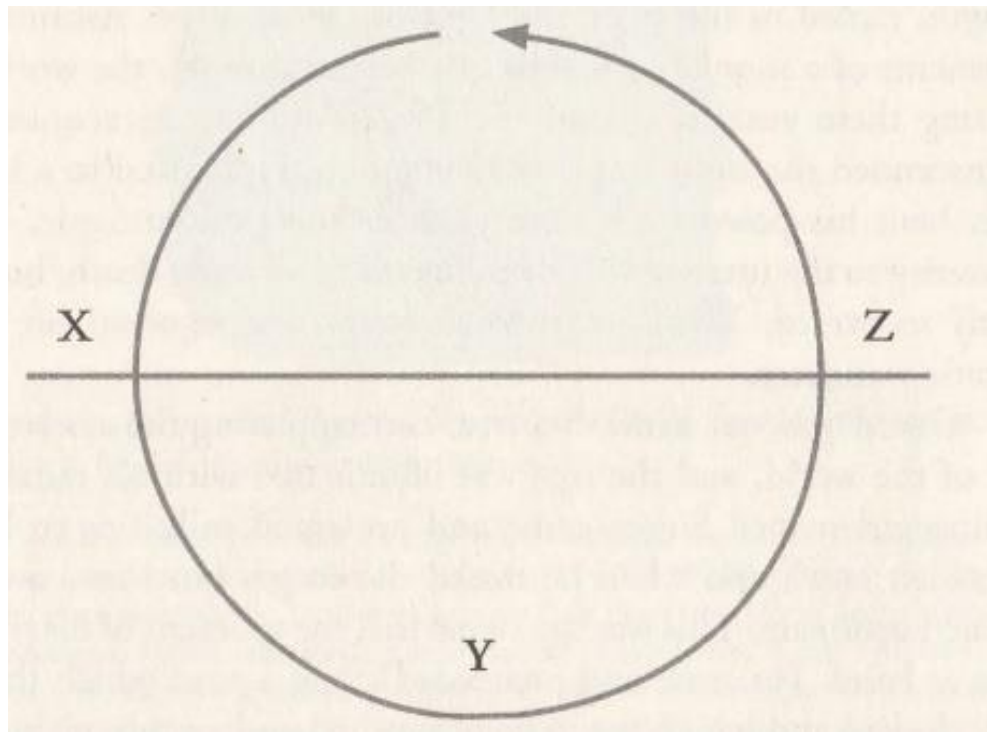


Diagram 4.1 Reproduced from Joseph Campbell's The Hero with a Thousand Faces showing hero venturing into a supernatural realm and returns after an adventure to aid the fellow beings.

Here, Mandapan ventures out from an ordinary world. However, the region ventured into is not a “supernatural wonder” (p.28) that Campbell suggests, but an ordinary world to do mercantile transaction in the neighbouring region. Though there are encounters on the way, the victory is short-lived. There is no return of the hero in the literal sense, yet the return is manifested through *keekal* as Kativanur Veeran, as discussed earlier. The return, however is metaphysical as Veeran becomes *teyyam* and parallels the description given by Campbell, “with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man” (p.28). It is opined in the book *Theyyamthirathottangal: Oru Padanam*, it is opined that the *teyyam* forms like Kativanur Veeran and Mutapan are conducted to protect lives and to stay out of danger. (2016, p. 18) The cyclical conduct of the Veeran teyyam could emphasise “the return and reintegration with society, which is indispensable to the continuous circulation of spiritual energy into the world.” Thus, Veeran as a local hero aligns with the “circular adventure of the hero” and brings “boons to a single folk” (p.28).

Conclusion

The *totam* of Veeran is gripping heroic and is deeply rooted in the regions of North Malabar and the borders of Kerala and Karnataka. There is a persistent patterns and motifs that emerge in the hero narrative. The construction, representation and socio-cultural meanings attributed to the hero sees the heroic deeds of Veeran as described as physical, moral and divine. The biography sees him passing different thresholds. The journey from Mangadu to Kodagu and back as a hero is eventful. The narrative also glorifies the heroic moral values shown by him. . The narrative describes the various weapons used by Mandapan. In spite of the crushing turn of events in the life of Veeran, he is determined to live with integrity. He is reluctant to accept his triumphant journey back as he realises the loss of his little finger and the ring. He believes that the mutilation symbolises the enemy’s victory and lack of ring symbolises disloyalty. Undeterred by adversities he returns to face the impending danger. The narratives show characters and contexts rooted in the ecological worldview. The complex is grounded in the surrounding environment.

Endnote

- ¹ Archetypes tend to personify natural processes and to present them in concrete terms—god and devil, life and death, male and female, for example—a characteristic of mythological imagery. Less pivotal belief-characters (such as spirits, fairies, ogres, and dragons), as well as abstractions (such as good and evil) and individuals in the social group (or mother and father), also serve as prominent archetypes. In daily living, archetypes are experienced as emotions and mental images associated with such significant events in the life of a human as birth or death or with a stage in life (adolescence or becoming a man or woman, for example).. Similarly, an elaborate folktale in which a youth sets out to learn fear (Motif H1376.2, “Quest: learning what fear is”; AT 326, “The Youth Who Wanted To Learn What Fear Is”) and encounters many socially significant individuals and groups, of whom only one succeeds finally in teaching him fear, would be indicative of the struggle between individual and society; it is the struggle of a youngster with no independent social identity seeking to wrest his place in society (represented by parental authority) by going through the process (archetype) of individuation. See more C. Jung and T. Green p.39.
- ² Mutharmudi is located in Madikeri in the district of Kodagu in Karnataka.
- ³ The rendition of the narrative through poetry and prose is often dealt as speech events demarcating the social status. For example, the *totam* on the first day rendered is *Putuchuram Keekal* marking the character’s descend from the hill (discussed earlier in the chapter). The particular part is presented by the *totakaran*, who pleads the form of *teyyam* to appear. On the next day, the narrative is rendered by the *kolakaran*-turned *teyyam* who uses the first person voice. Moreover, the rendition also reflects on the social positioning in the case of the final part of the narrative that involves the part called *Cholivili*, with recitals parallel to Sanskrit chants. The cue, thus is at the reciter, who represents the *Tandayan*. See V.L. Mathew (2016) for further discussion of social status and Sanskrit education.
- ⁴ A. Dundes remarks on hero pattern as a subject of inquiry and draws a review of literature from E.B. Taylor on Moses to von Hahn’s sixteen-incident biographical paradigm on fourteen heroes to Alfred Nutt ‘s study on Celtic heroes. Dundes writes that Adolf Bauer’s monograph. “The heroes analysed by von Hahn included Perseus, Hercules, Oedipus, Romulus and Remus, Siegfried, Cyrus, Karna, and Krishna. The emphasis is on the parallels of the hero patterns across legends around the world, “the expulsion of children, miraculous rescue from water, the nursing by an animal, and the foster parenthood undertaken by a shepherd, fisherman, or some other poor individual.” (1980, p. 229) Also mentions the composite narrative synopsis of the hero pattern by Otto Rank given in “The Myth of the Birth of the Hero” (p.230).
- ⁵ The reference here is to the appellation given to the head of the community of *Tiyya*. Similarly, the identification of Anukkan with *Komaram* signifies the one who belongs to the community. Mathew in her book opines that the god dictates that in the Malanad, the Komaram is of the community Kavutiya and is an appreciation to Chemarati who belonged to the community of Kavutiya. For more on *tandayan*, see Edgar Thurston 1909. Castes and Tribes of Southern India. Vol. 4 & 5. Madras Government Press ⁶ See Boggs, R. S. Folklore Classification. *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, No.13, 1949, pp 205.
- ⁷ See A. Dundes (1980). The Hero Pattern and the Life of Jesus. *Interpreting Folklore*.
- ⁸ Freeman notes, “Until the Mysorean invasions and subsequent British take-over at the close of the 18th century, each of these areas lay in the mountainous territories of three contiguous kingdoms-Kolattunad, Nileshevaram and Kumbala-ranged south to north in domains reaching from their prominent western coastal centers up into the highlands.” See Freeman’s description of mountainous zones in the northernmost parts of Kerala

in the article “Gods, Groves and the Culture of Nature in Kerala”. *Modern Asian Studies* 33, 2 (1999), p. 257-302. Cambridge University Press.

⁹ The text parallels to the lines where the mothers plead for progeny. Repetition and coincidences in the texts are undeniable in the complex.

¹⁰ A structure erected near the sacred space where the Veeranteyyam gets conducted, in the memory of Chemarati. (See Photograph 4.6). Velarkote Chemarati jumps into the flames of funeral pyre. She exclaims at the shining star at noon. The tactic of exclaiming at the star shining bright in the noon to distract is strikingly common in the material of totam.

Chapter 5

The Flora, Fauna and Folk in *Totam*

The chapter details on how eco-centric narratives of *teyyam* strategise an actualisation of post-anthropocentric sensibilities. A close look at the oral narratives reveals how the zoomorphic and floral imagination interweave with the expressive tradition. The narratives depict not just the characters but emphasises on the interconnectedness of the environment around. The floral and faunal components are represented and revered. From land to water to air to plants to animals, the natural elements are intrinsic to the complex. The sacred groves are central to the complex. How are the categories of non-human and human presented in the folk imaginative and expressive tradition in the entanglement of word and world in the complex? How are interactions in and round the home, *oikos* located in the context of the complex? The role of storytelling and ecology in the phenomenon and the intermingling of human /non-human agencies and the significance of co-existence are looked into.

Reflecting on the nature-culture continuum in the context of *teyyam*, the approach dealt with here is ecocritical in nature. The inevitability of sacred grove to the complex is remarkable. The complex is witnessed by the folk in the outdoors in harmony with nature. The oral narratives are rendered and listened to in such a set up and could be seen as an attribute of ecopoetics in them. The conduct reflects local engagement and cooperation among the folk. The sacred groves, thus become liminal spaces – the in between of plants and humans living juxtaposing each other. The space is fundamental to the belief-driven ecoconsciousness and ethos. J. R. Freeman in the article “Gods, Groves and Nature in Kerala” describes the grove as “a piece of garden or forest land, but what culturally defines it is that it is dedicated for the exclusive use of particular deities; it is guarded in their interests” (p.261). James Cowan, who studied the Aboriginal culture of Australia writes, “it is the ‘*collusion* between man and nature’ that evokes reverence: a collusion that’s achieved through respectful modification of nature” (Nanson, 2021, p. 39). The environment around the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea is significant to *totam*. The manifestation happens in several forms. The manifestation sees the mortal takes the form of

divine, in anthropomorphic and zoomorphic forms. In fact, the association of *Teyyam* as a cult to animism is often suggested in the beliefs among the folk on the complex. The descriptions of the landscape and seascape enrich the stories. The manifestations are of zoomorphic in nature where the features of animals are attributed to deities. The transformation sees human to non-human to god in *Teyyam* with zoomorphic characters. The forms of *teyyam* are projected with attributes of animals. For instances, the *Nagakaniteyyam* or the *Nagayeniteyyam* depicts the stories incorporating serpents, the *Puliteyyam* involves tigers and cubs, *Panchuruli* revolves around boars, *Mutalateyyam* confines to crocodiles. The flora and fauna typical to the landscape features in the oral narratives of the complex as the natural landscape and the cultural landscape entangle.

Ecocriticism and Zoofolkloristics

The chapter looks into the interweaving of the complex, the zoomorphic and folk imagination and topographical sensibilities with a select oral narratives. Anthony Nanson in the book *Storytelling and Ecology: Empathy, Enchantment and Emergence in the Use of Oral Narratiuve* writes, “Cultural ecology tries to integrate literature with ecology via notions of textuality and empathy that transcend the duality of mind and body” (2021, p.5). The interweaving of folkloristics, narratology and ecocriticism is taken up to understand the representation in the storytelling of interactions among the living in the complex. *Totam* features gods, groves, animals and plants. An approach toward such interactions are focussed through zoofolkloristics. On applying such approach to folklore, it aids it “re-evaluate perceptions of folkjlore, link it to ecology and change human attitudes to non-human beings. The latter is the basic concept of zoofolkloristics” (Kaucic, 2015, p.16). The article “Zoofolkloristics: First Insights towards the New Discipline” also notes, “The simplest definition of zoofolkloristics defines it as a discipline dealing with animals in folklore” (p.9). The concept is further elaborated in the article “Zoofolkloristics: Imagination as a Critical Component” thus:

“Zoofolkloristics draws on humans’ perceptions and creative representations of the world around them with a focus on nonhuman animals in that world. It is, essentially, a critical analysis of the position and role of other-than-human animals in various folklore

works as well as representations of human-nonhuman relations... Zoofolkloristics introduces theoretical and analytical approaches that enable insight into the changing attitudes of human towards other animals in folklore as well as within traditional and contemporary ritual practices. This may facilitate a reframing of historical and current human-nonhuman entanglements with potential impact upon the legal protection of nonhuman subjects. Theoretically and methodologically, zoofolkloristics is formed in connection with ecocriticism, critical cultural and critical animal studies (CAS), literary criticism perspectives on animal issues, and other concepts and discourses across the sciences that help illuminate interspecies encounters, entanglements, and relations in a given (and inherently dynamic) socio-political context” (2024, p.928).

The cases presented here include faunal representations of *Nageniteyyam*, *Puliteyyam* and floral imagination in *Devakutu*.

Zoomorphic Imagination and the Folk in *Totam*

On providing insights on zoofolkloristics, Kaucic’s article throws light on the two predominant concepts on animals in folklore: anthropomorphism and zoomorphism. The former is where “animals are attributed human characteristics...or otherwise behave like people- animals are transferred into the human world” (p.14). The latter is described as “animalistic characters are attributed to people” (p. 14).

In the *Puliteyyam*, the zoomorphic projection animates the senses. The *puliteyyam*, where the apotheosis sees the god takes the zoomorphic form of *puli* meaning tiger. It is believed that Siva nd Parvati take the form of the tiger and the tigress. The data is drawn from the live conduct of *Puliteyyam* in Kanjirod Sri Pulideivam Kav on 24th, 25th and 26th of February, 2024. The form was taken up by Prasanth Peruvannan. The *totam* begins with the salutary lines to Ganapati,

Karimukhanu

viravodu

tozhuthen

tuna taru navil.

Karimukhan, (Ganapati)

Bow to you,

a quick gesture.

Help me with

the gift of the gab.

The *totam* of *Puliteyyam* recounts the narrative of gods zoomorphosised as tigers. It is believed that *Pulideivam*, translated as tiger-god belongs to the region close to Panatur river, bordering Kerala and Karnataka. The details depict that Siva who is about to destroy the demon, Vrushabasura takes the form of *shardula*, that is tiger in the name of Pulikandan and Parvati takes the form of tigress in the name of Pulikarinkali. Moving across the forests of Tului, they come across tigers mating and take the form of tigers to give birth to six cubs. Pulikarinkali gives birth in the hollowed out den under the Tatenar rock. Out of the cubs five are males, namely Kandapuli, Marapuli, Kalapuli, Pulimarutan, Pulikanan and Puliyurkanan and one is a female cub, Puliyurkali. To satiate the hunger of the cubs, they reach a barn for cows, owned by Kurumbrantiri Vanor¹. The tigers feed upon the cattle in the barn. Dejected and frustrated he seeks help to get rid of the tigers. Karindirinayar comes forward to promise the destruction of the tigers. He sets out with his bows and arrow and sets up a hunting² blind strategically to conceal and catch them with the help of branches of a mango tree. The narrative goes,

Gandivam ambum

Karintiriyarnayar enthi.

Maavodu kond

Anage oliyum teertu.

With Gandiva like arrows,

Karintirinayar sets out,

builds hunting hideout

with branches of a mango tree.

The hide out³ also saw a child with the mask of a deer to trap the tigers. The trap is set and the arrows are ready to take down the tigers. To the contrary, the tigers attack the child and the hunter and kill them. While dying, the latter disapproving the action questions the tigers. He tells that he has served his master well to seek justice for the loss of the cattle; whereas what was done to them was injustice. He further prevailed upon the tigers for justice and was promised to be venerated along with them. He, thus becomes a deity and is venerated as a form of *teyyam*, *Karintirikananteyyam*, as the narrative goes, “*Pulideivangal angane onbatay!*” meaning, “There, thus, comes nine tigergods!”

The children are exposed to the *teyyam* and the interaction sees the *teyyam* following the children with the claws open as the children in awe try to hold the *teyyam*. Further, the representation signifies the tiger cubs at play with humans. The embeddedness ensure the affirmative of tigers as protectors. The narrative of tiger-gods in the sacred grove reflects the commenting on the enchantment of landscape and storytelling, it is noted, “there is a synergy between the protection of landscape features and the transmission of stories” (Nanson, p.37). The presence of tigers legitimises that the landscape is wild. At the same time, the contact depicts the human-animal interactions.

The apotheosis of Karintirikanan could be seen as the acknowledgement by the folk of his courage and fearlessness as he is the only one who acted upon the call of Vanor. The process of hunting is evidently different from the standard process, detailed in the notes, where instead of having beaters and helpers who are in-charge of the dogs and nets, he takes up the action all by himself to mass exterminate the tigers. The worship of the tigers and the hunter indicate that the hunting is a result of concern for the perils to the other living beings. It is associated to that the act of keeping in check the population of the wild animals. The act is an attempt to keep a balance and homeostasis among the species of the region and acknowledging the natural cycle as tigers predate on cows. Also, it is interesting to note that the form of Pulikandan is taken by Siva, who has taken form of a hunter too according to the beliefs of the folk.⁴ The belief parallels with the annual conduct of *Pulideivam* keeps them away from the threat of wild animals. The folk imagination throws light on the parallels of concerns around the natural setting and the concerns around the socio-cultural set up. It is assimilated to the hegemony over the possession of land.

As the narrative concludes, the Vanor is set to look for the consequence of sending a hunter. It is believed that he is stuck en route as his palanquin has become immobile. It is the hunter who has turned to a deity who blesses the chief. And, it is from then on that to curb the wild animal attacks in the chieftdom that the *Puliteyyam* is revered. The act sprung from the chief's obligation to propitiate the death.

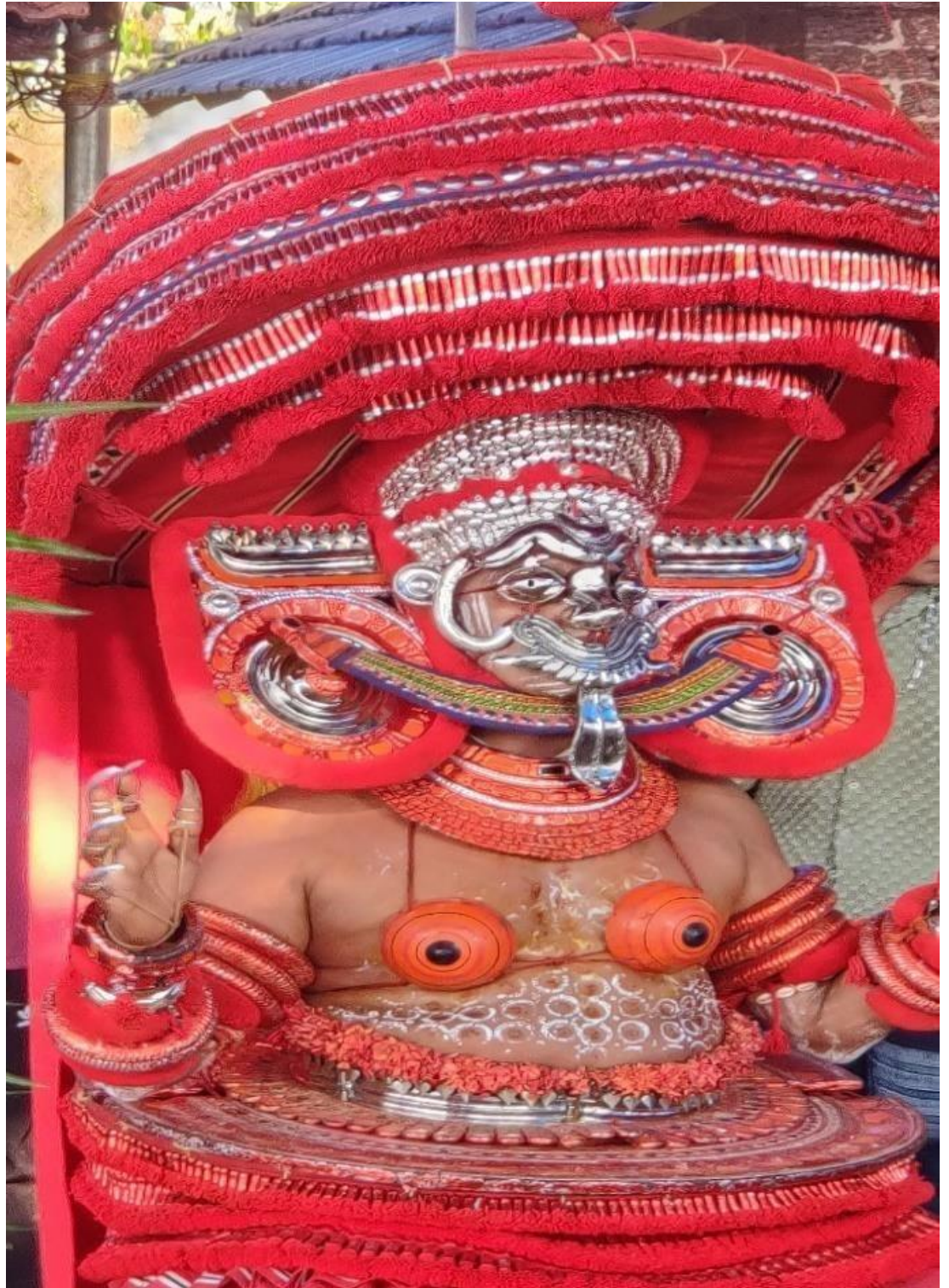
The consideration of power inherent in performance to transform social structures opens the way to a range of additional considerations concerning the role of the performer in society. Perhaps there is a key here to the persistently documented tendency for performers to be both admired and feared – admired for their artistic skill and power and for the enhancement of experience they provide, feared because of the potential they represent for subverting and transforming the status quo. Here too may lie a reason for the equally persistent association between performers and marginality or deviance, for in the special emergent quality of performance the capacity for change may be

highlighted and made manifest to the community. (Bauman, 1975, p.305).

The social set up sees the fight for power among the rulers and the control over the people who belonged to the lower rung of the society (Discussed in Chapter 2). Here, the hunter is killed and divinised following his critique on justice. Thus, the zoomorphic imagination direct toward a subversive attitude emphasising an upward mobility of those who were subjugated.



Photograph 5.1



Photograph 5.2 *Pulideivam*



Photograph 5.3 Pulikananteyyam



Photograph 5.4 Teyyam bestows blessings



Photograph 5.5. The façade of the Iriveri Pulideivam Kshetram embellished with the tiger-gods.

The *totam* of the *Teyyam* form Nagakani/ Nageni depicts the story of the snakes worshipped as goddesses and gods. The region inhabits several kinds of snakes and are considered sacred.⁵ In the complex, the snakes are considered as gods and revered in the form Nagabhagavaty, Kurindini, Nagakani/ Nageni. The worship of serpents has been believed to be prevalent in the region from ancient times and they are often considered as the protectors of the land. On extending the belief that Parasurama on creating the land put forth the condition that the inhabitants of the grama (as discussed in Chapter 2) were to consider the serpents as divine beings and worshipped. The shrines in some groves are embellished with motifs of snakes (Photograph 5.6). The region is part of what is known as ‘ahibhumi’, where *ahi*⁶ denotes snakes and *bhumi* means land, meaning the land of snakes.



Photograph 5.6 showing the sacred space related to serpent worship in Chala, Kannur.

The *totam* of *Nageniteyyam* begins with the *varavili* to invoke the gods.

The lines go:

Poika polika, Naga Bhagavati.

Polika Bhagavati, Naga Bhagavati.

Let it flourish, Naga Bhagavati

Let it flourish Bhagavati, Naga Bhagavati.

The *totam* honours snakes by addressing them as dwellers of a snake kingdom. The narrative describes snake's race where Nagakanni and Nagakandeswaran lived with their off springs in the Maninaga *putu*. *Putu* is the burrows in the mounds where snakes dwell. The lineage grew as several off springs took birth in the *putu* with clutch of snake eggs, *nagamutakal*. The adjectives *shri* and *tiru* are used to describe the snake to denote prosperity and reverence. The eggs are hatched on the forty-first day. The performer who takes up the form of the Nageni *teyyam* employs the serpentine moves, described as *enju chelunu*, a colloquialised form of *ezhanju chelunu* meaning slithering away. The movement of the snakes are paralleled to the climbing plant *Cissus latifolia*, known as *naranda*:

Katil peruta

naranda pole

Enju varunalo

Nagamakkal

Like the *Naranda*

Crawling in the forest,

the baby snakes

slither their way.



Photograph 5.7 Nagakani/ Nageniteyyam

The conduct of the *teyyam* is associated with *dana-danya samrudhi*, prosperity and fertility. It is believed among the folk that the conduct of *teyyam* forms of snakes brings prosperity and is done for the appeasement of snakes, *nagapriti*. Snake worship is relevant to the notion of fecundity. In the narrative the clutch of snake eggs in multitude directs at the idea of prosperity, off springs and fertility. In the article “Saints, Serpents, and Terrifying Goddesses: Fertility Culture on the Malabar Coast (c. 1500-1800)” notes, “Malabar, being a cultural melting pot during the medieval and early modern period... became the site for the evolution of an interesting fertility psyche.” (Arafath, 2016, p. 100).

In the lines of perspectives of zoofolkloristics the relegation of animal subjectivity and nonhuman experiences, has been addressed: “it is now becoming possible to reverse this situation and reinstate nonhuman animals from the past as feeling, thinking individuals with their own stories and histories” (2024, n.p.) The depiction of animals in the *totam* is anthropocentric. The narratives set out a discourse for the animals. The *puliteyyam* shows the tigress and the tiger with feelings and the totam of *Nageniteyyam* shows the familial togetherness among the snakes. The animals are capable of have feelings and emotions. They are coloured with subjectivity and character of their own.

Floral Imagination and Folk in Totam

“To preserve our places and to be at home in them, it is necessary to fill them with imagination. To imagine as well as see what is in them.” Wendell Berry opines on the significance of nature, creativity and imagination.(Nanson p.121). An imagination involving the essence of ecological consciousness, the floral component in culture and folk beliefs are evident in the narrative of Devakutu. An enquiry into the representation of flowers in the oral narratives of situates the socio-cultural aspects of lives in the larger landscape. Jack Goody pursues a geographical and temporal enquiry into the culture of flowers:

For flowers are also part of culture: firstly, because they have been brought under cultivation by mankind and, secondly, because they are used throughout social life, for decoration, for medicine, in cooking and for their scents, but above all in establishing, maintaining and even ending

relationships, with dead as with the living, with divinities as well as humans (1993, p.2).

The live conduct of Devakutu was held in the Tekumbad Sri Kulom Tayakavu Bhagavati Kshetram in Cherukunu in the district of Kannur on 21st December, 2022, 5th of *Dhanu*. The *teyyam* that grew into prominence as the only *teyyam* form taken up by a woman⁷ is *Devakutu*. In discussing the floral imagination in the folk, an emphasis on the form of Devakutu cannot be denied, though it is often looked upon as a site of contestation to consider the form as a *teyyam*. However, the relevance here is to the vegetal complex within the form that supersedes the contestation. A middle ground where the form overlaps the characteristics of *kootu*, a play like dance and that of *Teyyam* is resorted to, highlighting the ecocritical essence in the form. The content emphasises the ecologically rooted sense of belonging. The central feature is the bower bestowed with diverse flowers. It is interesting to note that Devakutu is also called as Valliammakutu⁸, where *valli* means creeper and *amma* means mother and *kutu* means dance or to play.

The formulation of the narrative sees the appellation and address to several flowers innate to the region. The grove where the *teyyam* takes place is Tekumbad⁹, a picturesque landscape. The narrative recounts that Tekumbad, an island with floral abundance has attracted the celestial beings, *apsara*. The celestial beings mesmerised by the landscape descends down to venture into the bowers to collect flowers. It is believed that one of the beings loses the way and is lost in the bower. She is wandering in the bowers in solitude. And it is believed that Narada provides her with new clothes and makes way for her to go back to the *devaloka*, the abode of gods. The bower becomes a refuge to the being and Narada acts as a guide. A sense of fantastical in the narrative is employed as supernatural¹⁰ form of a celestial goddess is juxtaposed with the religious figure of Narada, a messenger between the celestial realm and human world.

The *totam* of Devakutu identifies the flowers in the island. At the start of the rendering the narrator presents a salutation to Ganapati and goes:

Karakanar makan Pillayar!

Ota kombu udayavane!

Omana Ganapatiye!

Karimbum Tenilanirale

Karatal edutudane

Vayale amrut cheytu

Vayale amrut cheytu

Ganapati oru abayam njan

Pillayar (Ganapati), the son of the merciful (Siva)!

The Single-tusker! The Saviour!

Dear, Ganapati!

Savour with your hands

sugarcane, honey and coconut.

As you take into the mouth

the sacred food.

Ganapati, I take refuge in you.

(Drum beats.)

The totam enlists the flowers of the island. The flowers lay well within the folk repertoire of the region. The flowers are identified by the celestial being as she responds to the landscape. Enchanted by its beauty she asks her companions to collect them. In the narrative, *malar* means flower, *totam* refers to garden, *koyam* denotes to gather or pluck and *tozhi* stands for a friend or a companion.

Checki malaro totatil ellam

Cheki malaro koyamo tozhi

Asoka malaro totatil ellam

Asoka malaro koyamo tozhi

Saugandika malaro totatil ellam

Saugandika malaro koyamo tozhi

Pichaka malaro totatil ellam

Pichaka malaro koyamo tozhi

Kayampu malaro totatil ellam

Kayampu malaro koyamo tozhi

Tulasi malaro totatil ellam

Tulasi malaro koyamo tozhi

With the Cheki flower, the bower abounds

Friend, get the Cheki flower.

With the Asoka flower, the bower abounds

Friend, get the Asoka flower.

With the Saugandika flower, the bower abounds

Friend, get the Saugandika flower.

With the Pichaka flower, the bower abounds

Friend, get the Pichaka flower.

With the Kayampu flower, the bower abounds

Friend, get the Kayampu flower.

With the Tulsi flower, the bower abounds

Friend, get the Tulsi flower.

The flowers in the bower	Common Name	Scientific Name
<i>Cheki</i>	Jungle geranium/flame	<i>Ixora coccinea</i>
<i>Asoka</i>	Asoka	<i>Saraca asoca</i>
<i>Saugandika</i>	Ginger lily/ Garland Lily	<i>Hedychium coronarium</i>
<i>Pichaka</i>	Common Jasmine	<i>Jasminum grandiflorum</i>
<i>Kayampu</i>	Ironwood	<i>Memecylon umbellatum</i>
<i>Tulsi</i>	Holy basil	<i>Ocimum tenuiflorum</i>

Table 5.1 The flowers identified in the bower

The topophilia presented in the narrative depicts an esoteric interaction between the lives around and the setting. A connection to nature around reorients the being with the scenic descriptions of the bower. The description of the nature around gives a sense of value of the place and space. The ecocritic turn in the narrative sees the being acknowledging the presence of the flowers in the bower. Also, it elicits a sense of awe, admiration and marvel. An inference at the mythopoeic connection among the biotic is undeniable in the complex. Acknowledging the presence of diverse and local flowers and recognising the tacit intrinsic value dissipate the Cartesian view that looks at the materialistic aspects of the surroundings. The species identified in the narrative are situated in the island. Tekumbad comes from *tekuka*, referring to the ebb and flow of the tides that brings in and out the riverine soil around the Matul River, creating *maad*, a land of beauty. The landscape sprawls with lush vegetation of with

coconut trees, surrounding the region named Ayiram tengu, meaning thousand coconut trees. The beliefs attach to the region attests that the surroundings are enchanted with goddesses of forests who descend from the abode of gods and resorts to the region and uses the flowers in the bowers. The notion of flowers providing the spirits¹¹ with pleasure is not uncommon. The folk emphasises at *sankalpam*,¹² often understood as belief that groves often turn into pleasure gardens, which Freeman discusses as *udyanam* meaning garden and *aramam* meaning rest:

In these pleasure gardens (aramam) and retreats. The gods and goddesses sometimes gather to catch the breeze, full of fragrances from the flowers and groves. This is the meaning of saying that these are places harbouring a religious conception (*sankalpam*)... The *kavu* is the place they have where they can ramble about. (1999, p.263)

The *sankalpam* among the folk is that the protagonist of Devakutu ventures into the bower that could be considered as a pleasure garden. The nature of the intent is to collect flowers peculiar to the region. A benevolent goddess who is temporally lurking around the idyllic bower, captivated by its beauty is worshipped in the complex.

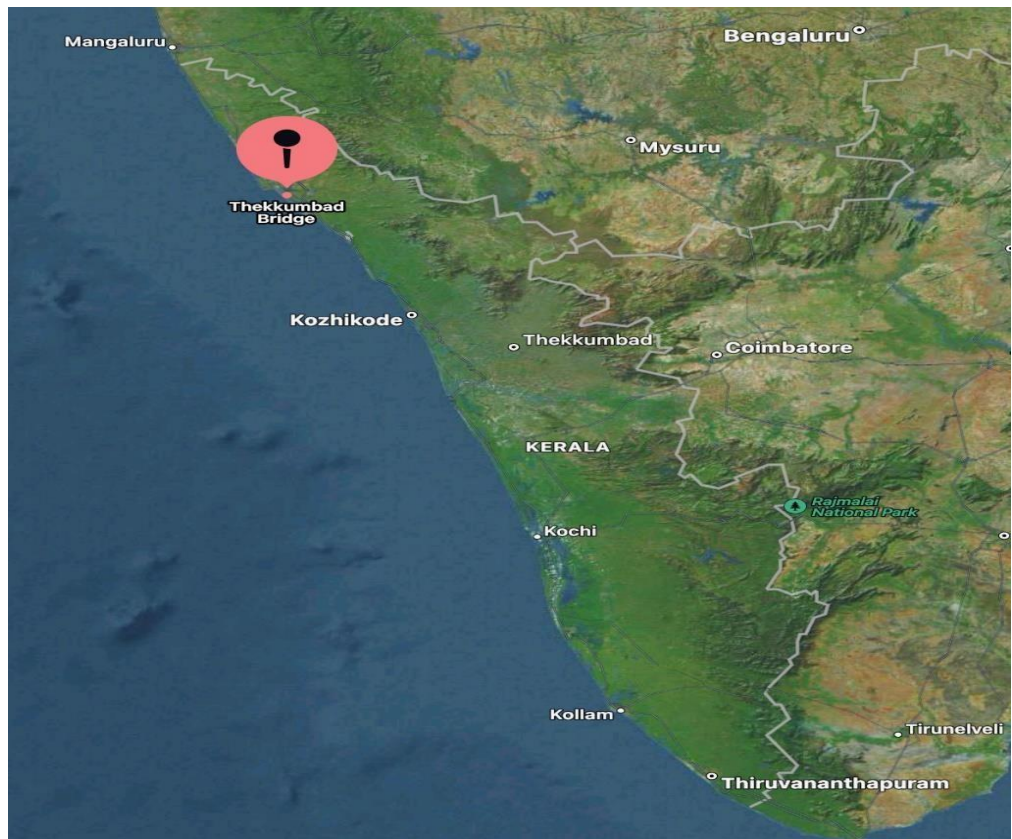
The form of Devakutu takes place at the Tekumbad Kulom. The grove is significant to the transformation. The floral descriptions in the narrative rises from the attention given to the embeddedness among the celestial being, bowers, flowers and wilderness. The floral realm differs starkly from the crops that have been taking precedence in the region for commercial sake¹³. The realm contrasts in putting the aesthetic value in prominence over the materialistic value. The form of Devakutu is simple, where the woman who takes it up is adorned with not so complex attire with floral motifs (See the photograph 5.6) and simple make up with a crescent on forehead. The cue B. Muhammad Ahmed notes in the foreword to the book *Devakkoothu* by P. T. Ravindran. is at the ingenuousness of the natural beauty of the region and the benevolence in the demeanour of the celestial being. Lisa Gabbert writes about the performative landscapes “that participate in creation and shaping of the liminal reality where

this world and the other world meet. People who enter this environment beyond the boundaries of everyday reality transform themselves ritually into story characters and become participants in the legendary realm” (Gabbert, 2015, p.65).

The oral narratives building up a culture of flower is observed in that of Devakutu. The descend is depicted as a call, through the rendering of the narratives to aid the mankind. The story mentions the flowers in the bower featuring the supernatural with enchanted landscape. According to Jack Goody in the work ‘the Culture of Flowers’, an enquiry of this kind into the floral component, which he says is a part of nature and culture, helps to make more concrete the problem of attitudes to nature by linking them to wider sets of practices and beliefs. Further, the goddess is bound back to the *devaloka* and iterates in the narrative that she shall visit the bower again and it is believed that it is with each conduct of Devakutu that she is being welcomed. The implication is also that “even in life there is often a poignant recognition that pleasures are fleeting. Of their evanescent nature flowers are themselves a potent reminder.” (Goody, p.44).



Photograph 5.8,9 & 10 showing the landscape, the kav and mass flocking to witness Devakutu at Tekumbad



Map 5.1 Locating Tekumbad on the Map of Kerala



Map 5. 2 Tekumbad Island



Photograph 5.11 The forms of Devakutu and Narada

The role of the *totam* in building a culture of flower also underlines the idea of flowers being associated with fertility and femininity. Botanically, flowers are associated with continuity of life and represents reproduction of life. Hence, the oral narratives rendered for prosperity, fecundity and progeny are infused with the representations of flower. As seen earlier in the descriptions of the festival of *Pooram*, it is closely tied with the culture of flower. It is commonly called the festival of flowers of the North Malabar, unique to the region and is replete with floral themes. The narrative part is woven at the juncture of Makam attaining puberty and marriage, hinting at the association of flower with regeneration

The *totam* of Makkam, discussed in detail in Chapter 3, is rich with ecological consciousness. The beliefs and values implied are ecocentric. Like the tree's response, its interaction with both biotic and abiotic worlds in the part of the narrative where certain omens are encoded. The falling of tender leaves of coconut tree and the tiger claw tree the one with thorns symbolising fertility and crossing of chameleon are considered as bad signs especially when one is set to go out. Here, these omens signified potential danger when brothers ventured out to the battlefield. The tale describes -

Pacholatumum murinju muriyana vizhnu

Pacha mriku velangana murinju vizhnu

Chenthala onth muriye paynu

Tankulam veti rudiram kanan yogam

Tender leaves of coconut tree had fallen

The *muriku* tree had fallen down

Red headed chameleon ran across

Sign of blood and destruction of a clan.

The notion of women as an integral part of nature is relevant in the narrative. The notion is significant at the end of the tale when nature's fury knows no bound as Makkam is killed by her brothers. The horror of their action is signified by nature - the sun dimmed, dark clouds gathered and lightning struck. In the ensuing storm, trees shook violently creating a very strange ambience. The narrative pictures this as –

Natuchekalo pura katunu

Ellam venjaramayiteernu

Pandrandu angalamaru

Tantan maranu tamatama veeshikoti

Nature's fury had no bound.

The house burns down at noon.

Chaos unleashed among brothers,

Forgetting themselves, they destroy each other.

It is believed that after being beheaded, Makkam's head fell in to a well. Water is a key symbol in the narrative implying replenishment and in turn directs at rebirth and regeneration. The emphasis here is the cyclical conduct of the complex, where *totam* is rendered to resuscitate Makkam. This re-emphasises the intimate relationship between persona and nature and a striking oneness. In the end, she takes solace and respite in nature.

Conclusion

The chapter has attempted to look at the interconnectedness of the complex and nature. The possibilities to read the texts of *totam* in light of interspecies entanglements is the crux. The oral narratives show characters and contexts rooted in the ecological worldview. The complex is grounded in the surrounding environment involving a collective zoomorphic imagination as

flora and fauna that are typical of the area are depicted. The portrayal of the biotic is in close association with the belief system of the folk. A diversity of narratives are put out there to acknowledge and protect the diversity of the flora and fauna of the region in the complex. The conduct could be attributed to demonstrating a compatibility and reconciliation among the inhabitants of the environment. The portrayal is that of a multispecies interactions that emerge in the sacred setting of the groves.

Humans are intrinsically story oriented and story dependent and their beliefs adapt to the surroundings and are expressed through stories. They seek stories and turns to stories to take solace in them as they become a safe haven of hope. By giving persona and attributes of animal to a mortal and apotheosising the same instils a sense of wonder among the devotees. The perception of the surroundings inhabited by the folk and the values and beliefs informed through such perceptions are put out in the narratives. “In indigenous cultures detailed tacit knowledge of local fauna, totemic relationships with particular species, and altered states of perception all help to facilitate powerful experiences of identification with other creatures.” (Nanson, p.33). The realisation has dawned upon humans that the ecological crisis is inevitable as repercussions of their actions, hence, a perception that is ecocentric, nonhierarchal and hence far from anthropocentric is essential. Further, the conduct of the complex as Freeman opines could be “that the main religious efforts are directed towards alleviating human labour and hardship, enhancing the expectation of a good crop, and the hope that social superiors leave their subordinates a fair share at harvest” (Freeman, p. 275). Thus, it could be opined that *totam* is a counter-narrative to the societal hegemonies and its association with environment and anthropocentric traits give it a nature oriented ecopoetic quality, thus emerging out of it is a nature-based folk counter narrative. The creative and imaginative expressions pave way to look at animals and their representations. The angle that the zoofolkloristics approach gives is “to create a new ecological-ethical-empathetic axis of reading which might affect a change to a view where an animal subject is no longer an object, but a person” (Kaucic, p.23). The zoofolkloristics in it calls to overcome the Cartesian view of nature which does not see it as a living entity but as a reductionist and exploitative look at nature as passive and fragmented.

Rooted in nurturing sacrality, spirituality and sensitivity to the land, the ecopoetic element in listening or reading a story and how it transcends to the outdoors, being in nature, in complete harmony, through imagination is seen in these narratives. The chapter sees how folk knowledge, imagination and expression intertwine. It calls for a mindful, and conscious engagement with the atmosphere around; and emphasise that plants, trees, herbs and shrubs, animals and insects are as living as humans and has an intrinsic value as put forth by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess through the concept of 'deep ecology'. These eco-centric narratives look for constructing shared meaningful practices for prosperity that is in harmony with nature that thus reflects the all-encompassing and interdependence of the web of the world. The complex conducted towards the prosperity of the region takes into account to represent the interconnectedness and mediates a harmonious relationship with the surroundings.

Endnote

- ¹ Vannor refers to a truncated form of *Vazhunnavar* meaning one who governs.
- ² Freeman notes the swiddens of Kerala “The discovery that many of the older inhabitants of this mountainous zone recall a time when their subsistence derived exclusively from a combination of swidden agriculture and hunting, a way of life that has all but vanished from contemporary India.” In *Gods, Groves and the Culture of Nature in Kerala. Modern Asian Studies* 33,2 (1999), p. 257-302.
- ³ A description of the standard process of the activity of hunting is given by Freeman as “hunters armed with bows, rifles and often nets, were strategically deployed around a section of forest, and then beaters and dogs started at the other edge and drove all the game into the lines of waiting marksmen and nets.” Also, a remark on the association of hunting to swidden cultivation is made, as “the killing of deer, boar and panther in the surrounding forest is celebrated in preparation for clearing a swidden.” See page 275.
- ⁴ The hunter god Vetakorumakan, meaning the son of a hunter, is revered by the devotees as the son of Siva.
- ⁵ Nagas were believed to be the native-dwellers of the land and Parasurama on creating the land emphasised on revering them.
- ⁶ In the book *Theyyamthirathotangal: Oru Padanam*, Kerala is described as *ahibhumi* (See M. V. Vishnu Namboodiri) and the chapter “The Origin of Serpent- Worship” in the book *Serpent-Worship and Other Essays* touches upon the description of *ahi* as the throttling snake. (See C. Staniland Wake 1888).
- ⁷ Balakrishnan Koyyal notes that the goddess who descended on the land was “came to be known as Valli (literally a bower) and began to be worshipped by the local inhabitants. See p. 75, “Folk Art Forms of Kerala. 2016. Kerala Folklore Academy. Kannur.
- ⁸ The goddess is named *Valliamma* upon her interaction in the bower filled with creeper. On the appellations influenced by the surroundings Goody refers to RadcliffeBrown’s observation that in Andaman Islands “girls acquire an additional name at puberty drawn from a tree or plant which is flowering at that time.” (p. 18). ⁹ It is estimated that around the twelfth century the island was captured by the Kolatiri by overthrowing the Vaitakonmar Niriyotu *swarupam*, the forces, from the region today surrounding Kodagu, and established the island under the sovereign of goddess at Madayi in Kannur. See, Ravindran P.T. (p. 14).
- ¹⁰ In the section, “Comprehending the stories of the non-human” of the article “Storytelling and ecology: Reconnecting people and nature through oral narrative”, observes on the interaction of supernatural, solitude and nature that “the fairies in folktales not simply as a supernatural race but as an expression of nature...Solitary fairies tend to be more obviously tied to the landscape, featuring in stories about a particular tree, pool or rock.” Nanson, Anthony (2021) *Storytelling and Ecology: Empathy, Enchantment and Emergence in the Use of Oral Narratives*, Bloomsbury Academic.
- ¹¹ See Jack Goody’s discussion on flowers and spirits in “The Culture of Flowers” (p. 12).
- ¹² See Freeman on religious concept. (1999, p.262).
- ¹³ Freeman makes observations on the conversion of forest into “commercial plots of rubber, pepper, areca nut, tapioca, coconut and cashew.” (p. 259) .

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Summary

The study has attempted to analyse select *totam*, the oral narratives related to the complex of *Teyyam*. An interdisciplinary interpretative schema to look at the oral narratives has been geared toward. The complex encapsulates the oral narratives that are rooted in the collective local ethos and folk imagination and transcends the thresholds at several levels to universally appealing topoi. The crux revolved around identifying the patterns of meanings that are brought out through the folk expressions of the complex, especially the texts of *totam* rooted in the beliefs of the folk. Within the larger framework of narratology and folkloristics, and drawing on interdisciplinary theoretical conceptualisations, the construction of *totam* as a live oral tradition, folk narrative expression and its textualisation has been focused. The study has tried to look at how *totam* constitutes a set of stories transferred among generations of narrators verbally as a process of folklore. The pattern followed is to present the narrative at first to provide a sense of the story. The transliteration of narratives in the source language, Malayalam is interspersed, followed by a translated version in the target language, English. The interpretation drawing on diverse theoretical deliberations follows. The focus shifts to the pattern that unfolds to direct at the intended themes. The wider context of the region: cultural, ritual and geographical is taken into consideration. Though the subject of study is native, the theoretical approaches are drawn from perspectives that are occidental and oriental, owing to the universality of several factors in the complex, especially narratives. Also, the peculiarities of spatio-temporal bound oral narratives selected for the analysis are subjected to ways of seeing that are unique to the folk of the region. The juxtaposition, thus, is an attempt to establish a mediation between these ways of seeing. The conception, articulation, transmission and reception of the stories in the complex have been drawn attention to.

The first chapter has introduced the complex in question and presents the overall aspects of the work. Set out on a philosophical note on the notions of the power of word to weave world and worldviews, select oral narratives are pondered upon against the backdrop of *Teyyam*. The oral narratives considered are intrinsic to *Teyyam*, a colloquial term for god in Malayalam. A live tradition of the region of North Malabar of Kerala, conducted ritually, sees a human being apotheosised in the sacred groves; aided by the oral narratives called *totam*, as scores of folk gather to worship and witness. For the analysis, a few oral narratives were gathered based on the feasibility of the live performances from the sacred groves and the tradition bearers and gatekeepers. The chapter has made an attempt to draw attention to the relevance of an interdisciplinary look at the ways in which stories operate and to the need to understand what stories are being narrated by who and for whom. As a stepping stone, the chapter has resorted to a review of literature on theories, concepts, and methods that are global and vernacular. The resultant is the identification of the lacunae that, though a significant amount of work spans the topic of *Teyyam*, an analytical and interdisciplinary work that concentrates on the oral narratives associated with it beyond the confines of vernacular is meagre. The attempt to address the gap is undertaken in the next chapters.

The second chapter has traced the treatment of *totam* as potential texts for elaborate analysis. It is noted that the textualisation of *totam* occurs in myriad ways. An overview of the relevance of the narrative texts in the complex with respect to the attributes of texts and attitudes of folk is given. The chapter also has looked at the socio-cultural milieu of the region and the social groups associated with the complex. The significance of *totam* in terms of rituals is addressed by attributing the ideas of rites of passage. Transmitted orally across generations, the orality associated with *totam* has been focused. The focus has brought in the idea of genre-continuum, where *totam* reflects a spectrum of genres. The chapter has discussed the interplay of texts in the complex. Ranging from the narratives presented orally and visually through gestures and performance in different contexts of ritual, induced and digital, the chapter delves into the interactions of texts and contexts. A note on the translation of *totam* is incorporated to suggest a free and flexible sense-for-sense and poetry into prose translation that is attempted, to convey the narrative elements in the

complex. The following chapters have drawn upon select oral narratives of the complex to delineate the multi-dimensional aspects that wide opens scope for interpretations.

The third chapter has presented the conceptual categories against the lengthy *totam* of *Makkamteyyam*. The narrative texts are incorporated with two versions, in brief and detail. The narratives are described in length and interspersed is transliteration and translation of select texts. The categories, namely textuality, textuality, contextuality, performativity, space and time have been taken into consideration. The content analysis involves culling out themes that are woven across the narrative by identifying the successive motifs presented in the narrative. *Totam* is inflected by the interactions of the narrator, the form and the reception by the audience. Thus, a performative ambience is co-constructed by such interactions. The unfolding of the oral narrative in the narrated time, narrative time and real time is touched upon. The operation of memory in the composition of *totam* and the representation of *Teyyam* and the contemporary scope of its textualisation in the digital space has given focus too.

The fourth chapter has broken down the moves of the oral narrative of the hero, Veeran, against the backdrop of *Kativanur Veeranteyyam* along with the framework put forth on hero patterns. The chapter gives a closer look at how the body becomes a site of engagement in the complex, where in its physical space the storyworld negotiates with the physical presence of the teller, the audience, the performer and the character that gets embodied. The construction of the hero in the *totam* is paid attention to. The text of the oral narrative is presented and the patterns that emerged are delineated against the theoretical deliberations on hero patterns by Alan Dundes, Vladimir Propp and Joseph Campbell.

An ecocritical framework to look at the zoomorphic and floral imagination in the oral narratives of *Puliteyyam*, *Nageniteyyam* and *Devakutu* has been taken up in the fifth chapter. The role of storytelling and ecology in the phenomenon and the intermingling of non-human and agencies, and the significance of co-existence are looked into. Thus, to address the oral narratives in question several analytical methods have been employed, majorly drawing on narratology and folkloristics. The study has taken into account not just the

oral narratives as texts but also as the telling of the texts and how the telling is accomplished at different levels through these analytical methods.

Findings

The oral narratives of the complex of *Teyyam*, *totam* is intrinsic to the region of North Malabar and consist of several narratives that can be put to analysis. The oral narratives are rendered orally, involving long and short renderings that often combine prose and poetry. *Totam* is rendered with the accompaniment of a single drum in a rhythmic pattern. An interdisciplinary approach to the texts of the complex directs at understanding the nature of its construction and representations of the folks' perspectives in the backdrop of narratological, socio-cultural and ecological deliberations. After going through select oral narratives of the complex, it is noted that *totam* yields to the constituents of oral composition and transmission in the form of various modalities as far as the applicability of narratological concepts is concerned. Also, owing to the modalities are its folkloric nature of multiple existences spanning across time and space. A thematic analysis unfolds the strands of cross-cutting themes that run through *totam*. The study is a modest attempt to look into the orality in the complex of *Teyyam* by focussing on the strategically placed oral formulaic expressions and themes in a sampling of select oral narratives drawn from the corpus of complex based on feasibility, against the backdrop of narrative research and folkloristics. The initial section has attempted to establish *Teyyam* and *totam* as a complex dynamic and tried to look at the oral narratives as cross-generic constituent of the complex. The modalities of dissemination of the oral narratives are assessed anew along with the narratological constituents. The thrust has been on the interweaving of text, texture and context. It is tried here to situate the *totam* within the scope of narratological, folkloristic and performative contexts.

Totam could be considered as a form of expression of the society in which it reflects itself. The socio-cultural and ritual parameters define the production of the narrative. The presentation and mediation can be read as strategies and conventions to comment and critique the societal conditions. The oral narratives accrete cultural specific meanings in the spatio-temporally ordered set-up, where the region of North Malabar and its groves become the well-defined space of the conduct and the agriculturally and astrologically bound timings

direct the complex towards a well ordered temporality. Oral tradition reverberates with the socio- cultural processes of the time. *Totam* is fostered in the folk and the locale and is persistent through time. The narrative strategies aid in conveying the essence of the stories, pushing forward and concatenating the events, interweaving insights on socio-cultural milieu, rituals, beliefs and values. The complex shares verbal, visual, performative materials within it that constitutes parts of the broader socio-cultural context. The materials are windows that give access to the experiences of the characters that are rooted in the locale and reveals the identities of the folk of the region. The material integrates well into the socio-cultural ‘storyworld’ of the region. At a glance the stories are of the folk by the folk for the folk. On a deeper look, the stories are of the lives that transcend the extraordinary threshold of injustices operating as social perils in the name of caste, creed and gender, the threshold of battle through valour and the threshold of cosmic realms. The socio-cultural positioning of the narrators and the narratees reveal the power that is at play at the helm of the societal set-up and holds an esoteric function among the folk. What is enabled through the narratives is the transcend toward agency so as to settle the society through a reordering; as the ordinary and extraordinary, the every-day and non-every-day, non-human, human and the ‘god’ overlap. The active bearers of tradition are narrators who have received the principality to narrate through agreements between the narrators/performers and temple committee or the authority of the space where the form takes place. The complex sees dialogic exchanges between the performers and audience as the form and the narrators address the people who have gathered from all walks of life, of different age, gender and background, as devotees or as connoisseurs calling for prosperity and peace.

The oral narratives incorporate a culturally specific set of texts that get verbalised, visualised and performed to convey meanings that aim at the reordering. The oral text is not an autonomous, relegated and secluded text but complements with the performance text in actualising a communicative event of/in the complex of *Teyyam*. The texts reveal the lives of ordinary humans who had to go through ordeals of an unjust society. They are eventually apotheosised and extolled for their deeds to overcome the unjust as an exculpatory exercise. *Totam* archives the lives of the apotheosised of different communities along

with their belief systems, ritual behaviour and social compositions. The study thus, attempts to throw light on the what of *totam* to the why and the how of the oral narratives by focusing on the text, texture, form, and the context respectively. The text, context, texture, gestures, motifs, themes, socio-cultural, ritual codes and ecological ties along with the positioning of the narrators and narratees negotiate to build the complex into a whole. The message of general appeal for prosperity and welfare of the society is reflected in organised yet flexible socio-cultural interaction. The absorption is understood in the intermingling of the textual, textural and contextual features. For example, the rendering of the narrative depends significantly upon the repertoire of the teller and the interest of the listener in the cultural and ritual specific shared sacred space. For instance, the text and texture get shrunk in a specific situation where the event takes place as a result of an offering conducted by the family in the desire of progeny. The narrator does not subscribe to presenting the whole text and skips select textural markers to keep up to the time-bound enactment. The narratological attention reveals that according to the medium that the texts hold onto the effect on the narrative changes. Also, the length of the narrative varies. Further based on the contexts, the narratives are sacred and secular. For example, in the physical context of the setting in the sacred groves and the shrines, the rendering is considered as ritual and calls for reverence. It is conveyed in length without any ritual transgression to bring prosperity to the folk. The context also sees the complex taking place according to the stipulated calendrical pattern and time. The social context in aligning with the above notion sees only select narrators of the specified communities take up the rendition and forms of complex as it is hereditarily taken up by the particular communities based on the *Teyyam* being conducted. An induced context, for example in the case of an interview or conduct in cultural spaces beyond the groves and shrines are abridged and truncated as the situation demands. The dissemination of the texts in the digital context sees the texts being put out there by folk, usually the connoisseurs of the complex.

The oral narratives are realised through texts at various interrelated dimensions that attribute the nature of a complex to *Teyyam* and *totam*. The texts are realised as verbal, oral, visual, performative and digital in nature to praise, to emanate, to appease the victim/ survivor of the oppressions, to bring peace and prosperity.

Totam glorifies the deeds of the folk often subjected to relegation in the society in the name of caste and gender. *Totam* sheds light on repressed aspects of structural complexities of social set up of the region, channelling mobility and voice to the individuals who were denied justice. And puts out reflections concomitant to social structures. The narrative aids in airing feelings about and provides a public outlet to vent. The narrative progression is developed by juxtaposing the verbal, visual and performative elements. The narratives are steeped in the collective consciousness of the folk and get organised it into a whole as the stories associate with polyvocal and heterogeneous socio-cultural positions, values, beliefs, voices and identities and bridges past and present, and cultivates a nexus where landscape and mindscape intersect.

The pattern unfurled in the oral narrative of Veeran parallels the moves of hero patterns and the themes that recur in the heroic narratives. The patterns and meanings that emerge from the motifs and themes that run within the narrative texts are fundamental to the life experiences of a hero. The captivating narrative is rooted in the local yet the text transcends to appeal to the universal notions of courage, friendship, family, love, desire, empathy, honesty, freedom, good and evil, treachery, fear, death, loss, change, acceptance and belongingness. An array of folk's perspectives is replete in the oral narratives concerning their lives, identity, mobility and agency. Tied tightly to the topography, familiarity and localisation are inherent in the telling. Space and time bound, the complex reflects a collective belief system and aids in understanding the socio-cultural lives of a region. The interconnectedness with nature where ecological considerations and socio-cultural aspects are in tandem with each other is reflected in the complex.

Scope for Further Research

The study has attempted an analysis of the narratives, *totam*, keeping in mind its feasibility and viability. A select oral narratives were gathered from the field and were transliterated, translated and treated by breaking down the content, structure, theme, meaning, form and function. However, only a minuscule of its wide scope is presented. An extension of its coverage in this regard is plausible. The longstanding oral tradition of the region has to its credit voluminous literature on the complex, especially material in a vernacular nature.

Yet the potential for exploration is endless. Approaching the complex with a wide range of viewpoints would bring in newer perspectives. On tweaking Barthes' observation that "the text is open *ad infinitum*: no reader, no subject, no science can exhaust the text (1987, p.84-97), it could be opined that no research can exhaust *totam*!

The narrative analysis, involving the collection, classification and interpretation of narrative texts is dynamic in nature. Fluid and multidisciplinary, narratology has been shaped by several approaches and developments. The technological advances boost the kinds of considerations that can be made to the textual data at hand. Further research could explore the potential of utilising technology in studying narratives. As put in the methodology newer perspectives can emerge from different ways of looking at traditional concerns. The take on digitalisation of the narrative is curtailed here in the sense that the scope is vast and the potential lies in enmeshing the complex in reproducible research. The digitisation of narrative material and forms of human cultural expressions is evolving, bridging technology and tradition. The *totam* can be further treated to study the repertoire of the singers. Taking into account the identifying, collecting, translating and analysing version and variations among the nuances presented by a single singer at various places and various times, a comparative study opens several considerations. Such an exercise could create a narrative register by considering the repertoire of the singer and bring in a narrative idiolect. The exercise may incorporate what is learnt and how the learning takes place.

On a note of conclusion, the juxtaposition of texts and contexts emphasises the poetics in politics and politics in poetics. The description comes to full circle. The structure of the text parallels the cyclical social situation as the ritual cycle that takes place in the sacred space. An anti-establishment disposition is evident in the phenomenon. The text along with the context seems to assert the tendency to critique societal structure. The tendency is detailed in the phenomenon through exposition of characters relegated initially and apotheosised subsequently. The apotheosis sees the specific performer from the relegated circumstances being raised to the position of a god. The turn is a reflection of role-reversal critiquing caste hierarchy. The tendency is evident only when the text meets the context. The oral texts though describe the story,

its tendency to critique is full blown in the cyclical ritual enactment of the performers of the community in the presence of the audience.

The complex is deeply seated in the socio-cultural milieu of North Malabar and it is relevant even today where the intense emotions suit the human lives to make meaning of life's experiences through aesthetic expressions. The socio-cultural parameters that construct the production of the oral narratives could be attributed to the call for prosperity, social mobility, agency and identity in a just and equal society. The culture is transmitted through traditional storytelling and becomes the locus of socio-cultural and ritual; practice maintaining a sense of community and group solidarity through active participation by the folk. The complex is a carrier of shared collective memories forming a realm of collective concerns and collective confrontation to the past actions of injustices by reiterating *totam* and conducting the complex ritually and cyclically in the social spaces through communicative expressions. The character becomes a deity through *totam*, which is key to the transformation and marks revival and regeneration. The oral narratives of *Teyyam* rejuvenate the lore and the land, forging connections between the landscape and mindscape by weaving stories. Transmitted from generation to generation, oral narratives and performance traditions are inevitable to the understanding of culture.

It is re-accentuated that *totam* advances to formulate paradigms for a just society, identities and harmony with the environment. The complex thus takes the role as a bulwark in safeguarding the identity and the cultural indigeneity, freeing one from the clutches of straitjacketing conventions and serves as an outlet to repressed expressions. The apotheosis sees ritual identification with the surrounding juxtaposed to the ecological worldview which spans in the belief systems, comprising of fertility cult, serpent worship and animal worship. In all its complexity and dynamicity, the complex of *Teyyam* is vital in shaping the identities and understanding the perceptions underpinning its process, its places, its flora, its fauna and its folk; and continues to resonate even today with enduring relevance as the narratives see the gods grooving in the groves and make it is possible to be *Teyyam* today.

Endnote

- 1 See Roland Barthes (1987).

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Appendix I

List of Informants

Name	Place	Gender
Adithyan	Mattanur	Male
Ambika	Chala	Female
Ambujakshi	Pazhayangadi	Female
Anitha	Pazhayangadi	Female
Ashwanth	Elayavur	Male
Baby	Kappad	Female
Balakrishnan	Pazhayangadi	Male
Dasan	Azhikode	Male
Deepak	Kuthuparamba	Male
Hari	Cherupuzha	Male
Hari	Mattanur	Male
Jayanthi	Chala	Female
Krishnan	Trikaripur	Male
Kunjiraman	Sreestha	Male
Kuttan	Eramam	Male
Madhavan	Mattanur	Male

Mithula	Eramam	Female
Mohanan	Eramam	Male
Nalini	Edat	Male
Nanu	Azhikode	Male
Narendran	Chala	Male
Nimmi	Mattanur	Female
Pradeep	Azhikode	Male
Prashanth	Iruveri	Male
Raju	Kuthuparamba	Male
Radhika	Kuthuparamba	Female
Shanu	Nanicheri	Male
Sreedhar	Chala	Male
Thankam	Chala	Male
Venu	Talassery	Male

Note: The enlisted informants were significant sources to gather the primary data and were approached during the fieldwork spanning from 2020 to 2024.

Appendix II

The Months in Malayalam Calendar corresponded with Gregorian Calendar

1. <i>Chingam</i>	August-September
2. <i>Kani</i>	September-October
3. <i>Tulam</i>	October-November
4. <i>Vriscikam</i>	November-December
5. <i>Danu</i>	December-January
6. <i>Makaram</i>	January-February
7. <i>Kumbam</i>	February-March
8. <i>Meenam</i>	March-April
9. <i>Medam</i>	April-May
10. <i>Edavam</i>	May-June
11. <i>Mitunam</i>	June-July
12. <i>Karkidakam</i>	July-August

Appendix III Teyyam Calendar 2025



1	Pariyaram Sree Udayapuram Temple	4 to 7 January 2025
2	Kannom Sree Anjuthengil Aivar Paradevatha Temple	9 to 12 January 2025
3	Kandothu Sree Paradevatha Temple	10 to 13 January 2025
4	Kannaram Veedu Pottan Deivam	12 to 13 January 2025
5	Aalakkadu Kaasipuram Sree Vanasastha Temple	14 to 16 January 2025
6	Dermal Puthiya Bhagavathy Temple	16 to 18 January 2025
7	Maavicheri Sree Bhagavathy Temple	24 to 27 January 2025
8	Nidumbram Sree Muthappan Madappura	24 to 27 January 2025
9	Sree Chaammakkavu Bhagavathy Temple	26 to 30 January 2025
10	Sree Menarayarth Bhagavathy Temple	27 to 29 January 2025
11	Koyyodan Korothu Temple	29 to 31 January 2025
12	Puthiya Parambath Dharma Devasthanam	31 January to 1 February 2025
13	Poovallathil Temple	31 January to 2 February 2025



1	Poovallathil Temple	31 January to 2 February 2025
2	Puthiya Parambath Dharma Devasthanam	31 January to 1 February 2025
3	Kaitheri Puthiyedathu Kavu	1 to 2 February 2025
4	Yogi Madom	1 to 2 February 2025
5	Vallarkulangara Bhagavathy Kottam, Thekkumbad	6 to 7 February 2025
6	Pulimuthappan Kavu	6 to 8 February 2025
7	Thalikkaran Tharavadu Kizhakkeveedu	6 to 8 February 2025
8	Pramancheri Bhagavathy Kavu	8 to 11 February 2025
9	Thayineri Sree Kurinji Temple	10 to 13 February 2025
10	Kadumberi Sree Muthappan Madappura	10 to 11 February 2025
11	Sree Karimanal Kavu Chamundeswari Temple	11 to 14 February 2025
12	Andalur Kavu	13 to 19 February 2025
13	Cherukunnu Sree Keezhara Koolom Bhagavathy Temple	14 to 19 February 2025



Source: <https://www.keralatourism.org/theyyamcalendar/>

The drop down option features the month wise conduct of the Teyyam forms.

Glossary

Abaranam: Ornament.

Achan: Father. Also, an appellation signifying honour in the complex.

Ada: Rice cake.

Adbutam: Wonder.

Adityan: Sun.

Aksharamaimbatonnum/ Aksharam + Aimbatu + Onnu: Fifty-one alphabets of Malayalam

Amma: Mother.

Ana: Elephant.

And: Year.

Angala: Brother.

Antidipam: Evening lamp or flame.

Anubhavam: Experience.

Arayal: Pipal.

Ari: Rice.

Ariyil ezhutu: writing on a plateful of rice; refers to the ritual of initiation into learning.

Arudam: Source/ Origin.

Atirani: Indian Rhododendron, *Melastoma malabathricum*.

Avil: Flattened rice.

Ayilyam: Clinging Star, corresponding to the star clusters of twenty- seven lunar

Bai: Back or second.

Bhumiyil: On earth.

Chandran: Moon.

Charitram: History.

Chempaka poov: Champak flower, *Magnolia champaca*.

Chenda: Drum-like percussion instrument; often accompanying ritual services.

Choroonu/ Chor + Unu: Rice meal ceremony.

Deepam: Lamp.

Dukham: Sadness.

Erangal: Act of descending literally; refers to *Teyyam* be about to present or Manifest.

Erinjipu: Medlar, *Mimusops elengi*.

Ezhu: Seven.

Ezhukalliumezhutattum/ Ezhu kallium ezhu tatum: seven storey and rooms.

Gurudaksina: a fee of teacher, often paid as a token of gratitude.

Ilamkolam: The *teyyam* form clad in red with less elaborate attire to initiate the rendering.

Illam: House.

Kaitapu: Screw pine flower.

Kamadevan/ Kamanar: The god of desire.

Kaniyan: Fortune-teller.

Kanji: Porridge.

Karanavar: Head of the ancestral house.

Kartika: A star.

Katu kutu: Ear-piercing.

Kav: Sacred grove; refers to the shrine where usually *Teyyam* happens.

Kodum: Deep.

Kolam: Form, Incarnation.

Kolatiri: King of Kolatunadu.

Kolatunadu: One of the kingdoms.

Kovilulsavam/ Kovil ulsavam: Temple festival.

Kshanam: Invitation.

Kshetram: Temple.

Kumbham: Month of Malayalam calendar, falls between February and March.

Kumudam: Water lily, *Nymphaeaceae*.

Kurikkal/ gurukkal/ guru: Teacher.

Kusavan/ kuzhavan: Potter.

Kuti/ kunji: Child, small.

Kutu: Dance/ Play.

Makaram: Month of Malayalam calendar, falls between January and February.

Makatayam: Patrilineal inheritance.

Malar: Paddy pop.

Malayalam.

Manal: Sand.

Manan: King.

Manipravalam: Gems and coral, literally; refers to the combination of Tamil and Sanskrit

Manodharmam: *Manam*+ *Dharmam*, manner of conduct commanded by the reciter's mind. .

Maru taraku: Reply. (See *Taraku*).

Marumakatayam: Matrilineal inheritance.

Meenam: Month of Malayalam calendar, falls between March and April.

Motiram: Finger ring.

Mrustanamoonu/ Mrustanam Unu: Sumptuous meal.

Mukham: Face.

Mun: Front or lead.

Muriku: Coral tree, *Erythrina variegata*.

Murkhan: Cobra.

Naal: Day.

Nagam: Serpent.

Natumar: Sisters-in-law.

Nikkal: Act of standing, literally; refers to the presence of Teyyam/ reciter in the sacred

Nilapana: Ground palm.

Nomb: Vow.

Nombaram: Woe.

Paal kodukkal: Giving milk to the new-born, literally. Refers to the naming ceremony.

Pakal: Dawn.

Pala poov: White flowers, *Alstonia*.

Palaka: Plank.

Palumariyubanjaraum/ Palum Ariyum Pajarayum: Milk, rice and sugar.

Pamb: Serpent.

Papadam: A thin crispy wafer-like dish accompanying a meal.

Paril: On earth.

Payasam: Sweet pudding.

Pazham: Banana.

Phalam: Outcome.

Polika: Flourish/Prosper.

Pookal: Flowers.

Poomantiri: Floral carpet.

Pooram: The festival of flowers celebrated in North Malabar. Also, a star.

Poov/ pu: Flower.

Prasadam: Consecrated food distributed among devotees post offering to deities.

Pravriti: Deed.

Pudava: Saree.

Puli: Tiger.

Pulikudi: A sour drink.

Pushpam: Flower.

Rav: Dusk.

Santati: Off spring.

Stuti: Benedictory verse.

Sukham: Joy.

Swarupam: Political entities prevailed in Kerala.

Taali: Chain or necklace; usually worn by married women.

Tali: A kind of hair serum, generally made of red hibiscus flowers and leaves.

Talika: Plate.

Taraku: Documents of cadjan leaves.

Taravad: Ancestral house.

Tenga: Coconut.

Teyyakaalam: The season of *Teyyam*, conducted between October to June.

Teyyam: God, literally. Refers to the complex discussed in the work.

Tingal: Moon.

Tiruchembaruntu: Sacred kite.

Topan: Upmteen/ Plenty.

Totakkaran: One who sings/narrates *Totam*; hereditary reciter.

Totil: Cradle.

Utpati: Origin

Vachal: Orature, eloquence.

Vadyagosam: Sound of drums or instruments.

Varam: Boon.

Varavili: Invocation.

Vatam: Round.

Vayal: Agricultural field.

Vayarapu: Hogvine, *Merremia umbellata*.

Vazhuvan: To rule.

Veed: House.

Veli: Marriage.

Vetila adakka: betel leaves and areca nuts; often symbolises auspiciousness,
Prosperity and hospitality.

Vilak: Lamp.

Yogam: Chance



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FATHER'S NAME : SANTHOSH KUMAR K T/RATNA PRABHA

COURSE NO.	TITLE OF THE COURSE	CREDITS	RESULTS
FS801	Introduction to Folk Culture Studies	4.00	PASS
FS802	Theories of Folklore	4.00	PASS
FS803	Folklore-Field Methods	4.00	PASS
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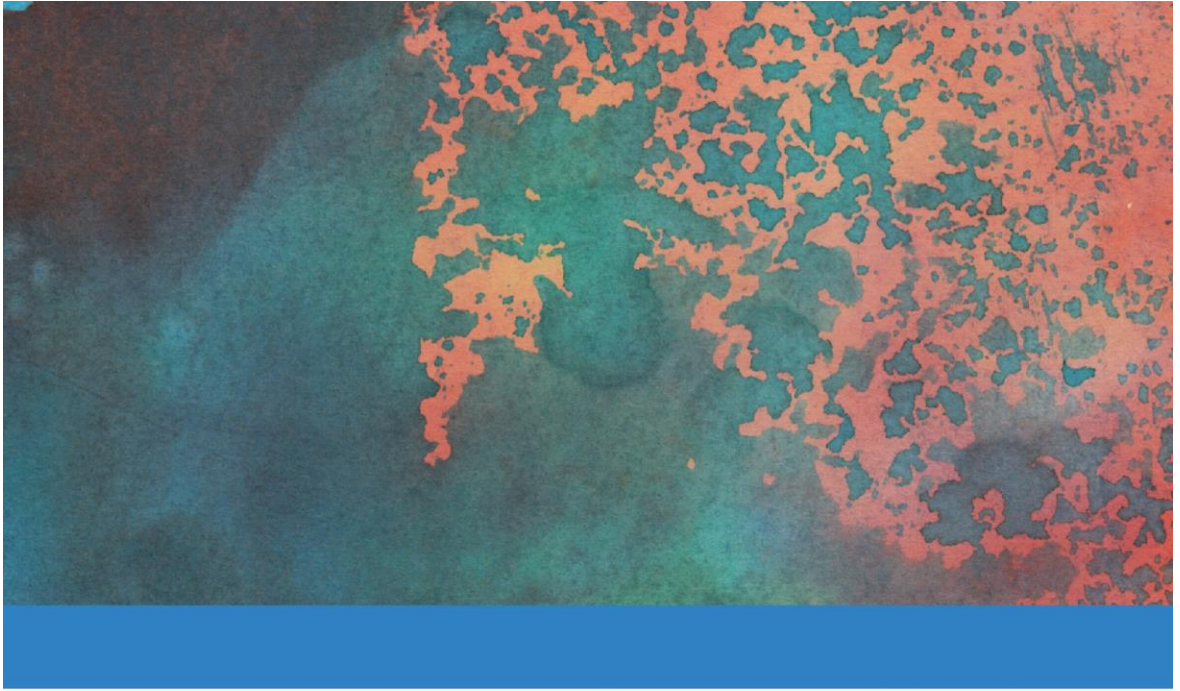
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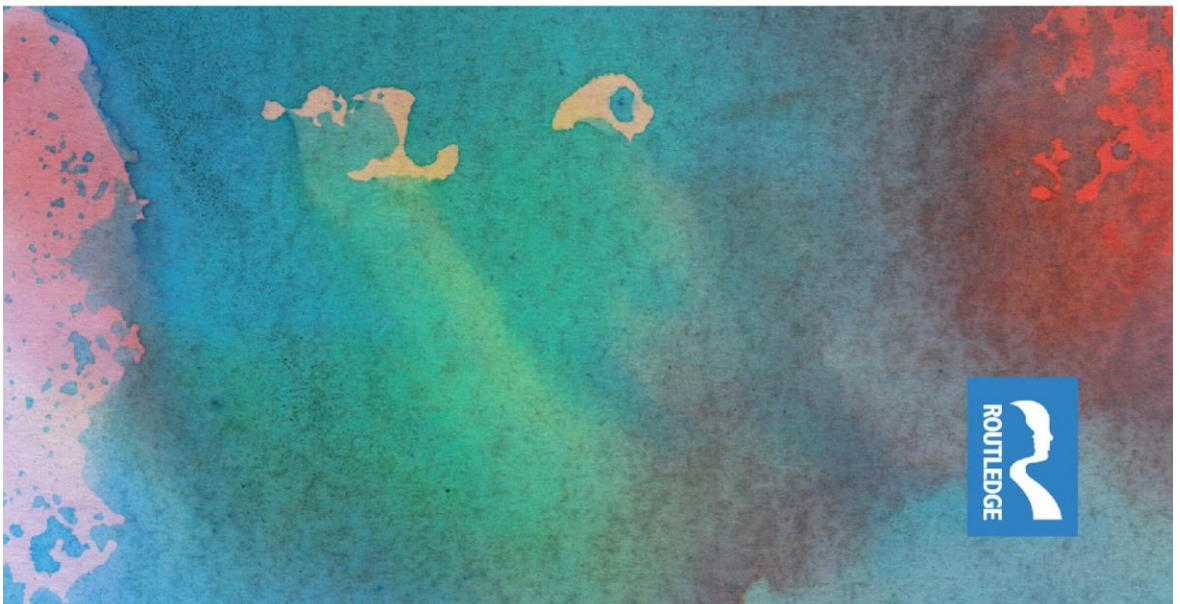


MEMORY STUDIES IN THE DIGITAL AGE

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE

Edited by

D. Sudha Rani and Rachel Irdaya Raj



17 Stor(y)ing Memory and *Totam*

Perspectives towards Oral Narratives

Santhwana Santhosh and Joly Puthussery

The chapter is an attempt to provide an interdisciplinary approach drawing upon the theoretical premises of memory studies, narratology, folk culture studies, performance studies and digital humanities to look into how storytelling, memory, oral narratives, its performance and digital interweave in the complex of *Teyyam* of North Malabar of Kerala. The chapter is segregated into various sections. The initial section attempts to introduce *Teyyam* and the oral narratives related with it known as *totam*, followed by the role of storytelling in the phenomenon. In the following section, a performance-centric approach to the complex is looked into. Further, the intertwining of aspects of memory in the complex is discussed. The penultimate section tries to situate the phenomenon in the digital sphere followed by a conclusion.

Transmitted from generation to generation, oral narratives and performance traditions are inevitable to the understanding of culture. A reflection on the etymological roots of the word “narrative” suggests that the term is associated with the idea of knowing and meaning making. In Latin, *narrare* means to tell. Narratives make sense of the world we are living in, shape one’s experiences and still let one’s imagination run wild, ultimately to make sense of one’s reality. A vast epistemology including collections, documentations, analyses and interpretations are devoted to the field. There is a remarkable shift from mere collection and documentation of oral narratives to scientific, theory-oriented methodological analyses and interpretations. A memory studies approach to the oral narratives and performance, in the backdrop of the phenomenon discussed here, reveals that these are not mere retrievals of survivals of the past, but valuable affective markers informing identities of individuals, communities and regions constructing worldviews. The chapter also tries to look into how communities of memory emerge in the context of the complex.

The entanglement of storytelling, performance and memory is inevitable in the context of *Teyyam* and the oral narratives associated with it. A spatio-temporal phenomenon of the North Malabar of Kerala, where a human is apotheosised into “god”/*Teyyam*¹ in a shared sacred space, aided by oral narratives, *totam*,² it creates a sense of collective belonging through “stor(y)ing,” imagining and reimagining the narratives. *Teyyam* and the oral

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narratives of it rejuvenate the lore and land, forging connections between the landscape and mindscape by weaving stories, forming a memoryscape. The shared sacred space, often known as *kaav* or shrine enclaved in sacred groves turns into a performative space as the human transcends to god, clad in intricately embellished elaborate red costumes and heavy headgears, grooving to drumbeat to shower blessings on common devotees/ audience from different walks of life. The narratives through acts of (re)membering go down memory lanes, celebrating and raising ordinary beings, once relegated by various social evils, to the positions of goddesses and gods, to glorify their extraordinary heroic feats.

In the *Teyyam* and *totam* complex,³ stories are conveyed through orality. So, memory plays a vital role in its transmissions. The complex promotes group solidarity where cultural transmission happens through storytelling in a shared sacred space. The space becomes the locus of cultural and ritual practices maintaining a sense of community involved in active participation. The space then turns into an institution of collective remembrance. The narratives bridge the gap between the past and present. The stories become fundamental to the shared experience of recollections and eventually get ritualised for collective commemoration.⁴

The article “Communities of Memory and the Problem of Transmission” by Michael Pickering and Emily Keightley (2013) discusses the issue of memory transmission and introduces the idea of mnemonic imagination:

along the two temporal planes in which it occurs: vertically, through time; and horizontally, in time. It is because we regard memory transmission as involving the mutual interaction of these two planes that we introduce the concept of the mnemonic imagination. The value of the concept is that it enables us to see, inter alia, how communities of memory emerge.

(115)

The notion of dissemination and inheritance of memory across and within time can be extended to the spatio-temporal specific and calendrical patterns of the *Teyyam* complex. The transmission of knowledge vertically takes place through narratives, as it gets handed down to the next generation by the practitioners of specific communities, where the novices through observation and repetition acquire the intergenerational and traditional knowledge. And, horizontally in time, the stories get told in the traditional space shared by the commoners/devotees/audience/listeners.

The dynamic sees various levels at which memory operates, a spectrum merging individual acts of remembering and recollecting in a ritual and cultural context where past and present interact with each other. A framework of memory at different levels is considered here, following Maurice Halbwachs' foundational insights and social frameworks of memory to study the memory of a group based on a Durkheimian approach.⁵ At the individual

TRANSLATION THEORY, TOOLS TECHNIQUES AND TACTICS



EDITORS
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- Laura Rebeca Stiegelbauer. *Translation Problems and Difficulties in Applied Translation Processes*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/315528028_Translation_Problems_and_Difficulties_in_Applied_Translation_Processes.
- Md. Faruquzzaman Akan, Md. Rezaul Karim, Abdullah Mohammad Kabir Chowdhury, An Analysis of Arabic-English Translation: Problems and Prospects, *Journal of Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, Australian International Academic Centre, February, 2019.
- Sohaib Alam. (2016). *History of Arabic language in India*. Riyadh, KSA: King Abdullah International Centre for Arabic language,.

Translating the *Thottam*: The 5Ts and the Oral Narratives of *Theyyam* of Kerala

Santhwana Santhosh

Abstract:

The paper aims to look at the scope of translating oral narratives associated with *Theyyam*, known as *Thottam* from the source language, Malayalam to the target language, English. *Theyyam*, believed to have come from the word 'deivam' in the source language, meaning God, is a cultural and ritual performance of the North Malabar of Kerala. *Theyyam* encompasses the sacred groves, its verdure, the drumbeats and the performer in a trance elevated to the position of God in the hearts of the devotees and the *Thottam*. *Theyyam* and *Thottam* provide various perspectives and sets of meanings contributing to the system of knowledge of the *Theyyam* complex. The dynamics include the negotiation of multi-textual dimensions, the production of various texts at different levels like oral, non-verbal, mentifact (mental text) and performance. The paper draws attention to the oral narrative of *Makkamtheyyam*, one of the many *Theyyam* forms, to investigate the intervention of translation in this dynamic through an interdisciplinary approach.

Keywords:

Theyyam, *Thottam*, Oral narratives, Translation

Introduction

Theyyam, a cultural and ritual performance is a complex and dynamic system. The rendition of *Thottam*, the oral narrative is integral to the *Theyyam* performance. Accompanied by the beat of a single drum, the performer presents the narratives describing the origin, the tale and the greatness of the *Theyyam* being performed. Further, the narration is realised through multi-texts, mainly oral and performance and in extension by

Research Scholar, University of Hyderabad

To whom it may concern

Re: Participation of Santhwana Santhosh

The International Society for Ethnology and Folklore (SIEF) held their biennial congress **SIEF2025: Unwriting** in Aberdeen, Scotland from 03/06/2025 to 06/06/2025.

Over 1080 delegates attended for five days of panels and presentations, of which over 230 took part online.

This is to certify that Santhwana Santhosh attended the congress and participated in the following roles:

- Contributor of Contribution: *It is cold out here!: Unwriting Totam and humour*

The panel/paper abstracts and full congress information were published on the

SIEF2025 website at <https://www.siefhome.org/congresses/sief2025/>.

Santhwana Santhosh's participation in this event was much appreciated.

Yours faithfully,



Triinu Mets

Conference administrator

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June 21, 2024

Rīga, Latvia

Certificate of Participation

This is to certify that **Santhwana Santhosh (University of Hyderabad)** participated in the 19th Congress of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research (ISFNR) held in Riga, Latvia, from June 17 to June 21, 2024, presented the paper **"In Situ-Ex Situ in/of Totam: Oral Narratives in the Changing Contexts,"** participated in the congress sessions, discussions, and other related events. We highly appreciate his/her contribution and involvement in this significant academic event.

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact us at isfnr.congress.2024@lulfmi.lv.

Yours sincerely,

Sandis Laime, PhD

Chair of the ISFNR 19th Congress Organising Committee,

Senior researcher at the
Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art,
University of Latvia



Oral History
Association
of India



CERTIFICATE OF PARTICIPATION

This is to certify that

Santhwana Santhosh

presented a paper titled

*Mountain Matters, Narrative Matters:
Reading Tottam of North Malabar*

at the Ninth Annual Conference of the Oral History Association of India

Mountain History: At the Intersection of Memory, Politics and Identity

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Memory as Strength and Endurance: Reading Theyyam and its Narratives

as Source of Cultural Memory and Resilience

during **Indian Anthropology Congress 2021** 'Anthropology: Theory to Application'

February 21-23, 2021

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Oral Narratives of Teyyam: An Analytical Study

by Santhwana Santhosh

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Oral Narratives of Teyyam: An Analytical Study

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