

***THEYYAM AS A TRADITIONAL ART FORM OF KERALA:
CONTINUITY AND CHANGE***

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DECLARATION

I, Mr. Vishnu Prasad V P, do hereby declare that the Dissertation titled

“Theyyam As a Traditional Art Form of Kerala; Continuity And Change” is based on the original work carried out by me and submitted to the University of Kerala during the year 2015-2017 towards partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts Degree Examination in Sociology. It has not been submitted for the award of any Degree, Diploma, Associateship, Fellowship or other similar title of recognition before any University or anywhere else.

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09th August, 2017

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This is to certify that the work embodied in this dissertation entitled “*Theyyam As A Traditional Art Form Of Kerala ; Continuity And Change*” has been carried out by Mr. Vishnu Prasad V P of Fourth semester, Master of Sociology student of this college under my supervision and guidance, and that it is here by approved for submission.

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MA Sociology

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ABSTRACT

Theyyam is a form of worship performed by the people of Northern Kerala. It consists of a special combination of symbols, rituals and art forms particularly dance. In this spectacular art forms, the ghosts, good and evil spirits come into the manifestation *Theyyam* or *Theyyattam* is a popular Hindu ritual of worship in North Kerala predominant in the Kolathu nadu. As a living cult with centuries old traditions, rituals and customs, it embraces almost all castes and classes of Hindu religion in this region. Theyyam is a rare combination of dance and music and reflects important features of a tribal culture. The term Theyyam is a corrupt usage for Dayvam means God. Attam means dance. Theyyattam means God's Dance. The performers of theyyam belong to the lower caste community and have an important position in the community. People of these districts consider Theyyam itself as a God and they seek blessing from this Theyyam. God is believed to enter the body of the Theyyam performer and hence, believers consider the man dressed as the Theyyam as a visible manifestation of God and seek his blessings. Thus Theyyam has a definite culture and social significance in the life of people. It is closely related to the culture and tradition of Kerala. Globalization and resultant modernization has brought in significant changes in all spheres of life in Kerala. Over the years many traditional art forms of Kerala has got sidelined and seems to have lost its importance in the society. Theyyam is also such a traditional art form of Kerala which lost its past glory. Anybody interested in theyyam may be interested to explore the following aspects, that is the folklores describing the genesis of theyyam; relation of theyyam with religion and culture of backward caste communities of North Malabar; impact of commercialisation on the performance of theyyam; factors motivating theyyam artists to continue in this field; factors contributing towards the increasing popularity of theyyam in the contemporary society so on. Many questions need answers. So through this study, the researcher proposes to probe into these areas in order to find out the socio-cultural milieu in which theyyam originated and factors still promoting the continuance of this art form in contemporary Kerala.

CHAPTER –I
INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Kerala known as '*God's Own Country*' is a land of diversities in the spheres of culture, arts, dance and forms. Kerala's folk ritual heritage is as varied and rich as its landscape. There are two spheres in the tradition of folk performing arts of Kerala: 1) Rituals and 2) performing arts. Kerala being a land of all castes, communities and religions even from time immemorial, gives us a variety of interesting ritualistic dance forms. In Kerala most of the performing arts are rituals. Only few have no connection with rituals. A great number of the folk forms have faced extinction over a period of time. However, the rituals and the various visual forms associated with them are still of great reverence to the rural community. Many traditional art forms of Kerala THEYYAM, Thira, Poorakkali, Kotamooriyattam, Pootanum thirayum, Kanyarkali, Theyattu, Padayani, Kalikettu, Kalamezhthuthum pattu are some of the popular religious rituals of Kerala. These are closely associated with magic, beliefs, and rituals of people in Kerala and forms a significant part of the life of individuals especially in rural villages of the state. They are often performed in the shrines or the temples as a part of the annual festival, propitiating the concerned deities. However the most popular amongst these is the Theyyam, Mudi yettu and Padayani representing the religions of north central and south of Kerala respectively.

Cultic and ritualistic arts have always exerted great influence on the social life of India, especially Kerala. Prominent among these is the ritualistic art form of the Theyyam which lacks a clear definition. Every Theyyam draws into its fold pantheistic practices, along with cabbolistic affirmations that helped the marginalised classes claim a space for themselves, and assert their social links with the land of their dwelling. The Theyyam performer bridges the divine with the human, the land with the people, and the arcane with the current. A total performance, it is an incredible coming together of faith based ritualistic celebration of not only religion, but the cultic and the natural and is integral to the consolidation of the different communities and faiths that are knit into the social fabric of Malabar. It is an inseparable part of a Malabar's life: it is to the Theyyam that he turns in supplication, joy and sorrow, drawing sustenance from its continuing hold on his psyche.

Theyyam is not limited to Kerala. It is found in the 64 villages of Parashurama's land including 32 of Tulu Nadu and 32 of Malanadu, i.e., from Korappuzha near Vadakara to Puthoor in Karnataka. The story of a number of Theyyams sailing into Parashurama's land from Aryan areas in a Marakkalam (a large wooden ship) is commonly accepted legend in

Kerala. Even today, it is these pantheons of gods and goddesses that are evoked through the performances of Theyyams.

The *thottem songs* (ritualistic chanting of the narrative) and dances of Theyyams are aimed to please the Gods. It is through manthraas and thanthraas that such oblations are paid. Most of the Theyyams are *Shaivite* in nature. *Shiva Vishnava* gods Mother Goddess, spirits and ghosts, snakes ,birds and other animals, characters from epics and legend, nature- sprits like Yashas, Gandharvas and Kinnaras, martyred heroes, ancestors ostracized rebels and so on are worshipped in the form of Theyyams. This veritable pageantry of gods and heroes still survive in all its glory in the Theyyams performed in the Kavus of Malabar, emphasizing the reinforcement of the community bonding and eliminating social and religious differences, achieved through these vigorous performances.

The etiquettes and codes of Theyyams seem rather unruly and random at the time of its emergence and it is believed that later it entered the regulatory phase. The term Peeda Vazhakkam that means venerable seating, or respectful locus on a sacred pedestal, finds in Theyyam *lingua frangua*, conceives the idea of regulatory practice and its measures. *Manakkadan Gurukkal*, one of the connoisseurs of ritual dance, took part as a catalyst for that process. Then it is elevated in royal position by the joined efforts on the part of king *Kolathiri*, then ruler. For procuring its codification, ordering and ological strata, *Manakkadan Gurukkal* supposed to have actually performed 35 Theyyams on a single night before the *Kolathiri*, the king.

The incident that finds the positioning of ritual dance goes thus: a woman, who did not cry upon her daughter's death was labelled as hard hearted and ordered by the *Kolathiri* to walk with a burning cockle (a small furnace or stove) on her head. While trying to do so, the distressed woman, fell into a *kakkathodu* (a narrow canal) and was drowned to her death. Shortly, her spirit started creating troubles in the *Kovilakam*. Astrologers advised the king to pay homage to her as a Theyyam, so as to bring an end to her vengeance,. Thus, the famous Theyyam artist of *Vannan community*, *Manakkadan Gurukkal*, was summoned to design a Theyyam form or *kolam* for the drowned woman. In order to test the *Gurukkal* who was a well known scholar, sorcerer and Ayurpath, *Kolathiri* asked him to perform 35 Theyyams in a single day- which he did in an exemplary fashion. In the process, the *Gurukkal* gave its enduring stature to the practice of Theyyam that it still enjoys.

The 35 Gods that are venerated through the Theyyams are *Madiyan Kshetrapalakan Theyyam, Oorppazhi, Vettakkorumakan, ThayyParadevatha, Kalariyal Bhagavathi, Chuzhali Bhagavathi, Someswari, Bhairavan, Kuttichathan, Khandakarnan, Vishnumoorthi, Poothadi, Bammurikkan, Karimurikkan, Ilam Karumakan, Thekkan Kariyathan, Veeran, Palottu Daivathar, Thottumkarapothi, Puthiya Bhagavathi, Veerarkaali, Bhadrakaali, Raktheswari, Raktha Chamundi, Veera Chamundi, Uchitta, Karuvaal, and Padikkutti*, besides the that to be performed *Badur Kappalan, Maha Ganapathi, Kizhoor Sasthav, Vayathur Kaaliyar, Yakshi and Yakshan*. These 35 Theyyams were collectively called *Muppathaivar*. In addition to *Manakkadan Gurukkal*, the well known *Theyyam artists* are *Bala Perumalayan, Palai Parappen, Vasuvana Knaladi, Chaalayil Perumalayan, etc...* However, it was also due to the substantial efforts of a number of unknown precursors that Theyyams have been able to assume so many forms, *bhaavas* (states of mind/expressions) and *thottem*.

The members of *Vannan, Malayan, Panar, Velan* (both *Anjootan and Munnootan*) *Tuluvelan, Mavilan, or Chinkathan, Kappalan, Kalanadikal, and Pulaya* communities hold the right to perform Theyyam. The authorities honour the most gifted Theyyam performers by giving them *Pattum Valayum* or *Kachum Churikayum* as recognition, and also name their *Tharavadu* to which they belong. The Vannan community follows matrilineal succession. The region given to the Theyyam performers will go to their nephews as their inheritance, as per the matrilineal system. For instance, the *Karnamurthy* ritual of Kannan Karnamurthy and now it has passed on to his nephew Babu Karnamurthy.

People of the *Vannan* community have customary names related to the rituals they perform like, *Karnamurthy, Nenikyam, Madiyan Simham, Pullooraan, Peruvannan* etc. People of *Malayan* community are referred to as *Panicker* and the older heirs of each *Tharavadu* would be called after the name of *Tharavadu* like *Perumalayan, Padathalavan, Parappen* etc.

Kaliyattakkaavu of north Kerala are enliven with the presence of Theyyams from the Malayalam months of *Thulam* (October- November) to *Idavam* (May- June). *Kavu* is the primordial locale where the tribal worship wild animals, reptiles and natural powers that were a threat to them or awed them. They worshiped *Nagakanyaka, Nagaraja, Pulidhaivangal, Karshika Oorvara Gods* etc and certain trees like *banyan tree, chembaka tree, jackfruit tree and tamarind tree* that earmarked as the dwelling place of these animal spirits. Later this place became *Kavu or Mundy*.

The term *Kaliyatam* might have originated from *nivedyam vekkal*, *Bali* or sacrifice or *oottu* (feast offerings), for *Kaali*. The main deity among the *Mother Goddesses* of *Sangam* era was the Goddess, named *Kottavey*. Most of the agricultural rituals were offered to her. People worshipped *Kaali* with reverential fear. The offertory for *Kaali oottu* dance for *Kaali* must have gradually changed to *Kaliyatam*. Food for *Theyyam* is normally served on the northern side of the temple. This place is called *Kaliyan Palli vadakkem bhaagam*. All these might have resulted in the formation of the word *Kaliyatam*.

Kaliyatam are conducted annually, once in three years, once in five years and after a period of one and a half years. When *kaliyatam* are held once in 6, 14 or 25 years, they are called *Perumkaliyattam* and done on a grand scale. A *kaliyatam* may last for a day or 3 or 7 days. *Perumkaliyattam* is a festival that lasts for 12 days. The arangu of a *Perumkaliyattam* often involves the temples and *kavu*. Everyone becomes a part of the *Perumkaliyattam* in spite of differences in religion and caste. For the initial ceremony of a *Perumkaliyattam*, a tree has to be selected to be sawn by the carpenter; the weapons are to be made by a blacksmith, ornaments by a goldsmith and *kalasham* placed by the *Theeyas*. The Brahmin and Nair hold their position in *Perumkaliyattam*. Nair functions as *Koyma* and Brahmin is entrusted with the *bramakalasham* (head priest). In some temples and *kaavu*, there are ceremonies to be done by the *Mappilas* (Muslims). From all this, now a days it can be said that *kaliyatam* presupposes social fraternity and belittle the boundary of caste and religion. The present study tried to find out the socio-cultural situation in which *theyyam* originated and factors still promoting the continuance of this art form in contemporary Kerala.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Theyyam is a form of worship performed by the people of Northern Kerala. It consists of a special combination of symbols, rituals and art forms particularly dance. In this spectacular art forms, the ghosts, good and evil spirits come into the manifestation *Theyyam* or *Theyyatam* is a popular Hindu ritual of worship in North Kerala predominant in the *Kolathu nadu*. As a living cult with centuries old traditions, rituals and customs, it embraces almost all castes and a class of Hindu religion in this region. *Theyyam* are a rare combination of dance and music and reflects important features of a tribal culture.

The term *Theyyam* is a corrupt usage for *Daivam* means God. *Attam* means dance. *Theyyatam* means God's Dance. The performers of *theyyam* belong to the lower caste community and have an important position in the community. People of these districts

consider Theyyam itself as a God and they seek blessing from this Theyyam. God is believed to enter the body of the Theyyam performer and hence, believers consider the man dressed as the Theyyam as a visible manifestation of God and seek his blessings. Thus Theyyam has a definite culture and social significance in the life of people. It is closely related to the culture and tradition of Kerala. Globalization and resultant modernization has brought in significant changes in all spheres of life in Kerala.

Over the years many traditional art forms of Kerala has got sidelined and seems to have lost its importance in the society. Theyyam is also such a traditional art form of Kerala which lost its past glory. Anybody interested in theyyam may be interested to explore the following aspects, that is the folklores describing the genesis of theyyam; relation of theyyam with religion and culture of backward caste communities of North Malabar; impact of commercialisation on the performance of theyyam; factors motivating theyyam artists to continue in this field; factors contributing towards the increasing popularity of theyyam in the contemporary society so on. Many questions need answers. So through this study, the researcher proposes to probe into these areas in order to find out the socio-cultural milieu in which theyyam originated and factors still promoting the continuance of this art form in contemporary Kerala.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Traditional art forms are lens to the past of our society. Theyyam as a traditional art of Kerala reflects the socio cultural situation of the past society in Kerala. Cultural and living pattern of any society is always an area of interest to many disciplines in social sciences like Anthropology, History, Folklore, Sociology etc. Thus this study which proposes to look into Theyyam as a traditional art form of Kerala has great relevance in order to shed light on the past events in our society that contributed towards the origin of theyyam. Findings of this study will be useful to understand how the traditional art forms are changing as a result of modernization and commercialisation. Findings of this study will be a contribution to the literature on traditional art forms in Kerala. The present study can invite the attention of government agencies for evolving steps to support the theyyam artists in Kerala. Thus this study which attempts to answer many questions from a contextual perspective of present day society has its own relevance

CHAPTER -II
LITERATURE REVIEW

LITERATURE REVIEW

Beginning with Logan's 'Malabar' (1887) the varied dimensions of the Theyyam has been discussed extensively, that unravels a tradition and its consequent adaptations and reformulations according to the changing nature and social context of the form. Theyyam has been represented in many ways, as folk genre, art, festival, ritual, performance and dance. While historical, anthropological and sociological works are mainly written in English as part of academic pursuits, folklorists had mainly documented oral literature and practices in Malayalam with a substantial content of descriptive notes.

Theyyam also known as Kaliyaattam, the spectacular dance ritual of North Malabar combines martial art traditions, folk legends, native music, colourful costumes, masks, body paints, and imposing headgear. Vibrant, esoteric, spectacular, it attracts countless number of devotees, pilgrims and tourists. Theyyam incorporates dance, mime and music and enshrines the rudiments of ancient tribal cultures which attached great importance to the worship of heroes and the spirit of ancestors.

The origin of theyyam is not conformed. Perhaps its source cannot be anything other than the primal impulse of expressing emotion through physical expressions. The ancient tribal people had the habit of expressing their happiness & grief with the accompaniment of dance. These dances might have eventually evolved as ritualistic means to please God. Life & art were hardly separate entities for the primitive people. Funeral rites, wedding rituals, celebrations, sorcery, illness and entertainment were closely linked to art, more so in the Kerala society of the yore, where art & life were inseparable.

But nowadays Theyyam facing so many challenges which includes financial problems, health and security problems livelihood issues and other problems. Theyyam is its own ethics and moral values. The people want to perform theyyam only for sacred purposes.

According to Ashokan Nenikyam, (1991) Theyyam is a sacred art form. In addition to in (1997) Kannaperuvannan pointed that performing theyyam is a God's gift. Also it's a Livelihood way. In 2007, Rajesh Komath, a professor of MG University said about socio-economic background of Theyyam. But he didn't say anything about the continuity problem of Theyyam.

Theyyam a folk art revolves around the myths and storylines associated with decade old customs, Rituals and other traditional practices that were transferred from generations to their successors. It is no doubt one can presume that the emotional levels theyyam is deeply attached to the old stories and song that are old, as it stood along the lines of related rituals and customs. The book under review in fact unveils the crux of the theyyam and asserts that past events, experiences and beliefs are certainly not just a recreation but influenced by long standing norms, rituals, stage arrangements, conversations, dance and songs.

The author whose family members have an organic relation with theyyam for quite a long time, makes an anthropological journey through its labyrinthine path and makes a bold attempt to expose the levels of casteism, the dominance of the upper caste people and their corresponding attitude toward the fellow beings. With illustrations to this effect, he discloses several factors that are associated with the family of the theyyam artist, the challenges they faced by their identity crisis and matters of survival. In this sense, the book titled “Nattu daivangal samsarichu thudangumbool” (when folk gods began to speak) is a brilliant work in auto-ethnography that portrays the story of the people in the lower stratum of the society who were suppressed, sidelined and discriminated.

It has been said that in history those who have encountered several melancholic episodes and who have had the guts to undertake adventurous feats ended up as theyyam. The artist who impersonates the historical characters tries to traverse through the memory life including ritual and emotional traverse they experience in their lives. Here the common man becomes both gods as well as one among the mass: he speaks for the commons by breaking the spells of old caste based restrictions imposed upon the traditional society. The book eventually goes on by describing the current situation on how the commoditisation of the art called theyyam happens and how it was transferred to the generations as a cultural object and the due changes it found itself to be exposed to in the coming years as well.

The author unveils the crisis his home and village called “Koorara” experienced in relation with the significant changes happening in and around the succulent paddy fields and glistening rivers; where the author focuses on associating the main happenings in the village to the art form Theyyam and questions the social context that can change if the kaavu (grove) becomes lively. Depending on the kaavu, how the harvest can happen and how it possibly influences the caste segregation are all discussed in the book. To a certain extent, one can notice the dominance of certain groups with their own bureaucratic ethos, as they chose to put

signboards Trespassers will be prosecuted around the kaavus which very later got converted into temples, which also in the long run caused the near extinction of art form like Theyyam.

The author makes a penetrating observation that the breaking down of joint family system and formation of nuclear and neo-local family system, which then tend to argue over ancestral properties where these kaavu are situated, and the land reformation and the like have contributed much in the paradigm shift to theyyams and in contextual performance. While most of the Nair-Nambiar families took advantage of their family lineage and ancestral names/surnames as it was a symbol of prestige according to them the lower caste people, their surname tend to become a mark of their slavery and suppression . Hence, they no more liked to add their surnames along with their names.

It is appealing and elegant to see the beautification done on the *Theyyam* artist, but it is impossible to presume that there are scars inside the psyche of the same artist given that theyyam artist, given that theyyam artist who ought to be transfigured as a god is not supposed to feel the pain, as Gods never feel the pain. It is not just a single scar or bruise the artist gets after his theyyam performance. Although Chilambu is very important factor in his performance, he gets several bruises around his toe fingers, drowsiness caused by the tightened adornments around his foreheads to which carries the exquisite decorations on the top of his head.

Theyyam as an art form, is getting a new shape as it get interweaved into politics, faith , rituals and the like at different extent and levels. As the time and place passes, theyyam gets updated and even reformulated, shedding its genuine fashion and warmth , eventually getting converted into a commodity in the market.

The untouchability in the field of theyyam performance is depicted in the book “Folklore-Adhikaram Adhinivesam by A. V. Ajayakumar in the chapter “Ooruvilakku” (outcasting) . In 1986, a shrine owned by the Thiyya community named “Pattayath Puthiya Bhagavathi Kavu in Pappinisseri in Kannur district had an incident of untouchability. The traditional theyyam performer of the temple who belonged to the Vannan community scolded the Trustee member regarding the remuneration of the theyyam performance. The trustees quarrelled and they brought a Malaya community man to perform Puthiya Bhagavathy Theyyam. It was against tradition and ethics. At last, the political parties involved in the issue and settled it. In 1994, Manakkad Raman Peruvannan from Ezhom performed Muthappan Vellattam Theyyam in Nirichan Gopalan’s house, who belonged to Pulaya community. But, the trustees of

Cheerumba Kavu temple which belonged to the Thiyya community didn't allow Raman Peruvannan to perform Theyyam in the temple. Even though he was the right holder to perform Theyyam there, because he performed Theyyam in a house which belonged to a Pulaya person, he was outcasted. Because of this, Raman Peruvannan sued the temple Trust in a special court for Other Backward Castes and got a favourable result. But he didn't perform in that temple again.

Maari Theyyam and Untouchability

History is the documentation of the past. It is the description of authentic data but the historians failed to understand the relevance of data which they collected for the creation of history. So we have omissions and dropouts. In the feudal social order, the historians described the history as of landlords. They have not considered the agrarian history and the peasant history. The lack of documented evidence was the main reason for the omission. According to the document in the revenue records, the names of the landlords are visible. The tenant's name is not there. At the same time, the list of tenants was kept in the landlord's house. So the agrarians were not in the records but the agrarian movement of the past and the victims of feudal system were depicted in rituals, myths and legends. The ritual performance of Chimmankali explains the transformation of primitive communism to feudalism and role of merchants and their victims. The myth of Kuttichathan⁸ explains the fight for the rights of agrarian peasants. The Kathirvanoorveeran⁹ Theyyam explains trade and commerce and the competition. Let us deconstruct the history with the evidence of folk-narratives. At present we are proud of equality. Practically, it is not a reality. In the temple entry proclamation, His Highness Sri Chithira Thirunal Maha Raja of Travancore proclaimed the temple entry for the devotees of Hindu religion without any caste prejudices. Lower caste people also got the right to enter the temples. Nowadays, any Hindu can enter the temple without any prejudices, but certain communities are not allowed to perform their ritual performance in the premises of temple. The ritual Theyyam is very popular in North Malabar. Madayi Kavu is the Goddess of the Chirakkal dynasty. The same Goddess is also the main deity of the Travancore royal family, due to the adoption from Kolathiri royal family to Travancore royal family. The untouchability due to caste was vanished, but untouchability in rituals is still continuing, for which the case study of Maari Theyyam of Madayi Kavu is a living proof. Maari Theyyam is a ritual performed by the Pulaya community of North Malabar. It is a traditional right of the Pulaya community. It starts in the mid of the Malayalam month of Karkkidakam, which is

approximately on the 1st or 2nd of August. There are six Theyyams in this group, namely Maari Kaliyan, Mamaaya Kaliyan, Maari Kalichi, Mamaaya Kalichi, Maari Kuliyan and Mamaaya Kuliyan. The costumes of the Theyyam are made up of tender coconut leaves. Both Kuliyan wear masks.

Legend says that Maari and Mamaaya came from Aryarnadu, which means North India. These evil Gods trickily got into the wooden ship (Marakkalam) of the Goddess, who travelled from Aryan region to North Kerala. Both Maari and Mamaaya got down from the ship at Valapattanam. These evil gods spread calamity in the region. The rituals in temples also got postponed due to the impact of evil deeds. In that situation, an astrologer was brought to Madayi Kavu and was made to think about the problem. The astrologer observed the zodiac sign and found out a solution. The village was conquered by evil Gods. To avoid the evil Gods, they brought the traditional magician Polla, a Pulaya youth to do the rituals. The astrologer pointed out the date and time of the proposed ritual to be performed by Polla. The ritual was to worship and perform Maari Theyyam after the noon on the 16th day of Karkkidaka month and remove the evil Gods. He performed it and in the consecutive days, the same Theyyam wandered in every nook and corner of the villages and removed the evil Gods. At last, Maari Theyyam was given a sendoff in the waters of the river. These Maari Theyyams were not performed in the premises of Madayi Kavu while all other Theyyams were performed in the courtyard of Madayi Kavu. According to an artist who performs Maari Theyyam, it was not due to untouchability. He says, "Long back, the temple authority decided a fixed place for each and every Theyyams. We got a place which is somewhat far away from Madayi Kavu temple towards North East. They also argued that Maari Theyyam is the part and parcel of temple rituals. It didn't start recently. It is a long tradition and we have no right to change the rituals.

The majority of the folk are not ready to break the rituals. By the passage of time, it is necessary to break certain norms and rituals. If anybody is ready to question the untouchable attitude towards Maari Theyyam or any other Theyyam, they can overcome the untouchability with the same remedies. There are possibilities to change the ritual with another ritual advised by the astrologer. The contradiction in the case of untouchability which is practised by the performance towards Maari Theyyam is very remarkable on account of the temple entry proclamation which was proclaimed by the devotee of Madayi Kavu Bhagavathi by late Sree Chithira Thirunal Maha Raja.

Even though public movements lead to a renaissance to abolish untouchability, authorities still practice untouchability. That is why Maari Theyyam is still being performed far away from Madayi Kavu temple which has the family deity of Sri Chithira Thirunal Maharaja, who made temple entry proclamation to all the public. This reveals that even though individuals are protected legally from untouchability, rituals like Maari Theyyam are still facing it, even legally.

Theyyam is a dance performance of a section of indigenous community that combines instruments and vocals. It is a unique art form that blends religious beliefs, art, dance and music. Theyyam, a 40 minutes dance performance, is completely devotional both in its ethos and rendition. Artists perform with the necessary fasting and preparation as the whole dance programme is a dedication to God.

The dance system has a close relationship with the social systems and caste structure. The Theyyam performer belongs to Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes. The majority of the Theyyam dancers belong to Scheduled Castes while a certain section of Scheduled Tribes also perform Theyyam dances though they are not covered under the present study. One of the distinctive features of the Theyyam dance is the monopoly of marginalized communities to perform it. Exclusive right is given to families from that indigenous community who are from the lower-strata of the society to perform it. People outside prescribed castes are not allowed to perform the dance. Theyyam performers are mainly from Malayan, Vannan, Mavilan, Vettuvan, Pulayan and Kopalan..

Theyyam dance performances have several serious occupational hazards that adversely affect the health of the performers. Health of a significant number of dance performers has deteriorated after their long involvement in the dance. By and large, health deterioration is directly related to the rituals followed by the dancers and their livelihood issues. Certain *Theyyam* performances involve dangerous activities. The physical exertion of the performer, the engagement with harmful substances and handling fire cause stress on the mental health of the dancers. Social discrimination also causes some level of mental agony. In addition, livelihood related health deterioration is also reported from the field. While the earning from *Theyyam* activities remains abysmally low, they cannot afford to have a minimum standard of

living. They are compelled to engage in other activities to supplement their meager income from Theyyam. Some of these dancers, after spending the whole night in dance performance continue to work in other fields during day time. This situation has resulted in several health-related problems to *Theyyam* dancers. Health problems reported by *Theyyam* dancers are not prevalent among other sections covered under the survey.

Theyyam dance is a seasonal job and the seasonality phenomenon of *Theyyam* dance affects the economic condition of the performers. The income from *Theyyam* dance is abysmally low. The earnings from the *Theyyam* season is insufficient to sustain the dancer's family throughout the off-season period of up to 6 months. While the dancers are forced to take up other jobs for their subsistence most of the part-time jobs of *Theyyam* dancers are quite non-remunerative and strenuous.

In an Upper Caste dominated society, Theyyam came as a platform for a positive relationships, interactions and cooperation, between Upper Castes and Scheduled Castes. It is a custom of worship that dates back several thousand years. The words of Scheduled Caste dancers during the Theyyam performance are venerated by the Upper Castes as the Divine Will. It may be noted that Upper Castes are the predominant groups which sponsor or offer the dance. When the performance ends, the SC dancers resume their ordinary roles in the lowermost strata of society with no special distinction or recognition. In the past, Theyyam dances were tools and weapons to resist and fight back against an unjust social system as a religious revelation. The result of our field survey clearly shows that the dance influences a section of Upper Castes (21%) in their positive attitudes towards lower castes. While there are Upper Caste people who refuse to mix with or eat with lower caste, several others (52%) have started to interact with the dancers in their day-to-day life. It may be noted that, over the last 20-30 years, Theyyam artists have used Theyyam to inspire self-confidence among the members of Scheduled Castes. According to 58 percent respondents covered under the survey, Scheduled Caste people see the Upper Castes bowing down to the deities that have entered Scheduled Castes as a positive and inspiring action. Some of the new generation dancers consider this response from Upper Castes as an encouraging action.

Majority of the Theyyam performers have just basic education. Low level of higher education among the Theyyam dancers is a matter of concern. As is evident from Table 4.1, about 41

percent respondents have primary school education while 14 percent are illiterate. The analysis of the level of education of Theyyam dancers in a comparative perspective clearly indicates that their situation in respect of level of education is quite worrisome as compared to other scheduled Castes and Upper Castes. About 14 percent respondents under Theyyam dancers category were illiterate against 11 other Scheduled Castes and just 0.5 percent Upper Castes. While about 41 percent respondents under Theyyam dancer's category had primary school education against 18 percent under other Scheduled Castes category and 9.5 percent under Upper Castes category. Those who are having high school education are more or less same in all the three categories. Level of higher education among the Theyyam dancers is quite low. About 5.5 percent respondents under Theyyam dancer's category had graduation and above against 16 percent in the other Scheduled Castes category and 22 percent under Upper Castes.

Theyyam dance performances have several serious occupational hazards that adversely affect the health of the performers. Health of a significant number of dance performers has deteriorated after their long involvement in the dance performance. By and large, health deterioration is directly related to the rituals followed by the dancers and their livelihood issues. Rituals related health deterioration: A dance performer is required to follow certain strict rituals. While some rituals are common to all varieties of Theyyam a few varieties have special rituals which have serious health implications on dance performers. Certain *Theyyam* performances involve in dangerous activities. In the case of *Theechamundi*, dancers need to fall in to fire early in the morning. Some Theyyams are performed with fire bowls around the body of the performer. *Ottakolam* Theyyam performer needs to enter fire heaps hundred times or so like *Puthiya Bhagavathy* and *Khandakarnan Theyyam dancers* act with the fire bowls around their body. In *Puthiya Bhagavathy*, the dancer is required to walk on hot coals repeatedly. Whereas, in *Thottumkara Bhagavathy* Theyyam, the dancer has to accept and consume animal blood from the sacrifices conducted.

Popularisation of Art and Honoring Theyyam Artists: At present, conflict of interest exists between the new and the old generation dancers as there is a divide between the old school of thoughts and new school of thoughts. There are new developments in this art form like introduction of Mudras for more acceptances which has influenced a fraction of the dancers. Modernization and commercialization of art form has started among the new

educated artists. The new generation is educated and they have a view that the art-form should be taken out from the current confined enactment to a wide panorama as it will create more opportunity for the artists and popularize the art. But this view is opposed by the orthodox people who are in the age group of 60 and above, as they do not want to move away from the traditional set up. Appropriate promotional activities, with the support of relevant ministries and departments, can address these issues. Promotional activities especially measures such as honoring *Theyyam* Artists like any other art forms, can attract new generation of the *Theyyam* families.

Training and Documentation: There is no written document for training new artists and currently the training is dependent mainly on the knowledge that is transferred from generations to the head of the families. Documentation of the rituals and customs of the training methodology is very important. Various aspects of dances especially the songs and stories have to be recorded in a form that enables the dancers to share it with the new generations. The proper orientation needs to be provided to dancers in order to reduce their work pressure and exhaustion. Steps may be taken to organize programmes for interested people of Scheduled Castes on different dimensions of *Theyyam* Dance. This will help them in acquiring the skill and enable them to become dance professionals.

Muttathu(1993) in the book the history and origin of *Theyyam* portrays that *Theyyam* is a ritual art form of Malabar region in Kerala. *Theyyam* performers of *Theyyam* are belonging to lower caste communities like Malaya, Vannan, Panar, Anjootan ,Kappalan, Pulaya ,Munnootan and Vellala. *Theyyam* is unavoidable ritual dance forms in north Malabar people. Tree worship paved way for the upcoming of the *Kavu*. *Paala* , *Chembakam*,*Plaavu*, *Kanjiram* , *Elanji* , and *Arayaal* were the tree that were worshiped **Kavu**. *Kavu* are sacred groves .*Theyyam* usually performed in these *Kavu*. There are varieties of *Theyyam* among which the Pottan *Theyyam* ,*Pulimaranja Thondachan* *Theyyam* are directly of the social oppression.

This book have 3 main topics and these main topic have 18 small subtopics. The first topic is *Chilambuvazhikal*. These main topic deals with the history of *theyyam* and evolution of *Theyyam* as an art form. The authors discusses and mainly focus on the Origin of *Theyyam*.

When we delve into the history of *Theyyam* ,its roots can be traced back to Karnataka's ancient ritual of *Bhootharadhana* (ghost worships). During the sangam age deep social

division existed based on occupation and area of inhabitation. The lamp would be sacrificed, and its blood mixed with rice, meat and alcohol would be given to the gods as an offering hoping that it would cure them of their infirmities and free them of their sins. The ritual was practiced in the northern Kerala by lower caste like Malayan, Vannan, Velan, Pulaya etc. The ritual that existed during the sangam age is that later transformed into Theyyam. In ancient times Velan communities considered as the higher caste and they consist of the priest and doctors. By the arrival of Brahmin caste in 8th century AD, the Chera Dynasty declined. The decline of Chera Dynasty was the one of the important reason of decline of Vela community. They lost their position. The Brahmin controlled the Rituals and Poojas they became the priest and higher caste.

According to Hinduism, all the creation –preservation –destruction activities in the universe are controlled by the three Gods- Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara (Shiva), respectively. For upholding righteousness, these gods appear in many godly guises and incarnations. For proposition of these gods, apart from ritualistic worship and sacrifices, man also gave form to donning their godly forms and performing as another form of worship. These became a part of their culture, underwent many changes over time, and is an evolution of the clan culture. It is very difficult to find out the exact period of the origin of theyyam. At the same time none can refute its antiquity. According to the general belief the origin of the theyyam is attributed to **Manakkadan Gurukkal**. He was a great artist and occultist belong *Vannan* community. Once, the Rajah of Chirakkal invited this great occultist to test his capacity as an artist as well as a magician. Gurukkal was residing at Manakkad in karivellur, about 40 KM away from place of Rajah. The rajah had given several tests like causing obstacles to the ferry as he was trying to cross the river. But Gurukkal managed to cross the river with his divine power. The gates of the fort were also he managed appear before the king with his physical power. The rajah sat along with a few other persons so that Gurukkal could not identify him. But Gurukkal easily recognized the king and respected. While he was called for the food it was so arranged that he himself would have to throw away to plantain leaf in which food be supplied. This was intended to make him feel inferior. Gurukkal foreseeing this received the hot rice in a melon leaf and thus she cleverly avoided the indignity of himself taking the leaf and throwing it away. Thus he successfully overcome the tests of the Rajah, Manakkadan Gurukkal was asked to make the costumes for some deities whose ritualistic dances were to be performed in the form of the Theyyams in night. Accordingly, Gurukkal designed 35 different Theyyams before the sunrise. Rajah realizing Gurukkal skill, a title Manakkadan

was bestowed on Gurukkal. It is popularly believed that this is how the present form of Theyyams originated.

Different cast people perform different Theyyams. Mainly Vannan, Malayan, Velan, Koppalan etc....casts performs the Theyyams. *Manakkadan* comes from Vannan communities and *Panicker* comes to Malaya communities. At present the Theyyams are performed by the *Ashokan Manakkadan*, *Ravi Manakkadan* and Karivellur Perumalayan. The people gives respect to the performers by calling this nick names. The oldest Panicker is called as *Karivellur Perumalayan*. The 2nd topics deals with the relation between Theyyam and other art forms like *Koothu*, *Porattu drama*, *Dance*, *Architecture*, and *Padayani*.

Vaalum Chilambu is the Theyyam stories written by Payyannur Kunhiraman. He was a Teacher at Moothedath High school near Taliparamba. After his retirement now he is working as a resource person in Saksharatha mission.

This book contains Ten Theyyam stories. These stories are very interesting. The First story is Perumkaliyattam. Theyyam is a popular ritual art form of worship of northern Kerala (Vadakara near Calicut to Kasargod). Theyyam performers are lower caste community. The meaning of Theyyam is God. A similar custom is followed in the Mangalore region of neighbouring Karnataka known as Bhuta kola. Theyyam performed in front of the village shrine.

In some Kavu the Theyyam festival is conducted in intervals of 12 or more years. These kinds of festivals are known as Perumkaliyattam. In 2008 Perumkaliyattam were celebrated in Ramanthali Muchilottu Kavu.

The author says about the story of Sree Vettakkorumakan Daivam .Sree Vettakkorumakan is Hindu deity worshiped in parts of north Kerala and North-Western Tamil Nadu. Vettakkorumakan is believed to be the son of Lord Shiva by his consort Parvathi, born when he assumed the form of a Kirata (hunter). The most famous temple of this deity is the Balussery- Kotta Vettakkorumakan temple about 25 km from Calicut.

The second chapter is about the story of Karimkuttichathan Theyyam. He is performed as a deity of magical rituals. Karimkuttichathan is a widely acclaimed deity throughout Kerala. Through most of them called lower caste people, this deity of Brahmin caste.

Karimkuttichathan is considered to have originated for Lord Shiva in Vishnumaya. Though there are a lot of Chathans, three of them are prominent and stand out from the rest. They are Karimkuttichathan, Pookuttichathan, and Theekuttichathan. Popular belief is that Kuttichathan would carry out any kind of wish to those who make Chathans happy through continuous prayers.

Third chapter discussed the story of Pottan Theyyam. According to legend, Pottan Theyyam is originated from Mahadev. In some Tharavadu, Pottan Theyyam has a small hut like building called Palliyara. It is a form of resistance symbolizing Goddess that would wipe out the social evils in the community.

Next chapters are Devakoothu, Manakkadan Gurukkal, Muslim Theyyam, Mannappan, Vairajathan and Thiruvappana. The last chapter, he discusses about the importance of Theyyam and their significance. Theyyam is not only a belief but also it's a part of life and culture. We worship not only puranic gods, but also we worship our environment. For example we protect Trees and Kavu are as an essential part of biodiversity. Theyyam makes our mind is good.

Sanjeevan's (2008) book is again a native account of the Theyyam practice. It reveals the concrete relationship of the Theyyams to caste groups in north Malabar village society. But, at the same time, as he argues that: though it is ridden with caste norms and customs associated with each form of worship, it creates or imagines a casteless society. Thus, the Theyyam becomes a potency that creates castes but it also fights against caste, its prejudices and distinctions. It also points out various phases of formations of various Theyyams and brings forth hitherto unknown primary sources on the practices of Theyyam such as documents regarding the rewards and expenditure incurred to the functioning of Theyyams in some of the major kaavus and tharavadus of north Malabar.

Damodaran's (2009) work ethnographically portrays the life of a specific caste--Malayan--who dance and do other forms of folk rituals through their hereditary occupation of singing and dancing for others as a means of livelihood. This group of people is an endogamous caste whose social position is more or less remain fixed and unaltered in the course of social change. This is because the north Malabar village social structure strengthened and perpetuated the age old customs of the Theyyam even today which isolate these groups within a social fold without much potency to break the social fabric of isolated culture. The pattern of interaction, man and his ecosystem, between individuals and culture, a symbiosis thus

evolved make possible the Malayan to carry out their hereditary occupation and the preservation of their Theyyams. The work is done with the insights of the anthropological theories and methods of functionalism and structural functionalism of early anthropologists such as Malinowski and Radcliffe Brown. The study of Theyyam and its relation with nature and man bring forth insights of culture but more closely enables to review the history of north Malabar.

Mayuri(1959) raises the issue of socio-political process of Theyyam and how politics is involved in ritual. This politics is not confined to the realm of tharavadu, but extends to the micro politics of locality, and macro positions of state and nation over these sorts of folk genres. By stating what Gough³⁰ had observed on the declining process of the Theyyam that with the emergence of a capitalist economy, democratization of society, and with the fall of the matrilineal family structure, the forms of ancestor worship--dead among the Nayars--like Theyyam would vanish. But what has been observed here is that people started debating on the mode and spaces that the Theyyam has to be enacted. As a form of worship it might have adopted its own attributes of the time and space.

Studies on the elements of Art in Theyyam have been a subject of research among art historians. Chandran(2005) describes the formation of art in Theyyam. Putting the question of emergence of Theyyam in its historical perspective, it interprets the tradition of mother goddess and hero worship through analysing the myths and legends of the various Theyyams. It evaluates how from the viewpoint of social science a ritual becomes an ideology. It also brings within the ambit of the book the processes by which village traditions become Hinduised as part of the contemporary cultural politics.

Pallath(1993) compares the differences between the Theyyams of the Hindu Pulayan and the Christian Pulayan. The religious conversion by the Theyyam dancing castes of Pulayar into Christianity lead to the emergence of a sect called as Christian Pulayan. The Pulayan's Theyyam restrict their practice to the Pulayan pathi (sacred spaces where Pulayans perform their rituals) and this has to do with the fact that the Pulayan is positioned rather low in the caste hierarchy of the Theyyam performing groups and also in the overall hierarchy of the Hindu caste order.

Dilip Menon (1995) looks at Theyyam as a folk dance and a popular culture. Theyyam is performed within the strict demarcations of castes, which form a culture that communicates

with society and made possible to venerate within the efforts of the castes around the festival. Many of the Theyyams were icons that rose against unjust caste atrocities. Theyyam also provides a forum to strongly criticize the powers that be of those days, who were perpetrators of casteist violence. When Theyyam functions as a meeting ground of the lower castes and upper castes, it also draws a line to indicate the do's and don't's. By conducting Theyyam, the powerful high castes complemented the strategy to affirm their superiority and Theyyattam in its turn sustains a stratified society which also identifies this as a social space to participate with distinctive discourses which form a community of Teyyattam. This essay narrates the peculiar features of the region, castes and land relations, and analysis Teyyattam considering its multiple meanings. It also point out historical reasons for the decline of the Teyyattam in the late colonial period while putting the question of social change in north Malabar society and culture.

Wayne Ashley (1983) dwells on the process by which the theatre of Kerala, its political plays and contextualizing Theyyam in those framework of analysis. As a student of theatre, Ashley approaches Theyyam through the viewing lens of theatre stagecraft, an idea that endows the work with a distinctive approach. The author has studied the agencies associated with a local/rural culture and unravels the social process that emerges as the outcome of such an interaction. He enquires how money, ideology, government departments, communities react to a cultural form like Theyyam and look into the aspects of how the binary concepts-- 'modernity' and 'tradition' separately and jointly reflected in this form of worship. These discussion centres around the question of whether the Theyyam is an art or ritual. The work has been divided into two parts. The first segment deals with Theyyam as a ritual, the core source of ritual power rooted in it. Besides, in a very distinct manner he has discussed the issue of caste and social orientation. With the engagement of the Marxist party, Central government, Drama Companies and Ford Foundation, the Theyyam gets uprooted from its traditional performing space and is re-located. The latter part of the book re-defines, re-creates Theyyam, as well as, speaks about the restructuring of a tradition that takes place. The work takes us through the changing form of Theyyam, and the process involved in this transition.

Above are some of the major studies related to theyyam and present study looks at theyyam as a traditional art form of Kerala and tried to look at the dynamics of this art form.

CHAPTER -III
METHODOLOGY

METHODOLOGY

TITLE

THEYYAM AS A TRADITIONAL ART FORM OF KERALA: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

GENERAL RESEARCH QUESTION

- What are the transformations that theyyam as a traditional art form has undergone in the contemporary Kerala society and its relevance?

SPECIFIC RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the folklore describing the genesis of theyyam?
- How theyyam is closely related with the religion and culture of backward caste of North Kerala?
- What is the impact of Commercialization on of on the performance of theyyam?
- What are the factors still motivating the theyyam artists to continue in this field?
- What are the factors contributing towards the decreasing popularity of theyyam in the contemporary society?

RESEARCH DESIGN

Case study design was used for the present study.

SAMPLE

A total of five Theyyam performers were selected by the researcher on the basis of criteria fixed as per the research questions.

SOURCE OF DATA

Primary and secondary data was used in this study. Primary data was collected from the participant cases, elders, and community members in the study. Unique background of the subjects was considered while selecting them for study. In addition researcher collected data from key resource persons like experts in folk arts, temple priests and local leaders

Secondary data was collected from books, journals, Historical documents, and folklore academy and web sources.

TOOLS OF DATA COLLECTION

As the topic requires an in-depth detailed analysis the researcher used an unstructured interview based on an interview guide. Non participant observations were also used to collect respective information pertaining to the research topic. For that the researcher attended many Theyyam performances. Camera was also used and visuals brought clarity to the topic under study.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Data was collected and analysed to answer the research questions. Analysis was done thematically.

REPORT WRITING

Research report was prepared after finishing the data analysis and interpretation

CHAPTER –IV
DATA ANALYSIS

PRESENTATION OF CASE AND DATA ANALYSIS

Case 1

Venu Panicker 57 year old Theyyam dancer, he from Karivellur near Payyannur. In fact he was over 40 years of experience in performing Theyyam dance. He was honoured by a royal family of Nileswaram with “Pattu and Vala. He performed all theyyams. He belongs to Malaya community. He was born in 1960. His Theyyam career was started in the age of 16. His Educational qualification is 8th standard. The first theyyam, he put on was Gulikkan theyyam. He learned the art from his father. His father is Velukutty Panicker who holds the position of KarivallurPerumalayan which denotes the highest position among Malaya community. Venu Panicker is married and has two sons, both who are active in the art of theyyam .in 2014.Venu Panicker was awarded the popular academy award for his contributions in Theyyam. He has his “*cherujanmavakaasham*” in Karivellur and is allowed to perform theyyam in thirteen kaavu in that region. Indulging in his family tradition (kulathozhil) of theyyam performance, he also indulges in the crafting of “*Theyyakoppu*” along with it. Theyyakoppu means the theyyam artefact. Head dresses are made of different materials including bamboo sticks, wooden boards, peacock feathers, coconut leaves and flowers. The Mudi (crown/head gear) assumes many forms-thirumudi, omkaramudi, vattamudi and kothachamudi etc. These and other parts of theyyam artifacts like oolakath, adukku, kaivala (bangle) are fashioned out of light wood like murikku (Indian coral tree) and kumuth. He also earns his living by doing tile works.

Genesis of Theyyam

As part of research, the researcher enquired about the genesis of “theyyam”. He gave a good discourse on that.

“I belong to the Malaya community, hence “theyyam” is my “kulathozhil”. Theyyam means God. In Malabar region theyyam is performed from “Korappuzha” to “Chanthagiripuzha”. Socially and economically backward communities like ours and other communities like ‘Velan’, ‘Vannan’, ‘Panar’ and ‘Pulayar to perform theyyam. There is no clear answer to who created theyyam.”

When asked about the origin of theyyam, he said that “there is no clear answer to that. Theyyam has very old history, our predecessors used to worship supernatural powers. The dead were represented by people through ‘Kolams’. This tradition was later on continued. It

is Manakkadan Gurukkal who is popularly known as the 'Aacharya' of theyyam. He gave theyyam its 'roopam' and 'Peedavazhakkam'.

Vishnumoorthi is an important god for us. 'Paalayiparappan' is our Aacharya. We perform traditional theyyam roles such as 'Gulikkan', 'Khandakarnan', 'Uchitta', 'Vairajathan', 'Rakthachamundi', 'Thottumkarapothi', 'Raktheswari' and 'Kuttichathan'. I mostly perform 'Theekolam' theyyam. My children also perform all these theyyam. 'Vannaan' community perform theyyam representing the martyrs."

Relationship with caste

When the researcher asked regarding the theyyam-caste relationship. He replied,

"We belong to the schedule tribe community. Brahmins were the highest caste during those old times. Most of our 'daivam' were formed/resulted from the oppression by the Brahmins. An example is 'Pottan' theyyam, which questions the prevalent system of castism through theyyam.

My first 'Pottan' theyyam was at a nearby 'Tharavadu'. When speaking about our community, its origin also needs to be discussed. 'Malayan' are believed to have come from the head of Lord Shiva. Malaya means the 'arayar' of the mountains."

The researcher asked about 'Mugathezhuthu' or facial painting and fasting (vritham edukkal). He explained "each theyyam has a different facial painting. For example, for 'Vishnumoorthi' its "kodumpurikam" and "kozhipoovu", whereas for 'Khandakarnan', its "Nathukannu" and "pulli". 'Theekolam' theyyam require 21 days of fasting before it. Each theyyam has a different "Mugathezhuthu".

The researcher asked about the castism in theyyam. The respondent replied disappointed tone,

"They still address us with our caste names. When somebody came to see me last month and when he was asking around for my house, the people asked him, "are you looking for 'malayan Venu picnicker's house? ". Theyyam performers are still addressed by their caste names. Brahmins bow before us only once in a year, when we were performing theyyam. Therefore you can still find casteism in Theyyam."

Impact of commercialization

To the next question regarding the commercialisation of Theyyam, the respondent was thoughtful before answering. As today theyyam is performed on the stage and roads. He replied;

“Today, theyyam has come out of its ‘kaavu’. Earlier it was something based on belief and faith but today it has become part of commercialisation.”

Do you go for such theyyam performances; he replied *“I will never allow the commercialisation of theyyam. Theyyams were used to be performed systematically and ritualistically at the kaavu. What is the meaning of performing it without its discipline and rituals? He says 7 years ago, some people came to meet him and his father. They had come to invite us to perform theyyam at Thiruvananthapuram. For which they replied, “All you need to do is to get into the costume for an exhibition, we will pay you.” We told them theyyam is a ritualistic art to be performed at the kaavu with its special features, so we are not interested in that offer.”*

The organisers replied that “all this art is not of interest to people, you will get paid well for programs, let us see if we can get anybody else”, they said. But today many people are performing Theyyam public place and in stage. We can’t stop them from performing them because they get more money there, then by performing in the groove. The researcher asked him, “because of the programme of folklore academy that you have a better living standard now and that you are receiving pension and various awards hearing this he laughed and answered. “Yes i agree with you because folklore academy is doing a lot of improve our condition and status. We started getting pension and awards. Even my father got a fellowship from the academy. All the because of the various performs conducted and organized by the academy then the researcher asked respondent about the impact of commercialization on Theyyam. He sadly answered the question. “Earlier there was a faith aspect moved in Theyyam but now the present generation can commercialize it. Theyyam has taken an important place in cinema too. But there they perform Theyyam without the rituals. The researcher asked whether the present generation has any interest in Theyyam. The respondent smiled looking at his son sitting beside and replied. “I believe that the present generation to lack and lose internet in Theyyam. They simply use it and source of income. That is why the present generation have limited knowledge about the rituals and Thottampattu of Theyyam. It is they who are going to public place and various stages. By performing publicity they don’t

follow the rituals and then lack the knowledge of the rituals, customs and tradition attached to Theyyam. However there are people who see the ritualistic side of Theyyam and follow it devoutly. But they perform only in the grooves, where they get less money which leads to poor living condition of the artist.

Motivating factor and Increasing Popularity

Hearing then the researcher seriously asked what is the factor that motivating the respondent to still continue in this field and why in it that Theyyam is still gaining popularity. To which the respondent replied “you know, that performing Theyyam is my *kulathozhil* (traditional art). Also people treat in a god, when we perform Theyyam. Today we get pension and also get recognition from the society. Through various programmes of the Tourism Department and Folklore Academy, Theyyam is increasingly gaining popularity. Many whatsapp groups have also come up. I have heard people of these group help the artist who get performing Theyyam. It is because of these efforts by Tourism Department and Folklore academy Theyyam still. Increasingly growing number of people are studying about on it. All these also contributed to the popularity of Theyyam. Today in state syllabus, in the Malayalam textbook of class 7std, there in a chapter on Theyyam. The aim of this to introduce or Theyyam to the present generation and make them aware about this art form. When the research finished question the respondent finally suggested it would have been better of had an institution for teaching Theyyam.

Case 2

As a part of research the researcher visited the Kerala folklore academy Chirakkal palace near Kannur district. Kerala Folklore Academy is an autonomous corporate body constituted by the Government of Kerala on 28 June 1995 under the Cultural Affairs Department, Government of Kerala. There are lots of Theyyam statues and different types of Mugathezhuthu (face painting) methods and their names exhibited here. Researcher took the photos of these things.

Sri.A K Nambiar (57) is the present secretary of Kerala Folklore academy Kannur. He is a native of Thalassery near Kannur. He had good knowledge about folk art especially Theyyam, he belongs to Malabar. In 1990 he completed MA in Folklore studies and got PhD in Folklore. Then after which he joined School of Drama, Thrissur during the period of 1996-2009. He worked as a lecturer, folklore studies department at University of Calicut. Famous folklorist like Dr. M V Vishnu Namboothiri and Raghavan Payyanad and A K Nambiar worked together.

Genesis of Theyyam

The first question raised by the researcher was about the origin of Theyyam. For that the Secretary of Kerala Folklore Academy said

“Theyyam is the ritual art form of Malabar region and it dates back to more than 800 years. Since my childhood, I had been a keen observance of Theyyam performance. Theyyam has a greater in performance where we look into the socio –cultural history of Malabar”.

He also added that *“in folklore there are many studies and research related to the origin of Theyyam. There are many stories behind its origin of Theyyam. One among those stories is related to Manakkadan Gurukkal. He is the one who gave shape to different forms and ‘Peedavazhakkam’ of Theyyam. I think you heard about his story.”* he said. Then after he said about Gurukkal’s story. *“Gurukkal was a great artist and a magical person. The local king Kolathiri makes a lot of test to him. But he easily overcomes the tests. At last the king asked Manakkadan Gurukkal to make the costumes for some deities of Theyyam. In the night, Gurukkal designed 35 Theyyams before the sunrise. Raja realizing Gurukkal’s skill, a title ‘Manakkadan’ was bestowed on him. They make “onnukure nalpathu Theyyam “which means 39 Theyyams”. Then he said that “so Manakkadan Gurukkal considered as the Acharya of Theyyam now.*

Relation with castes

Next the researcher asked him about how Theyyam is related with the religion and culture of backward caste of northern Kerala. When the researcher told A.K.Nambiar, that his relatives in Kolacheri mukku near Kannur. He replied “Vishkandan Theyyam is from that place”. He also added that,

“Origin of most of the Theyyam based on caste and caste based discrimination in society. People who perform Theyyam belongs to the socially and economically backward caste with include Malaya, Velan, Vannan and Pulaya etc....Most of the characters of Theyyam were those who died because of the exploitation by the upper caste. For example Kandanarkelan Theyyam, Pottan Theyyam, Vishkandan Theyyam etc are example of this type .Those who died like this are believed to have been raised from dead and became God.”

He also said- “I belongs to Nambiar caste, but the people who performed Theyyam hails from the lower caste. But when they perform Theyyam even the Brahmins will fall the hands in devotion. Before performing this unique art form they undergo fasting. Through this art form the lower caste people get a platform to question the exploitation and discrimination that the higher caste forces on them. More than a ritual art form it is called as a social revolution. Therefore Theyyam is something that has social relevance. He also said that- “in my opinion, more than a ritual art form Theyyam is something that has helped us to eliminate castism. An example for this can be “Pottan Theyyam” performed in sacred grooves which are closely related to the life of lower caste community. Therefore Theyyam has close relationship with caste. Theyyam is performed in Kavu not in temple”.

Impact of commercialization

The researcher also asked about the impact of commercialisation. For that he said “I support with the ideas of performing Theyyam in outside premise of sacred grooves because they were always the marginalised in society. So when they are transformed in Theyyam they become God like figures and are ranked above higher caste peers. The people who perform Theyyam have a greater status in the society and are given respect. For example Narthakaratnam Kannaperuvannan who is native of Kasargod is a famous Theyyam performer and he is even well known to the people from Trivandrum. Only because he performs Theyyam he’s getting all respect and recognition. Only because Theyyam and performers are well known to the

world, this art form is still safe from extinction. The performers are getting awards and Fellowships because it is recognized by the Government.

Theyyam has reached out to a wide audience because of rapid commercialisation. So all people are known this ritual art and these types' art forms are more popularised. Foreigners are very much interested in these kinds of art forms. Today the art form (Theyyam) is known over the world. Now the art form is performed outside of the Kavu (grooves), resulting in more artists to get better opportunities to participate in it. Also the publicity is increasing.” This is my personal view” he said.” I support the idea of performing theyyam outside of the Kavu, but it should be done as per the rituals. It should not be vulgarised.

The next question raised was regarding his opinion on the art form Theyyam used in advertisement and satirical programmes. His response was that “a couple of years back when I was the secretary of folklore academy, an incident occurred. A cigarette company wanted to use ‘Rakthachamundi Theyyam’ (This Theyyam is very powerful god and sacred) to advertise its product (cigarette). The advertisement involved the artist wearing the full attire and makeup and having to walk smoking a cigarette. This incident was very much criticised by the public as well as the academy. Personally this incident hurts me very much. Now sadly the art form is not performed as per the rituals and customs. Now the art form has a wide acceptance and popularity, but it is slowly losing its value. Unfortunately some of the artist today uses this art form as a means of getting more money. Now the art form is changing drastically.

Motivating factor & increasing popularity

Why theyyam artist still continue in this field and what are the factors contributing towards the increasing popularity of Theyyam in the contemporary Kerala. He says,

“In my opinion people still perform theyyam is because it has become popular also they got better in living standard and received awards and recognitions. There was a programme named ‘Utsavam’ conducted by Government of Kerala under the ministry of M.A.Baby (former Education minister and, culture and tourism also) .The main attraction of Utsavam was folk art form. Almost 99% folk art forms were there. It helps to folk art forms to attain a position in main stream art forms. I also support performance of Theyyam outside, because it makes the people who perform Theyyam to join the mainstream and come out from their pathetic situation. One of artist who performer in the ‘Utsavam’ told me that ‘it was through

the money I received by performing theyyam last three years that could to construct a beautiful house for myself. He got 1 Lakh rupees and also an award. They i would have just heard about such a big amount and never seen it. They got recognise within the society and also got better financially. That in why I guess, they still continue in this field. Many regional group of Theyyam artist were formed many studies one being done in the field. In grooves, theyyam in performed in traditional way fulfilling all rituals. That all i want to say about Theyyam. Everything changes in society change.”

Case 3

Vinu Peruvannan (39) was born in Madikai in Kasargod district. He has more than 20 years experience in Theyyam .He completed M A degree and now he is working in KSRTC as a bus conductor. He studied at GHSS Madikai, then after he joined BA and MA in E K.Nayanar memorial College Elerithattu near Nileswaram. He married and he has 2 kids. His wife is an English medium School Teacher. His father Sri Kunhiraman Peruvannan is a famous Theyyam artist in this place. He was honoured by a royal family of Nileswaram with Kachum Churikayum. He has above 60 year, but even now he is very active in Theyyam .He has his “*cherujanmavakaasham*” in Madikai and is allowed to perform theyyam in seven kaavu in that region. He belongs to Vannan community. Now Vannan community is considering as Scheduled Caste. ‘Peruvannan ‘is aacharya (master position) in Vannan community. ‘Kachum Churikayum’ is the symbol of peruvannan. Vinu peruvannan got this position in his age of 29. He has one brother who is also very active in Theyyam.

Genesis of Theyyam

When the researcher enquired about what are the folklore describing the genesis of “theyyam”. He gave a good discourse on that.

“Kannur and Kasargod districts are also known as the land of ‘Thira &Thari”’. Theyyam is a popular ritualistic folk dance form of Northern region of Kerala. Majority of the artists belongs to Scheduled Castes and a small section of dancers are Scheduled Tribes. Theyyam is an abbreviation of ‘Theyy attam’ a Malayalam word, which means ‘dance of the God’ where ‘Daivam’ means God and ‘Attam’ means dance. Theyyam dance (hereafter referred as Theyyam) invokes the presence of the deity in the body of the dancers. He also said that “there is an important matter is that any person who belonging to Malabar region he talk about his village, he not avoid the name Theyyam”. In that time he laughs and continues. “Theyyam is a culture, believes and a social integration in Malabar. It is not only a ritual art form; it also helps as to integrate the society”. He very active and give active responses. Theyyam is a culture, belief, life of Malabar people. “In my knowledge, the origin of Theyyam was in the time of Sangam age in Tamilakam. In this time the Velar community who worshiped their god ‘Kottavey’ (god of war). In the same time a group of people who worshiped the supernatural powers. They make kolas. The dead were represented by people through ‘Kolams’. This tradition was later on

continued. It is Manakkadan Gurukkal who is popularly known as the 'Aacharya' of theyyam. He gave theyyam its 'roopam' and 'Peedavazhakkam'. These are the stories about the origin of Theyyam".

Relation with caste

The researcher asked the respondent how Theyyam is related with the religion and culture of backward castes of north Kerala. He replied with a laughter. I belong to Vannan community. The foundation of Theyyam is caste. The Theyyam artist performers belong to the backward caste. They belong to communities like Vannan, Malaya, Koppalan, Pulaya and Panar etc. The researcher asked him whether he has any reservation in Government jobs. The respondent affirmatively replied that they have reservation in community or caste to which he belongs is socially and economically backward. I belongs to Vannan community which is a scheduled caste. On this, the researcher asked the respondent about the origin of Vannan caste so the respondent replied them; we belong to Vannan community which should not be mistaken to be 'Mannan'. We are different from them. We are more in number in districts like Kannur, Kasargod. Our main job is to perform Theyyam. Apart from this we are also involved 'paramaryavaidyam', stitching and 'mantrikakarmam'. We asked whether there is any relation between caste and Theyyam. Yes, there lies a deep relationship and association between the two. Theyyam is performed by people from lower caste. It is a voice and art form, a form of expression of the oppressed lower caste people. While saying this his face expression changed. People from lower caste have been oppressed and exploited to great extent. Many have been killed by the upper class people and some also got martyred while resisting and protesting against these exploitations. These are the people who mainly become God while we perform Theyyam. In number, our community performs the maximum number of Theyyam. Various Theyyam we perform are Vishakandan Theyyam, Kurikkal Theyyam. All these Theyyam depict the atrocities the oppressed classes had to face. The best example is in Vishakandan Theyyam.

In my opinion, Theyyam and caste are deeply connected and interlinked. It is during these Theyyam performances the upper caste people bow down and give us respect. Through these Theyyam we oppose and react against the atrocities they have done to us. That is why i said that Theyyam is related to Caste. This also helps in the social integration of lower castes. It was then that his father came. The respondent introduced the researcher to his Father. After which he continued this ;"As I was saying Theyyam doesn't belong to an individual but to an

entire community,(Kaliyatam/Perumkaliyattam).Different communities participate in kaliyatam,Perumkaliyattam.Vanan,Malayan,Velam,Thiyya,Kollen(Blacksmith),manan,Brahmin,Varrrior,all these communities have a specific duty or position in this kaliyatam Mahotsavam. All the duties and responsibilities are interconnected. So Theyyam helps create a social and cultural solidarity.

Impact of commercialization

After then the researcher asked question focusing on the impact of commercialization on Theyyam. So the respondent replied that I expecting this question because once Theyyam which was restricted to Kavu (groove) is now seeing performed outside. I think its change to so. It shouldn't be performed outside Kavu in open stages. Hearing this researcher asked the respondent opinion of performing Theyyam outside Kavu (groove) with all the rituals. So the respondent replied

“Theyyam is an art which is closely connected to grooves and community. Since Theyyam is performed in grooves, it is more closely associated with the nature .The groove are being preserved and protected by performing Theyyam, as well as the relation and bond between humans and nature are re-established and increased. It is usually performed around trees like Pala, Chembaka, and Banyan etc. with an idea of protecting the trees. Theyyam becomes complete and sacred only when different communities perform their assigned tasks. He continued when it is being performed in other venues, it loses its divinity, involvement of different communities, the element of protecting nature and overall, it's purity and originality. He asked “is there anyone doing the rituals and duties which are supposed to be done along with the performance of Theyyam?” ”they are just performing for the sake of money.”

(During this time, a group of people came to fix date for Theyyam and offered 'vettilla', 'paakku' and some cash in advance. The respondent later said to the researcher that it was the first ritual of Theyyam and it is known as 'Adayalam kodukkal'.)

The respondent continued-“most of the people nowadays perform theyyam as show item. It is being publicized through movies and advertisements, which makes good money for the Theyyam performers, but as an art it loses its purity and sacredness. The professional value for Theyyam has increased and there are many people performing Theyyam in other venues for making good income. Most of such performers are the youngsters. Not only theyyam, but

many other traditional art forms are now losing their cultural value and are only concentrating on profit taking and commercial value.

“In the past, Theyyam was performed with an aim of bringing out social and cultural injustice, with the belief of getting a better produce for the farmers. Now the whole concept has changed.

The researcher asked whether it is true that most of the Theyyam performers are famous, receiving numerous accolades and attention because of performances outside of the traditional setting. The respondent replied “I’m honoured with the title ‘Peruvannan’ by my community and I do not perform outside. It is the highest honour that the people of my community can receive. It is more valuable than any other accolade. A good Theyyam performer is honoured with titles such as Peruvannan for the Vannan community, Perumalayan or Panicker for the Malaya community. These titles are given by the society.”

The researcher then asked about the Folklore Academy’s performance and if the Theyyam performers are receiving any support or benefit from it. “We are receiving security benefits such as pensions, health securities, and fellowship benefits from the Folklore Academy” he replied.

Motivating Factor

The researchers then moved to the next topic. The traditional job of my family was performing Theyyam. So i too am involved in performing Theyyam. In comparison to previous years we get enough money to meet our needs by performing Theyyam in grooves. In addition to it we get pension from government. We also participate in many other programmes like Utsavam, Dwani organized by folklore academy through which we get additional money. Folklore Academy also organized meetings for Theyyam artists to understand their problems and find a possible solution. Today also we can find some people who truly have interest in Theyyam. We have even started whatsapp group at regional levels. He shared his personal experience. He said, “Two years ago was performing Kandanarkelan Theyyam. It was Theyyam which involved jumping on burning charcoals. During the performance i burnt my leg. That time many people came to me with helps. A Hosdurg resident, Rajesh was the one who gave me money. He told me that they have a whatsapp group through this group we got about your condition. All the people of the group love Theyyam.”

The respondent got teary while saying all this. He further added that, “It wasn’t because I performed Theyyam in front of foreigners or staged many performances that I received help. I believe it was because i am a genuine and a good Theyyam artist. These are a few reasons why I still continue performing Theyyam.

Increasing popularity

Researcher asked whether Theyyam is growing popular. He replied yes, today Theyyam has grown a lot more popular than previous times. The people who came to grooves with faith are blessed by Theyyam (God).Communities form and new relationship are established and renewed in grooves. We receive great support. Also Theyyam has become a subject to many studies. Due to these factors Theyyam has gained popularity. In the present scenario when people have a lot of anxiety, despair, depression etc taking part in Theyyam in the grooves blesses people with peace and consolation. Many people from far off places are coming to see Theyyam. This is all I have to say about Theyyam.

CASE 4

Chandran Muttath (50), born in Peelicode near Kasargod district, studied BA in Economics at St. Thomas College Thrissur. He also completed B. Ed and now he is working as a High School Teacher at Heroor V.H.S Kumbala. He has presented number of programmes in Trivandrum Dooradarshan and Kannur Akashavani on Folklore and Literature. He got Folk Award, National Integration Award, and Chirakkal. T. Balakrishnannair research fellowship etc. Now he is writing in a Malayalam weekly. All his works are based on Theyyam.

His main works are

- Anushtana jeevithathinte kanappuramgal (a study based on Theyyam)
- Tatum dalam (study based on Theyyam face painting)
- Karshika Theyyamgal
- Jalasanchara Theyyamgal

Genesis of Theyyam

In the beginning of the interview researcher asked him about the genesis of Theyyam. Without any hesitation, the respondent quickly answered. “I will tell you everything I know. There have been a lot of stories regarding the origin of Theyyam. As far as I know, the art of Theyyam is very old. The origin of Theyyam can be understood from the *Thottampattu* of each Theyyam. I have written a book on the origin of Theyyam. Theyyam emerged from an uncivilized society. Feasting on the hunted animals and praising the Gods for giving good agricultural produce were the first steps in Theyyam dance. Over the course of time, modern musical instruments have been introduced and the dance was made vibrant and modernised. These were the beginnings. Most prominent and important deities during the time were ‘Siva’ and ‘Sakthi. Both of these two gods are portrayed in most Theyyam. Theyyam is also performed as a way to remember the deceased ones. Kooliyattam is the popular name for such Theyyam. Muthappan and Thondachan Theyyam are also types of Theyyam performed in belief of the expired ones. Rituals like *Velanthullal*, *Mantravatham* are some earlier practice associated with Theyyam. During the *sangam age* there was *thina* systems. The inhabitanicies were given names like *kuravar*, *adavar*, *kanavar* etc. They worshiped ‘Choyyona’ or ‘Chuvanna Murukan’. In scriptures like *Chilappathikaram* and *Tholkkappiyam*, ‘Velan veriyattu’ has been mentioned. They sacrificed goats and offered blood, rice and meat (alcohol/liquor) to the ‘Chuvannamurukan’. They performed using ‘vel’

and port yard Murukan and therefore people valued their words very much. In northern Kerala, Theyyam is performed by people of different communities like Velan, Vannan, and Malayan etc. It was performed in front of Murukan and Kali during the sangam age. Theyyam performed in grooves nowadays are in imitation of these earlier practices. “These are all knowledge I acquired through reading”, he continued. People belonging to the Velan community were regarded as the highest ranking members of the society. They were priests and medicine men. They were respected and honoured by all in the society. But during the 8th century, Brahmin invasion became strong and the Chera kings and Vela’s power started depleting. Brahmins considered themselves as the dominant and highest class and they discriminated the Velan community, making them are the lowest class. These are all historical facts. People belonging to the lower caste communities like Pulayar, Panar, Vannan, Malayan, Koppalan and Velan are the ones who perform Theyyam nowadays”.

The researcher asked if other art forms seen in the present scenario had similar ancestral backgrounds. He answered “yes. Most of the art forms have emerged from the places where Panan community lived. They are the ones who popularised Theyyam, dance, Koothu, Koodiyattam etc. Many castes and races started influencing their art and they became known by different names in different regions”. The researcher asked if Theyyam has any link with ‘Bhootharadhana’ of Karnataka, to which he replied laughing “I have studied about the origin of Theyyam and according to my findings, it does have a close relation with ‘Bhootharadhana’. The costumes, rituals, name of gods, face painting and all of shows Bhootharadhana close resemblance with Theyyam. Bhootharadhana can be seen as a twin or another form of Theyyam”.

Researcher asked about Manakkadan Gurukkal. He replied “Like I said before, the ones who belonged to the upper class and the ones who are now the lower class are the ones who perform Theyyam. Manakkadan Gurukkal belongs to Vannan community. He had performed forty Theyyam in one night in front of *Konathiri* (Alladam swaroopam king) and he got honoured with the name *Manakkadan Gurukkal*. He is the one who has given Theyyam its present form and given it *Peedavazhakkam*. Even before Manakkadan Gurukkal and Konathiri, Theyyam existed (That’s why Konathiri wanted to see Theyyam performance). Only because Theyyam as an art existed that time, Gurukkal was able to modify it and perform in front of Konathiri”. He answered the questions very clearly.

Relation with caste

Researcher asked about the relation between caste and Theyyam. He replied smiling, “Like I said, Theyyam has relations with caste. Caste is the foundation of Theyyam. Lower caste people are the ones who perform Theyyam. It is a prominent art form for them. Theyyam is God. Performing of Theyyam is an ancestral occupation of some castes. Brahmin domination made them the depressed classes and Brahmins became the priests and upper class. But still, Brahmins respected Theyyam, and they also honoured and worshipped it. Theyyam is the right of Pulayar, velar, Malayan, and Koppalan communities. It is their ancestral occupation, along with sacrifices and magic’s. When velar migrated to different regions, they began to be known by different names. And they performed their arts no matter where they were. They still continue to do this”.

The researcher asked how some Theyyam fall victims of harassment and even death due to caste. He answered that,

“Vishakandan, Muchilottu Bhagavathi, Pottan Theyyam, Kurikkal Theyyam and Nambolan Theyyam etc are people. They face harassment and the eels due to their caste. They were killed when they questioned about caste system to upper caste. But they get reborn as gods. These gods then perform Theyyam. The upper castes worship them that time. Pottan Theyyam fight against the injustices of the caste system (he recited few lines of Pottan Theyyam Thottem Pattu). After being dressed up as Theyyam, they can question as well as the caste system in front of the *melalar* (upper caste people). Theyyam was used as a method to fight against the caste system. Another important thing is that Theyyam is performed in grooves and not in temples. The lower caste people had very intimate and close relations with these grooves. It is because they live very close to it. Even today, Theyyam is prohibited from enters the temple walls. In my opinion, Brahmins have minimum or no roles in Theyyam. In temples it is the Brahmins who perform the rituals and everything. But in the grooves where Theyyam are performed, these rituals are called *Koyma*. Brahmins are simply supposed to be there for namesake. In my opinion Theyyam has very crucial relation with caste because it addresses different caste. I visit all grooves which has Theyyam. In my *Tharavadu*, every twelve years, we get Theyyam performers like Gulikkan, Raktheswari, Rakthachamundi, Pottan Theyyam, Kuttichathan etc. It is known as *Perumkaliyattam*. When they are dressed up as Theyyam, and then address different

communities according to their positions in society. Brahmins were addressed as '*Ente Thanthrikale*'; the Theyyam performers community were addressed as '*Kalladi*', Pulaya community were addressed as '*Pathillam vanore*'. The researcher asked if the Theyyam performers are still addressed their names Peruvannan or Perumalayan. You might have heard Kannaperuvannan, Rajeevan Anjootan, etc are all their caste names".

Impact of commercialization

The researcher moved on to ask the third question regarding impact of commercialization of Theyyam. The respondent replied "Theyyam is an art form of north Malabar, but today Theyyam is present in various part of the world". The researcher asked whether the respondent agrees with performing Theyyam outside groove (kaavu). The respondent replied "I am fine with performing Theyyam in places other than the groove, if it follows the rituals and ceremonies of Theyyam". Then the researcher asked about the respondent's view point on the usage of Theyyam in political agendas, films and advertisement. "Today Theyyam is being used in films, advertisement and political party programmes. It is being commercialized in many ways resulting in the loss of its traditional value. But to promote Theyyam it could be also performed on stages".

The researcher asked, "Today most of the young Theyyam performers perform theyyam outside of the grooves and get more money. What is your opinion on it?" He replied "Today most of the Theyyam performers perform Theyyam in stages and public places through which they get more money. Comparatively, the money they get from Kavuvu is very meagre. Today, lots of foreigners study about the cultural aspects of Theyyam and they are very much attracted to its costumes and make up. The present generation performers don't have much interest in theyyam. They neither know its rituals nor ceremonies nor the tradition behind it. For them its only a source of income." The researcher asked what are the changes in Theyyam today especially in the context when it is being performed outside of the grooves. He replied "Today Theyyam is being performed outside the grooves, here they don't follow the rituals and ceremonies and there is no time management. Personally, for me, there is no problem in performing theyyam outside the grooves but they should strictly follow the rituals and ceremonies.

The researcher asked, "What do you think, about many theyyam artists being famous today because theyyam is being performed outside the groove? The respondent replied "Today

most of the Theyyam performers perform Theyyam outside of the grooves, because they get more money, they improve their life, and they get high respect from the society and also get awards. This is good for them especially because these communities belong to socially and economically backward caste. Earlier, they used to be exploited by the upper caste people and also they get very less money in Kavu. But today they perform Theyyam outside of the Kavu by which they get more money and social acceptance and respect. But I am not comfortable with vulgarising Theyyam. The researcher asked the new generation Theyyam performers who correctly study about the rituals of Theyyam and its ceremonies. The respondent replied “In my opinion that new generation Theyyam artist study the rules, and rituals of Theyyam but they are lazy to follow these rituals and *Thottem Pattu* of each Theyyams. My friend Mr. Ashokan told me that the flowers, rice and turmeric powders are bought by Kavu owners from market, in the same time why they says the Thottem and rituals are correctly do in Kavu? When they gave more money in Kavu in that time onwards we stop to perform Theyyam outside of the Grooves.

Motivating factor and increasing popularity

The researcher asked the fourth and fifth questions regarding the motivating factors and increasing popularity of Theyyam. The respondent replied that “Today Theyyam is more popularized and they got more money, awards, pensions and high social respect. These are the motivating factors that they still continue in this field. Theyyam is a traditional job (kulathozhil) of these communities. Today there are lots of people who study about the Theyyam. The modernization and commercialization are the ways of increasing the popularity of Theyyam. The folklore academy introduced lots of programmes like Utsavam and Dwani are as the ways for increasing the popularity of Theyyam. Today many people come to the grooves and see Theyyam because Theyyam it is more popularized.

CASE 5

Unnikrishnan M K (37) was born in Thalassery near Kannur district. After pre-degree he completed Fine Art course and now he is working as a Drawing Teacher at Rajas HSS Vadakara. He got the Kerala Saksharatha Mission Award in 2012 for Logo competition. He is the main priest and *Anthithiriyam* (Lamp lighter and caretaker of the kavu) of his kavu. He has 3 brothers and they are the trustee members of this Kavu (groove).

Genesis of Theyyam

The researcher asked about the genesis of Theyyam. He replied with smile

“Theyyam is the ritual art form of northern Malabar. Besides Theyyam has a prominent place in the history and culture of Malabar. In order to understand the origin of Theyyam we should check how art was evolved – ancient people lived in forest and they worshipped sun, rain, snow and water. And when they got food from hunting they celebrated it with dancing and later this dancing was evolved as various other art forms. Theyyam was also formed in the similar fashion. Theyyam is the art form of untouchables. It is practiced and performed by various *Avarna* (lower caste) groups like Panar, Pulayar, Malaya and Vannan etc. During the olden times these grouped lived among different clans. And later they migrated to different culture and landscape and are known by different names. They use to perform the Theyyam of dead ones is known as Kaliyatam. This gradually developed as the Theyyam we know.

The researcher asked about Manakkadan Gurukkal. He replied “If I am right Manakkadan Gurukkal was the person who is behind the reformation of Theyyam which we see now. He is the one who gave formal content to the Theyyam”.

Relation with caste

The researcher asked about the relationship between Theyyam and caste. He replied “everything about the Theyyam is deep-rooted in caste. The people who perform Theyyam are from economically and socially backward class. In Theyyam ancestors who are dead and people who are killed due to issues pertaining to caste are reincarnated as gods while performing Theyyam. Vishakandan Theyyam, Thondachan Theyyam and Pottan Theyyam they were all common people but, were killed due to caste problem. The same savarnas who

killed and suppressed those avarnas working in their farms and fields. Worshipped those guys reincarnated as god in Theyyam. They questioned every essence of caste discrimination resistant in the society. Before the invasion of *Aryan's* these communities, Velar, Panar, Malaya, Koppalan were all socially developed communities. These groups worked as priest, vaidyam etc. But after the invasion of Aryan they spread their belief, rituals and suppressed the Velar, Panar groups to the lower margins of the society. But this group continues to perform Theyyam.

When the researcher asked the question does different caste have different Theyyam? He replied. “Yes, different castes have different Theyyams. Vannan use to perform Theyyam of Kathivanur Veeran, Kandanar kelan, Veerar kali, Muchilottu Bhagavathi whereas Malaya community use to perform Theyyam of epic characters like Vishnumoorthi, Gulikkan, Kuttichathan and Puthiya Bhagavathi etc.

The researcher asked him “whether these Theyyam are referred by their caste. He replied “Yes, even now Theyyam are commonly known in their caste. One of my friend son, he perform *Theechamundi* (Ottakolam- single kolam) at the age of 17 and received *Pattum Valayum* (silk and golden bangle). But he is known and referred as ‘Panicker’. Similarly the best Theyyam performers from Vannan community are recognized by giving *Kachum Churikayum*. But these guys are also known and referred by the name of their castes”.

The researcher asked the question whether Gulikkan is a god of Malaya community. He replied “If am right Gulikkan is the god of the Malaya community because in the olden days in order to save themselves from the suppressions and cruelty of savarnas. These savarnas learned Manthravadam and practiced ‘Bali’. They worshipped Gulikkan because most of them fear Gulikkan and Kuttichathan”.

Impact of commercialization

The researcher asked about the impact of commercialization on Theyyam. He replied “Theyyam have come out Kavu and *Tharavadu* these days. Earlier it wasn't like that, Theyyam was only performed in Kavu and *Tharavadu*. When asked the question what is your opinion on commercialization of Theyyam? He replied “They are supposed to be and should be practised and performed according to rituals and fasting. Strict discipline of mind and body are required to perform Theyyam. And when Theyyam taken outside Kavu people often not follow those rituals and maintain the discipline. Because of these factors I cannot agree

with the trend of taking Theyyam outside of Kavvu. But the other side of this should also be taken in to consideration, where the artists perform Theyyam outside Kavvu; they get fame, recognition and decent amount of cash to survive. Only because of thus I couldn't completely blame the artists who perform Theyyam outside Kavvu.

When asked the question on his opinion about using Theyyam for advertisement and promotion activities. He replied "I was born and brought up in Theyyam. I believe in Theyyam. Theyyam is associated with nature in our Kavvu there is *Kuttichathan*, *Gulikkan*, *Pottan Theyyam* and *Khandakarnan Theyyam* who performed belongs to Malaya community. Then there is *Monthikkolam*, *Vayanattu kulavan*, *Kandanar kelan* which belong to Vannan community. Perform Theyyam outside kaavu for them it is matters of belief and livelihood .When performed Theyyam outside kaavu owners ban those guys .so those people never perform it outside Kavvu.

When researcher asked the question whether for new generation performers is Theyyam a part of their belief or is it a way to make money and fame, he replied. For new generation Theyyam is only a means through which they could make fame and money. When performed outside kaavu they got more money and also while performing Theyyam in kaavu, rituals and discipline have to be maintained but for advertisement and commercials it isn't necessary. I have a friend whose name I don't want to disclose. He has acquired Panicker Sthanam. He doesn't perform Theyyam inside kaavu but in advertisement and commercials and in cinemas and do shows in Dubai, Gujarat, and Madhya Pradesh.

When asked the question due to commercialization is there any changes in Theyyam Koppukal he said yes. Earlier Gulikkan mask was made of Pala and also for Mugathezhuthu, materials from nature were used and plastic wasn't used. But now the mask is made out of plastic, synthetic paint is used for Mugathezhuthu. Instead of natural fresh flower garlands, they use garlands of plastic flowers.

When researcher asked him to explain the significant changes happened to Theyyam, he replied; now a day's Thottem Pattu is never sung full. The rituals and discipline are not followed strictly. Many Theyyams doesn't know how to dance properly. There are also significant changes in Mugathezhuthu and similar things. The basic structure of Kavvu has undergone drastic changes. There are concrete buildings and electricity in kavukal. There are no trees, animals and all in Kavvu. These are the major changes.

Motivating factor

The researcher asked about the factors motivating Theyyam artists to continue in this field. He replied with smile “today Theyyam artists get more cash in this field and they got social respect from others. Today the demand of Theyyam has been increased. Folklore academy and Kerala Tourism department conduct lots of programs like *Utsavam*, *Swaroopavicharam* etc. These programs are very helpful to Theyyam artists because they got more money. Government of Kerala increases the pension for Theyyam artists. So their living standard is increased. Researcher asked about how Theyyam artists are affected by the commercialization? He replied “is in my opinion that the commercialization affects the team artists. As a part of commercialization the team came to the outside of the groves. They got more chances to perform Theyyam outside of the groves. My friend says “that I am going to perform Theyyam outside of the groves because there are lots of chances in advertisement and films so they give me more money”. In my opinion that commercialization and performing Theyyam outside of the grooves are the most important motivating factors of Theyyam artist to continue in this field is field because through it they get more money and social respect”.

Increasing popularity

The researcher asked about the increasing popularity of Theyyam. He replied very fast “Today Theyyam has got increased popularity because of the activities of Kerala Folklore academy and Kerala Tourism department which conduct many programs like *Utsavam*, *swaropavicharam*, *Mugathezhu silpashala* (face painting workshop) etc. Today Theyyam related books are published. Narthakaratnam Kannaperuvannan wrote *Chilambitta oormakal*. There are lots of study about Theyyam and their rituals. These are the main things. The researcher asked how mass media helps to increase the popularity of Theyyam. He replied “Today Theyyam is increased. The role of mass media is very important in increasing the popularity of Theyyam. Today there are lots of people who uploaded videos and photos on YouTube, Face book, and whatsapp. The Theyyam blogs and Theyyam pages are created in face book. The foreigners and others who ssee this team videos and photos and get attracted to Theyyam. They contact to their whatsapp, Face book members and came to Theyyam. So the mass media act a very important role in increasing Theyyam”.

DATA ANALYSIS

1. Genesis of Theyyam

One of the most important elements in the culture of a society is art. Art influences the lifestyle, the nature, each and every individual on various levels. Traditional art forms are related to every member of a society from their birth to their very last breath. Art exemplifies the symbols and norms of the society and its traditions. It shows the culture, the beauty and the craftsmanship of the people.

Theyyam is a prominent art form that still exists in northern Malabar. Rituals and practices are a part of the culture. The collective knowledge and behaviour that the people have acquired through the years are what that forms their culture. Through these rituals and practices, the collective consciousness is being carried out rather than individual interest.

A ritual is a sequence of activities involving gestures, words and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and performed according to set sequence. Rituals may be prescribed by the traditions of a community, including a religious community. Theories of Levi struss and Malinowski are helpful in describing the identity of these art forms.

The first question was about the origin, myth, relation with supernatural powers acts of sacrifice and heroism by the characters of Theyyam. All the five subjects shared almost common views about the origin of Theyyam. They have gathered the knowledge and understanding either through reading books or by word of mouth which was passed down by their ancestors.

Knowledge from books

Some of them answered the question about the origin of Theyyam using their knowledge from books. According to them the people in the olden times used to worship the nature as well as their forefathers and deceased people. These practices were prominent even during the sangam age. People belonging to the Velan community were one's who carried out these rituals. They used to perform an art form called 'veriyattu', and Theyyam is a newer vision of that. The primitive people used to hunt animals and ate fruits and berries from the forest. They worshipped the nature and its elements. They used to enjoy dancing in groups after

eating. Rain, wind, natural calamities etc. were all their elements of worship. They also worshipped fire, air, water, sky and land. They found joy and happiness in their collective being. The groves are very much related and important to the people.

Panchabhoothas

The Panchabhoothas are very much related to the human beings. The Panchabhoothas are water, air, sky, land and fire. It is therefore this reason, they worshipped these elements. The basic existence of human beings depends on air and water. So they were worshipped from the beginning. Most of the Theyyam we see today came from the elements like water, air and sky. Theyyam which came by sea in boats are called Jalasanchara Theyyamgal (Vishnu Namboothiri m v). These are different gods associated with these different elements. Theyyam like Kadappuram Chamundi, Kalichekon, Padakkathiya Bhagavathi, Vishnumoorthi, etc. expresses the relation between humans and water. The hunters later settled in definite places and started doing agriculture and farming. With the beginning of agriculture they started living as groups and families were made. Theyyam about the gods associated with agriculture, like Valiyavalappil Chamundi, and Kalichekon, shows the connection between humans and agriculture.

Serpent worship/ Tree worship

“People lived closely with nature and considered nature as their mothers. Worshiping snakes and trees is a part of Indian culture. The idea of groves supports this” (Balan Nambiar; 1998.2) opined. Trees like banyan tree, chembaka, Kanjiram, Pala etc. are considered sacred and are protected by building foundations around there and many ritual practices, like lighting the lamps, are carried out there. It is also part of the Indian culture. Theyyams like Gulikkan, Kuttichathan, and Dharmadaivam are associated with these trees and are carried out at their foot.

Knowledge from ancestors

Most of the Theyyam performance have gathered their knowledge about the origin of Theyyam from their ancestors. This knowledge is being passed down from generation to generation. And this knowledge is very valuable. “Theyyam as an artform has been existing for a long time and it portrays the brave warriors and women as well as deceased ancestors as gods”(venu panicker). People who lived an honest and brave life in the society were

honoured with rituals and practices after their death. This has been a practice followed in India a long time.

Worriers

There has been a custom of portraying the deceased members of the family as gods while performing Theyyam. Such Theyyam are also performed for rejuvenating the memories of the deceased ones. “In northern Malabar, the Vannan communities perform Theyyam like Vishakandan, Kathivannur veeran, Muchilottu Bhagavathi etc. in the groves which portray brave men and women. After death, they become Theyyam”(Narayanan potty,1989). In the earlier joint families, the eldest member of the family was called the ‘Karanavar’ and he was respected and obeyed by the others in the family. This person was bestowed with the responsibility of keeping peace and promoting harmony among the family members. Also, the elder members of the family made sure that the inherited knowledge has been imparted to the next(younger) generations. By making the younger generation respect the elders of the family, the saying ‘respect your elders’ was developed and passed on. The demise of such elder people caused great sorrow among the family members and they portray the deceased person gods through Theyyam. ‘Karanavar’ Theyyam and ‘Gurukkal’ Theyyam are such examples. These kinds of practices lead to the origin of Theyyam.

All the five respondents mentioned about ‘Manakkadan Gurukkal’. He has redefined the expression and performance of Theyyam, traditional Theyyam performer Vinu peruvannan opined, “usually Manakkadan Gurukkal is regarded as the as the teacher of Theyyam. With the order from Konathiri king. Manakkdan Gurukkal performed 39 different Theyyam in one night”. “Theyyam did exist before Gurukkal and Konathiri king. But the present form of Theyyam was given by Manakkadan Gurukkal”(Pathman Narath).

Manakkadan Gurukkal

Manakkadan Gurukkal is considered as the ‘Great teacher’ of Theyyam. His resting place is at Onakkunnu, wich is near Karivellur. He was a magician, and physician and inorder to exist his knowledge and wisdom, king *Alladaswaroopam* Konathiri put him through various tests and finally asked him to perform 39 different Theyyam in one night and the King was satisfied and honoured him with the name and position ‘Manakkadan Gurukkal’

There are many factors associated with the origin of Theyyam. Most artforms begin during the early days. These art forms underwent significant changes over time. Theyyam's origin also like past. People lived in groups and they worshipped nature and the dead in the form of Theyyam. Many Theyyam are associated with nature. Theyyam are carved at not in temple, but in groves, where ordinary people are very closely related with.

2. Relation with caste

In India, there are various castes and religions. The Aryan invasion prompted the spread of Vedic culture and divisions of caste according to the occupations started taking place. Brahmins became the highest caste and they became priests. In the caste hierarchy, the top position was held by Brahmins, the second position was had by Kshatriyas who were the Kings and warriors. The third position was held by the Vaisyas who were merchants and bottom of the caste hierarchy was the Shudras. The injustices and cruelties due to this caste hierarchy were faced by the Dalit or untouchables. These people of the lower caste fight against the caste system using various art forms as a medium. In Theyyam also, we can see strong influence of caste.

Influence of caste in Theyyam

The diversity of castes is a speciality of Indian society. Each caste and religion has their own art form and practices. The dance that the primitive people did paved way for art forms. During the sangam age, the velar community used to perform an art called 'veriyattu' which later transformed into Theyyam. People were given different names according to their place of northern during the sangam age. The velar community were also called as Koppalan, Vannan etc. Velar community held high position in the society and they were the priests. But reasons like the Aryan invasion fall of the Chera Empire lead to the domination of Brahmin community in northern (India/Kerala). The position of the priest was taken over by Brahmins and the velar community were suppressed. But the velar community continued performance their art form which became Theyyam. In the present days also, Theyyam is performed by people of Vannan, Panar, Malaya, Koppalan and Pulaya communities.

Theyyam communities

Theyyam is performed by the communities like Vannan, Malaya, Pulaya, and Velar. They are socially and economically backward communities, who still perform their inherited ancestral

art form which still Theyyam. Theyyam mostly consist about the stoves of people who fought against the caste system. ‘Theyyam is performed as a medium to fight against the cruelties and injustices of the caste system. In a particular Theyyam called Pottan Theyyam the caste system is strongly criticised and the message includes we are all humans’ (Dr. Lissy Mathew 2005)

Theyyam against caste

Vishakandan, Muchilottu Bhagavathi, Nambolan Theyyam, Pottan Theyyam and Aippilli Theyyam are some of the Theyyam that criticized the caste cruelties and discriminations and they were in turn, rewarded with punishment and death sentence by the upper castes. Pottan Theyyam was used to fight against the social discrimination based on caste and the concept of untouchables and the aversion of higher castes towards the lower caste. In Pottan Theyyam, it is said “the blood in your body is same as the blood in my body”. Vishakandan Theyyam is about kandan, a Pulaya community man, who saved a higher caste woman who was bitten by a cobra. In turn, he was killed by Namboothiri. So Vishakandan Theyyam is performed in his memory (Pathman Narath). Usually, Theyyam are performed by Vannan and Malaya communities. Vannan communities exhibit Theyyam of deceased people and also people who fight against the social injustices. Pottan Theyyam is very significant because it portrays the ideologies and perspectives of the lower caste people, their struggles and discriminations they faced etc (Rajesh komath).

Theyyam performance today

“Theyyam is mixed with caste. It is the art forms especially for lower castes. The upper castes have no position there” (Nambiar.A.K). In the present days also, Theyyam performance all called using their caste name along with their names. Regarding this, Theyyam performers Venu Panicker, Vinu peruvannan grove owner Unnikrishnan M.V all shared same opinions. They shared their experiences. “Theyyam performers are still known using their caste or community names. Peruvannan, Perumalayan etc. represents the ritual names as well as caste name” (V.K. Anilkumar). Famous Theyyam performer Venu Panicker said of his experience “although the relevance of caste system has still considerably declined all over the countries, it still has a major role when it comes to Malabar. Untouchables are still untouchables. They all still discriminated and prone to violence”. Theyyam are performed by the lower caste in a society. It is an invited tradition for them. Theyyam helped to caste consciousness and

awareness about the social injustices and about the people who died trying to fighting against these evils. Therefore caste is a foundation for Theyyam. Most Theyyam are revolutions of a society. Rajahs ram Mohan Roy, Jyothi bah phule, Sree Narayana Guru and Swami Dayanandha Saraswathi are all revolutionaries who fought against the caste system and social evils. When the lower caste performs Theyyam, even Brahmins respect them and tear them.

3. Impact of commercialization

Modernization and developments in the society are increasing rapidly, but as a drawback the traditions and culture are being sabotaged. Market and commercialization has taken over art forms like Theyyam. “Modernization is the process of changes toward those of development in social, economic and political systems in the 17th century to 19th century.” “Modernization evolved from two ideas about social change the conception of traditional versus modern societies and positivism that viewed development as social evolution in progressive stages of growth.”

The changes that are happening to theyyam can be seen a sign of modernization. It is not just confined to the social changes but it is reflected in all spheres like culture, economy, politics etc. and all of this has influenced theyyam. Therefore these changes can be probed into using theyyam as a lens. Theyyam not only means the performance and the costume but the whole environment of the performance. So, theyyam groves have much importance. Modernization has brought considerable changes to theyyam and groves. The new inventions and upgrades have changed all aspect of human life. Now we can order and acquire things with just one click. Art forms have transitioned from a cultural dimension to other dimension.

Change in the groves

“In the past, people visited groves for their spiritual beliefs. The deities were placed in the most beautiful parts of the nature. There were no walls of concrete or building or concrete substance around it.”(C.M.S Chanchera) But now, modern facilities have invaded groves. There are buildings, concrete walls, parking area, bathrooms, ac rooms, fans, canteen etc. constructed around it and also above the deities. These modern facilities have decreased the values of tradition and cultures” (Chandran Muttath).

Modernisation in theyyam performance:

As a result of modernisation a lot of changes have taken place in theyyam performance and groves. The colours that were used to paint the faces of theyyam are now artificial paints. For theyyam like Gulikan and Pottan Theyyam the spate of betel-nut tree were used to decorate their face. But now cardboards are now used instead. Garlands were made using medicinal flowers but now plastic garlands have replaced them.

Commercialization

“The change in theyyam was happening dynamically. Drastic changes have taken over the practice of theyyam from its making up to its ritual. Even the groves have changed significantly.”(Rajesh Komath).

As a part of commercialization, significant changes happened to theyyam. In the market economy, the commercial value for art forms has increased.

“Commercialisation is a process of introducing a new product or production method into commerce- making it available in the market”-definition of commercialization. “The very soul of theme has been lost due to the invasion of market and commerce”, theyyam performers responded. According to them, theyyams are only inside the groves and not outside of it.

Theyyam outside groves

“Throughout the world modern innovation and technologies have affected the social life of people, the ritual, the art form and all other aspects. The traditional norms and values have been replaced by it, which is a state of helplessness and satirical.”(P.K Michael Tharakan, Former vice chancellor, Kannur University)

Theyyams which have its spiritual and divine values are now performed in the outside world and stages. It is also popular in movies and advertisements. In 2011 Kerala government in partnership with Kerala Kowmudi and Josco jewellery organised an annual shopping event known as grand Kerala festival as part of Christmas and new year celebration. It was organised in Kanakakkunnu Palace ground, Thiruvananthapuram. As a part of the festival, theyyam was performed for seven days. Theyyams are generally performed in grooves and ancestral homes. But its performance in such an event was totally surprising and uncalled for. Theyyam performers claimed that the theyyam lose its spiritual value and beliefs when

performed in outside world like in stages. The professional demand for theyyam has increased now. A new set of performers claiming to be 'professional theyyam artists' have emerged. Movies books and documentaries about theyyam have been made targeting the national markets.

“When performed outside of the grooves, theyyam loses its soul and life and becomes just an artform. Theyyams which are done without its customary rituals and practices cannot be called as theyyams.”(Velukutty Panicker)

Theyyam in markets

Theyyam has acquired a global status now. Philosophical thinkers, artists, communist parties have all supported theyyams. It became a favourite aspect for media too. The government has even set up a folklore academy in Kannur for benefitting theyyam. Theyyam developed two new protectors other than the customary theyyam performers, theyyam communities etc. The professional importance and value for Theyyam has increased. It is being presented in the market for fortune and fame. It is being performed to delight foreigners and tourists. Just like buying tickets for movies, theyyam is also spectator like that. “Nowadays it is presented without doing any customary rituals or practices”(Chandran Muttath). “What is theyyam without its rituals and beliefs? Without them, the essence of theyyam is being destroyed.”(Rajesh Komath). Some of the so called “professional theyyam artists” will do anything if they are offered a good reward. Theyyam in commercial world is like that now.(K.V Anilkumar). The very purpose of theyyam has changed from fighting against injustice to making profit. We are selling our age old tradition in the market. Not just theyyams but most other art forms are also being commercialised. Art forms are reflections of time. But now that reflections are not clear. Art forms exhibit the culture and the unity of society. It is inherited from generation to generation. But modernization or commercialization has brought various changes in daily lives of people. Now people tend to avoid the rituals and beliefs as a result, the tradition, culture and unity of people are deteriorating. For a society to exist it need integration among its members. But now, what parts from us is disintegration. The shift from joint family to nuclear family prioritised the 'I' feeling instead of 'we' feelings. This 'we' feeling is getting distant from us. Society and social structures has changed; and so does artforms.

Change in theyyam performers

The traditional theyyam performance underwent changes due to commercialisation and modernisation. In the past theyyam were performed by the communities which were socially and economically backward. But now, the situation has changed. It has shifted from grooves to the open commercial world. Performing theyyam in the outside world earns the performers large amount of fortune and fame. The backward caste who used to perform theyyam has come forward in the society and are being respected by everyone. It is because theyyams have conquered the mainstream stages.

“A theyyam performer in Kasargod is renowned even in Trivandrum because of exposure he gets from performing in other venues” Dr. A.K Nambiar opined.

The income from grooves are considerably low; but performing in outside venues earns them large income and wider fame. Theyyam performers were socially marginalised groups. But performing in venues like stages, advertisements and other programs earned them good money. Sri A.K Nambiar, Secretary, and Folk Lore Academy said:” A theyyam performer told me that he was able to build a house from the income he receive from performing at various events organised by the academy”. They are the deprived section of the society; but through these programs they were able to get good income and improve their standard of living.

4. Motivating factor

Usually arts forms are the mirrors of age. For a Malabar men Theyyam is a part of his culture, believes and his/her life. Nowadays modernization, commercialization as affected many art forms seriously. People who perform Theyyam as a hereditary are still continuing in that field. The factors that pull back them towards this fields may be the increasing popularity, the activities of Kerala Tourism Department and Folklore academy the opportunities that the artists acquire for performing this art form. Because of all this factors the life style of Theyyam artist became more stable.

The activities of Folklore Academy

An organization working with the objectives of protecting art forms in Kerala, artists, retaining the traditional culture of Kerala, that is Kerala folklore academy. This academy mainly focuses on the protection of folk arts. Academy plays a major role in protecting

Theyyam. Annually folklore academy conducts folk festival regularly. There are many programmes also conducted by the academy for Theyyam also.

Utsavam- a folk festival

'Utsavam' is a programme conducted under Kerala folklore academy. This programme extends for 15 days. For each day they will be different types of Theyyam perform as a part of this programme. The Theyyam performers are receiving large good amount of remuneration from this.

"I was able to build a new house for me with the money I earned from previous 2 years 'Utsavam' programme". This is an experience shared by a Theyyam artist who participated in the Utsavam to Sri. A.K.Nambiar (Folklore academy secretary).

Swaroopa vicharam- Theyyam workshop

'Swaroopa vicharam' is a programme conducted by folklore academy. This workshop carries out seminars, discussions regarding Theyyam, types of face painting and so on. This programme is conducted in association with *Koottu*. Many Theyyam artists participate in this workshop. This workshop acts as a major resource centre for the knowledge about Theyyam.

Recognitions and Awards

"In ancient period Theyyam performers can't even dream about an award for performing Theyyam. But nowadays they are recognize with even Padmasree" (V.K. Anilkumar).

Theyyam artist are receiving fellowships and awards the present scenario. Through these recognitions, social and economic status of life is standardized. This people are receiving respect from others. Once they are a section which is being suppressed and faced a lot of exploitation in their life. But now present they are achieving a standard life style through this art form. Most of the senior Theyyam performers are now being honoured and receiving helps from the society. This is a great relief for these veterans. A. K. Nambiar says that "They may not haven't seen a lakh as a whole. They may have heard about such a large amount, but now they are earning lakhs of rupees"

Pensions

Kerala government brought different types of pensions schemes for people . Pension is provided for Theyyam performers, who is having age above 50. "In olden days the money we

got from groves were very little. It was very difficult to lead the life with that providing pension which helps for winning daily bread”- Kunhjara peruvannan says. Now the pension is raised.

Theyyam as a traditional job

Theyyam is the hereditary occupation of castes like Vannan, Malaya, Panar, and Koppalas. “Theyyam is our traditional occupation. That is why we are following this” says Theyyam artist. They *Kolu* (remuneration) received from groves during early was limited. But now this art form receives higher popularity and earn a good income. “My father and grandparents were performers who performed this art as an occupation. That’s why we don’t think about doing another job”. Some of the Theyyam performers stated this.

Local groups

Local groups usually promote Theyyam very much. People in a locality formed Theyyam groups and were able to understand more about this art form. These local groups interfere in the problems affecting Theyyam performers. This also helped the artist to attain a better life situation. There are chances for getting an accident during the performance of Theyyam. These artists are being helped for their medical treatment by these local groups. “During the performance of Kandanar kelan Theyyam I was affected with a burn in my legs. At this time I got help from the local Theyyam groups”. An artist Madikai Vinu peruvannan.

Art form is a part of life within a society. It is the duty of local people in the society to take care of this kind of art forms from decline. Theyyam as an art form which is on the edge of extinction is to be protected by the society. So that the future generation won’t forget such an art form which has spiritual more over traditional and cultural value in the Kerala society.

5. Increasing popularity

For the people of Northern Kerala Theyyam is a deep rooted cultural consciousness within them. An art form which can only be performed within a group is the asset of a society. A belief that considers the person who performs the art form as god is the main force that retains the Theyyam. Even though urbanization, industrialization affects the different courses of life the rural art forms can only be protected by the performers. “Groups formed because of social needs is one thing that sustains traditional art forms. Folk arts is a product of folk culture. Folk culture is nourished by a group of people living in a particular area”(Subrahmaniyan.

L.K.C.10;19). Nowadays the folk arts is receiving more popularity. Groups or associations of people help the folk arts from extinction. Today Theyyam is a popular art form. Through increasing influence of social media, books and commercialization Theyyam got wide popularity in the society.

Activities of social media

In the present scenario influence of social media is very large. The influence ranges towards all realms of life of people. Increasing influence of these social media is nourishing the artforms and culture of kerala. The role played by social media in making Theyyam a popular art is very high. “During the burn occurred while performing Kandanar kelan Theyyam i got many medical help through the people of whatsapp group” said by Madikai Vinu peruvannan.

A few months before as a part of Kaliyattamaholsavam (Bapooran Theyam) was staged at Kumbala in Kasargod district. Coconut climbing is a major ritual practice in this Theyyam. During practising this the Theyyam climbed coconut tree and fell down. He was affected with spine injury in order to find out the financial help through facebook and whatsapp there were many requests. Thus he gained a lot of help. So social media like facebook, whatsapp play a major role in making Theyyam popular. There are movies and documentaries based on Theyyam. Youtube also carries videos, that shows Theyyam with all its rituals. Now people perform southern part of Kerala are searching for Theyyam by understanding more about it.

In the magazine named ‘Yathra’ of Mathrubhoomi Arun vijayakumar wrote this. “After orkut and facebook came i happened to see pictures taken by some people. I dedicated to see the Theyyam next year surely. Later through Ramesh a Payyannur resident who was my facebook friend i watch Theyyam. Through social media popularity of Theyyam increased. Many Theyyam groups were formed. All these groups brought more popularity for this artform.

Books and journals

At present there are a lot of books and articles being published related to Theyyam. There are biographies of Theyyam artists. Theyyam artist says that through books and articles popularity of Theyyam became more increased many books were published for Theyyam during 1960s. From the book released in 1887 by William Logan “Malabar manual” till the book published during 2004 by William Darranble ‘Nine life in search of the sacred in

modern India'. 'Theyyathinte Jathivazhakkam' is a book published by Sanjeevan a PhD holder in "Social relevance of Theyyam" at Madhurai Kamaraj University.

Increasing beliefs

Today people have changed from joint family to nuclear family. Through the togetherness there was happiness, socialization etc. but due to the modernization put man needs not time even have take care of his own affairs. While people share emotions and sadness of them with others there comes an interactor. Through these interactions a good society is being developed, but the people now become selfish and live in a world of them. During this time they face a lot of problems. There is stress in life. Inorder to ventilliate their problems they find shelter in temples and other worshiping centers. Theyyam artists agree that today faith in god is increasing. Due to this faith many Theyyam , are formed. "There are double amount of Theyyam than before, because people is having a greater faith in Theyyam" Most Theyyam artists said this. Many Theyyam groves are by and local committees started to conduct Kaliyattam every year there. All these things give popularity to Theyyam.

Activities of ministries of Tourism and Cultural affairs

Secretary of Kerala Folklore academy A.K.Nambiar started that through organizing many programmes by Tourism and cultural affairs ministries the popularity of Theyyam raised under folklore academy there are Theyyam workshop. Theyyam equipments and Theyyam face painting exhibitions are conducted. The activities of folklore academy made Theyyam very much popular. People got awareness about Theyyam including foreigners arrived Kerala study Theyyam.

Commercialization/Modernization

From the five cases it is that due to commercialization and modernization Theyyam gotwider popularity. In advertisements, new media, movies, documentaries everywhere Theyyam is given importance. People from abroad came to know more about Theyyam through commercialization. Including foreigners many people came to know more about and to study about Theyyam. Theyyam is being portrayed on flexes of party programmes. In order times Theyyam was only performed within groves. But due to commercialization and modernization give a new platform for Theyyam to achieve greater heights.

FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

FINDINGS

Based on the analysis of the primary data the researcher has arrived at the following findings.

- It was found out from the cases that Theyyam is a caste based ritual associated with the temples and Kavus.
- Theyyam is a traditional art form of Kerala performed by male artists only.
- Theyyam is an art form closely connected with the religious beliefs of the lower caste Hindus.
- Theyyam depicts the revolt of the lower caste people against the oppression of the upper caste people. Through it they try to take revenge against the exploitation suffered by them in a mythological way.
- Manakkadan Gurukkal is the proponent of the modern form of Theyyam that we see today.
- The of knowledge of Theyyam is passed down from generation to generation among lower caste people.
- Most of the Theyyam artists are earning their livelihood by working in some other field.
- It was found out from the study that commercialization of Theyyam improved the living status of Theyyam artists.
- All Theyyam artists do not have a common opinion about the commercialization of Theyyam. While some are supporting it others are concerned about altering the traditional rituals connected to Theyyam when it is performed outside the Kavus.
- Modern Theyyam artist doesn't follow the traditional rituals of Theyyam.
- Folklore academy and government provides support to the Theyyam artist. It is because of this factor that Theyyam artist continue in this field, despite their poor economic background.
- There is an increase in the popularity of Theyyam among the people due to the support given by the mass media.
- Many researchers conduct studies on Theyyam which is also helpful for increasing the popularity of this art form.

SUGGESTIONS

- ❖ Government should introduce research projects to study about Theyyam.
- ❖ Government and Folklore academy should initiate programme to attract youth to perform Theyyam.
- ❖ Cultural department must provide enough training facilities of Theyyam artist to improve their performance.
- ❖ The authority must increase the money benefits of Theyyam artists.
- ❖ A museum shall be established by the government in order to preserve the artefacts related to Theyyam.
- ❖ Hindu temples shall given financial support by government for organising Theyyam during the annual festivals.
- ❖ An academy should established by the government or NGOs in order to give training for those who are interested to learn Theyyam.
- ❖ Biographies of the former Theyyam artists should be prepared in order to protect the traditional knowledge associated with this folklore.

CONCLUSION

Theyyam is an art form which represents the traditional culture of Kerala. It is closely connected with the dynamics of the traditional caste system of Kerala. It was a tool of the lower caste people for raising their voice against the oppression they have suffered from the dominant caste with the help of rituals and beliefs. To a certain extent the social context of Theyyam performance has undergone major changes in the current society. The relevance of Theyyam in modern Kerala is increasing day by day. The art form Theyyam has undergone many transformations since its beginning and these transformations lead to the formation of modern Theyyam. The popularity of modern Theyyam has increased significantly because of commercialization. The publicity received by Theyyam in mass media increases its popularity among people. The Theyyam of earlier period mainly focused on beliefs of Hindu religion and it is associated with festivals of grooves, deities etc.... Theyyam of present generation focus on only monetary gains/ benefit for the artist.

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INTERVIEW GUIDE

TOPIC: THEYYAM AS A TRADITIONAL ART FORM OF KERALA: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE.

Genesis of Theyyam

- Origin, place, different Theyyams, myths, rituals, castes.
- Relation with supernatural powers.
- relation with some temples, places, incidents.
- Acts of sacrifice by the characters of Theyyam.
- Acts of heroism by the characters of Theyyam.
- Folklore on the revolt of lower castes against upper castes.

Relation with castes

- Major themes indicating the influence of caste in the myths describing the origin of Theyyam.
- Descriptions on the caste identity of Theyyam characters.
- Theyyam characters challenging and fighting against the caste based oppressions.
- Theyyam characters as winners or victims in this fight against caste based oppressions.
- Performance of Theyyam as a channel for glorifying the heroic acts of characters of the past who challenged the caste based social discriminations.
- Caste identity of Theyyam artists of today.
- Social context that influence the performance of Theyyam by artists belonging to some castes only.
- Attire of Theyyam artists and its relation with caste
- Popular story lines beneath the performance of Theyyam and its connection with caste.
- Rituals followed during the preparation time for Theyyam performance and its connection with caste principles.

Commercialization

- Ritual factor, social factor, income.
- Status, popularity ,publicity.
- Costume and market.
- Fashion mode, influence of tourism.
- Foreigners interact towards art forms.
- Conversion from the natural costume products to artificial products.
- A form of entertainment, losing traditional value.

- Cost maintenance in present society.
- Effect of sponsorship system.
- Influence of modern demands.
- Youth's view/approach towards Theyyam
- Part of exhibition, form of projection of festivals/celebrations
- Model, plot, festivals, still models.
- Changes taken place in the mythological perspective.
- System towards the art forms.
- Relation between age of Theyyam artists and the tendency for commercialization
- Influence of age style changes towards the Theyyam culture.
- Performing Theyyam for getting money.
- Change of context of performance of Theyyam-Religious to commercial.
- Change of the status of Theyyam artists from traditional cast based identity to a professional performer motivated by money.
- Modifications in the timings and nature of performance of Theyyam for satisfying audience or viewers.

Motivating factor

- Sponsorship, increasing income.
- Performing as a customary practice of the family.
- Promotion by tourism department, availability of fellowships, Awards
- Role of folklore academy in promoting Theyyam.
- Availability of Pension
- Increasing support of people to Theyyam artists.
- Support of local self Government in organising Theyyam performance.
- Support of socio-cultural organisations like clubs, NGOs.
- Increase in the number of temples and more demand for Theyyam performance.
- Attraction towards Theyyam as an art form.
- More opportunities and income due to commercialisation.

Increasing popularity

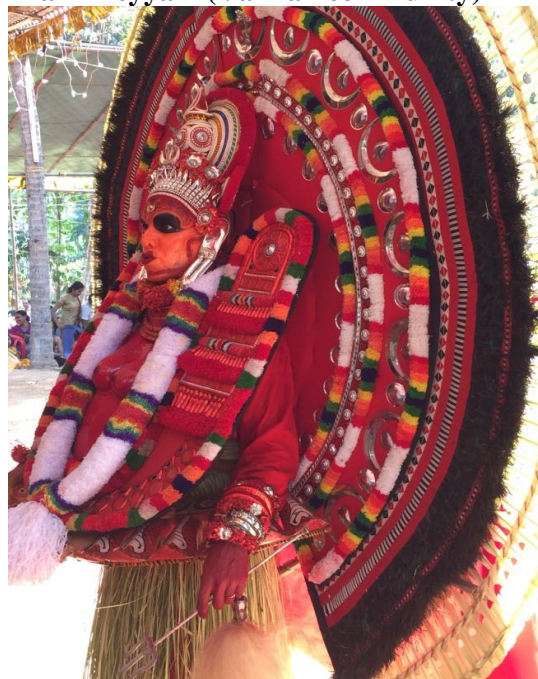
- Increasing programmes (festivals) and more chances for performance.
- Increasing appearance in the media.
- Books and journals written on Theyyam.
- Biography and autobiography about Theyyam performers that give publicity to Theyyam as an art form.

- Importance of Theyyam as a traditional ritual art form.
- Conducting Theyyam festivals by folklore academy.
- Role of local people's organisation and NGOs.
- Study and research about the Theyyam in educational institutions.
- Role of temple committees in inviting Theyyam artists.
- Positive attitude of people in supporting the performance of Theyyam artists.
- Support of state government which organises local art festivals.
- Opportunity to perform in school and college youth festivals and the increasing popularity.
- Increasing advertisement by tourism dept.
- Opportunities for Theyyam artists in secular programmes like annual meeting of political parties, beauty contests, reality show etc.
- Possibility for further increase in the popularity of theyyam in near future.
- Possibility for any decline in the popularity of Theyyam in future.
- Increasing attraction towards traditional culture and art forms.
- Increasing beliefs in God and greater attention towards temple rituals

SOME VISUALS OF THEYYAM



Bali Theyyam (Vannan community)



Rakthachamundi Theyyam (Malaya community)



Kandanar Kelan Theyyam(Vannan community)



Theyyam Face Painting



Tomb of Manakkadan Gurukkal





Bhagavathi



Theyyam Face Painting



Gulikan



Kundor Chamundi