

THEYYAM AND SOCIAL PROTEST

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THEYYAM AND ITS HISTORY

Theyyam, which literally means God and is derived from the term Daivam, is the name of a religious folk ceremony practised in the northern portion of Kerala, also known as the Malabar region.

It started out as a fertility rite.

It is a ritualistic demonstration of long-standing reverence known as a dance of the gods.

This dancing worship aims to bring together humanity and divine.

A visible and tangible incarnation of god, from whom the community might seek and receive benefits, is traditionally all that the rite signifies.

However, from a psycho-anthropological standpoint, this ritual appears to have functional qualities that go beyond the religions and traditional meanings and interpretations due to its central features of elaborate rites and costumes, dynamic and rhythmic dance movements, musical instruments like drums and cymbals, stories and narratives of social significance recited as ritual songs, and performer who entered a state of trance.

The male dancer decks himself up in costume and makeup. Then he looks at himself in a tiny mirror that he is holding in his hand. This behaviour is known as Mukha Darshan. He becomes a divinity in this instance.

The spirits of gods and goddesses are said to possess the dancers.

The hypnotic beat of the drums accompanies the dancers as they enter the shrine.

These dancers portray mythological tales while dressing up as gods and goddesses. The historical text Keralolpathi discusses the beginnings of the theyyam ritual art.

It is said that festivals like Kaliyattam, Puravela, and Daivattam or Theyyattam were sanctioned by Parasurama, the sixth manifestation of Lord Vishnu, who stopped the sea's advance to save the land of Kerala.

Kaliyattam gave rise to theyyam. The Malayar, Pana, Vannan, and velan tribes are among the tribal groups that practise theyyam. Over a span of 1500 years, the dance of the Velan community underwent changes and evolved into the modern theyyam cult.

Since the Theyyam artists are from low-caste communities like Malayan or vanaan, Theyyam has a revolutionary notion behind it.

Even those of high social standing will be required to worship the gods who take the guise of Theyyam.

Nambiars and Thiyyas held the patronage of theyyam, and it was customary for each Tharavadu to have its own theyyam.

There are 456 theyyakkolams; the most well-known ones are Sri Muthappan Theyyam, Pottan Theyyam, Devakooth, and Guligan.

In some theyyam performances, the dancer wears a mask over his face. The dancer wears various conical, circular, or circle-shaped crowns as well as lengthy headdresses throughout all areas of the theyyam. Such training demonstrates how the dancer's identity changes to become the enigmatic divine. Additionally, the torso and face are painted using a range of colours. The Velan Veriyyattu ritual dance, which was performed in Tamilakam to appease the god Murugan, is well known. The Brahmins worshipped god Murugan in more sophisticated ways, as detailed in Tirumurug Arrupadai, whereas the native Velan priest practised this rudimentary type of worship. The ritual dance that Velan performed to appease Murugan was later included into the cult of Bhagavati. This is most likely where the theyyam dance originated. Theyyam, also known as Kaliyattam, is an ancient socioreligious ritual that has been practised in Kerala since very ancient times. This is a religious dance performance for Kali, as the title "Kaliyattam" suggests. Due to the fact that every thera or village was legally required to execute it, Kaliyattam is also known as Theyyattam.

Every community in Kerala had a communal shrine called a kavu in ancient times, and

Kaliyattam had to be conducted in front of it. Kolam is the name for each manifestation in a Kaliyattam. Actually, kolam denotes a shape or form. Each god, goddess, hero, and heroine has a unique and distinctive form, and each form has a distinctive representative feature.

Usually, kaliyattams take place in kottams and palliyara, which are places of worship. Kaliyattams are performed in the courtyards of such homes, just in front of the various compartments. (Normally, the Kaliyattam season runs from December to May. A group of people sing a song just before the performance, accompanied by chenda and elathalam, detailing the history of that specific kolam, as well as its enormous power and sacred element. The kolam appears in front of the crowd of people after the hymns are sung, in front of the place of worship. It is thought that the person who was assumed to be that kolam receives the spirit of the deity, goddess, hero, or heroine of the kolam.

There are over 300 theyyams and more in North Malabar. People do theyyam according to their personal beliefs and faith. The act of performing a theyyam is a gesture of gratitude for favours or particularly remarkable favour received. Theyyam's worship has a prehistoric beginning. It has different religious practises that were prevalent in ancient societies included. In addition to this, this religion also engages in other archaic rituals like ghost worship, hero worship, tree worship, animal worship, and Gramadevata worship. Theyyam had been significantly impacted by Aryan ideas and mythology at the same time as many Brahmanical gods and goddesses had crept into this local culture. They still exist today, along with many other folk gods and goddesses. We can see how the primitive man, via rites and rituals, converts his everyday experience into metaphysical conceptions and identifies his abstract visions in a tangible design by giving them many forms in Theyyam, the ritualistic dance. It is the worship of the spirits through their invocation to the dancer's physical representation through which they bestow benefits on the faithful. Theyyam has developed over many years to take on its current shape. By bringing new subjects into the fold and classifying and entrusting them to the right communities for their dissemination, the landowners and chieftains fostered these artists and brought about many changes. On the best of them, titles like "Peruvannam" and "Perumalayan" were awarded. These ghosts have been offered sacrifices in the aforementioned sanctuaries for many years. Based on their characteristics and outward appearance, they can be classified as Shaivite, Vaishnavite, snake, human, etc. Some of them are fantastically wild and bloodthirsty. Some of them will accept alcohol as an offering. The entire community works together to make the ritual offering during epidemics in order to satisfy the presiding spirit of such tragedies. There are numerous gods and goddesses who embody Shaivite and Vaishnavite beliefs, including Bhiravan, Gulikan, Vishnumurthi, Pottan, and Kali, who are all manifestations of Sakthi, or supreme power. Another class of spirits are animal spirits, which include Bali, Hanuman, Puli, etc. Theyyam includes in its repertoire a number of notable social figures who made an impact on society through their bravery in battle, as in the case of the Theyyam known as "Kativanur Viran," or through the suffering they endured at the hands of cruel people, as in the Theyyam "Makkam." Theyyam is essentially an invention of humans. It has a perfect relationship with man since it allows him to express his intense feelings against injustice and evil as well as his desire to keep society functioning smoothly.

According to writer and documentary director V K ANILKUMAR , theyyam is not about mythology or supernatural elements but rather it is the voice of death, as he claims the whole idea behind theyyam is based on the idea of death. There is no belief of heaven in theyyam, its all about land , after death you come back to land, claims Anilkumar.

DEVAKOOH AND POTTAN THEYYAM

For the benefit of this paper, a magnified approach towards Pottan theyyam and Devakooth theyyam is put forward.

Pottan Theyyam

There are many different types of theyyam, but the pottan and pulimarinja theyyam are specifically products of societal oppression. "Pottan Theyyam" is referred to as the "manthra murthi" or the "God of the people." The ballad song "thottam pattu" is sung the night before "Pottan Theyyam" is performed, and it introduces the play "Pottan Theyyam." This specific theyyam recreates those individuals who sacrificed their lives for a cause.

Pottan theyyam is not a piece of art that viewers find amusing, rather it is revered by the populace as a god. This theyyam criticises caste prejudice. The social norms and traditions of the society are called into question by the pottan's queries. "Pottan Theyyam" is referred to as the "manthra murthi" or the God of people, and it has a myth associated with Sree Sankaracharya. Lord Shiva is thought to have appeared to Sree Sankaracharya and Parvathy Devi at that time as dalits, who were regarded as the untouchables. Sankaracharya requested that Lord Shiva and Parvathy Devi relocate out of his line of sight because he did not want to become contaminated by them. When asked to get out of his way, the Dalits refused. In a series of exchanges with Lord Shiva, the latter revealed the absurdity of the caste system, which divides people and civilizations into disparate parts. Sree Sankaracharya is questioned by the Dalit (Lord Shiva) about whether or not all people's blood would be the same colour if they suffered a cut to the body. Where does the difference therefore exist? Shankaracharya discovers that Lord Shiva was the one testing him after being submerged in a series of questions, at which point he understands that all people are the same and must coexist in harmony. Shiva's primary lesson for Shankaracharya was this teaching. Even now, while this theyyam is being performed. To disseminate the message of humanity, the artist shouts all of these events in the style of a ballad. The ballad song is regarded as the first Malayalam lyrical style that discusses caste prejudice that was prevalent in Kerala. Pottan theyyam differs from other varieties of theyyam in terms of storytelling. An art form that belongs to the Dalit community is pottan theyyam.

Devakooth Theyyam

In Kerala, where even the Bhagavathi theyyam is done by men exist the only form of theyyam called as Devakooth Theyyam.

The story behind Devakooth Theyyam is the tale of Devangana coming to an island from heaven. Its Ambuakshiamma holding to the throne for the performance of Devakooth theyyam since 2012.

Devakooth theyyam is performed in Thenkumpaokudo Thaye kavvu or more specifically Mattul Thekumbad dweep kullom thayakavil.

This particular form of theyyam is performed by the women of Malayan caste and hence it is also known as kanikooth.

The utsavam where Devakooth theyyam is performed is called kaliyattam.

POTTAN THEYYAM AND DEVAKOOH THEYYAM AS AN EMBODIMENT OF SOCIAL PROTEST.

The impact of communal trauma can be neutralised and lessened through the use of traditional rituals that incorporate dance and theatre elements.

Sociologists and anthropologists assert that the Theyyam ritual, by simulating a celebration and inducing participant trance, serves as a cathartic release of repressed collective social tensions and frictions engendered by the inequalities and contradictions of a caste-ridden society.

There are psychological underpinnings to rituals that explain the cathartic effect, devotional experience, and dread they instill in spectators.

Balan Nambiar's article "Photographing Theyyam" focuses on the theyyam performance. He claims that in order to reach a condition of divinity, the performer goes through a shift of spirit. The performer praises his followers

without regard to caste or gender while adhering to strict drum beats. People view this as a platform from to address all of their issues with God and ask him to end all of their difficulties.

Magnifying on how the forms of the theyyam such as Devakooth and Pottan theyyam plays a crucial role in being the means of social protest or revolution the research for this paper went along, an article by H.D DEVAGOWDA raised the fact that the belief that Devakooth theyyam is a form of theyyam is false. He claims that it's a different art form on its own. Its different from theyyam as most ritualistic practices involved in other theyyam is not present in Devakooth.

Varavilli is an important segment of theyyam. It is a process of calling the spirit of the gods.

This process is not present in Devakooth. Vakuriyadal, vazhipad and Mookuradharshanam is not present in Devakooth theyyam.

The most fascinating fact, claims Devagowda is that the thalapore which is an essential element of the theyyam form containing 21 stones, churip is also missing from the Devakooth form along with the chilanka and padhasaram on the feet.

The revolutionary factor behind the claim of Devakooth being the feminine theyyam which empowers the dalit women is eradicated by the article by H. D Devagowda claiming that Devakooth is not a form of theyyam in itself.

Devakooth theyyam can not be looked upon as a means of social protest which falls under the forms of theyyam rather it can be looked upon as an art form which empowers the dalit women , being a means of social protest on its own.

Karl Marx, who is regarded as the principal proponent of this idea, established the "conflict theory of religion," which is a subset of casteism. Conflict hypothesis holds that the upper caste maintained power over religion while simultaneously elevating the lower group. In "Theyyam Myth: An Embodiment of Protest," written by J.J. Pallath, he makes the point that everyone on earth is equal by citing the development of the Pottan theyyam.

The link of brotherhood unites everyone. He investigates the myth in his own unique approach to demonstrate how everyone in the world is equal. Theyyam is regarded as a form of protest against the violence they experience as a result of caste prejudice.

The repression of the lower caste is a major theme of the "Pottan theyyam" performance. That is made abundantly obvious during the "thottam pattu" narration, the song sung during the performance. After the prayers, the shaanthi (priest) in reference to the documentary

Pottan Theyyam gives the costume to the performers. This incident demonstrates Karl Marx's conflict theory. In other words, the priest from an upper caste assists the performance in donning the dress and bows to the performer as though the performer were a god. By placing themselves in this situation, members of the upper caste assist members of the lower caste in overcoming their mental state of servitude. People from the upper and lower communities used to travel in the same boats, demonstrating their interdependence on one another. Similar to the flower garland, which was made by the lower community and used to decorate the gods in the temple. This can be interpreted as the top class of the society maintaining their status and assisting the lower class in uplift. People receiving blessings from the theyyam performers make it abundantly evident to the audience that Karl Marx's conflict theory holds that the upper class community of the society gives the lower community a promise for the lower community's upliftment by continuing in their social position. The performer is treated with respect and reverence at the time of the performance. Even members of the top strata of society revere them and show appropriate respect when they are performing. This also implies that the lower caste is no longer subjected. The only art form that eliminates the superiority of the higher caste

over lower caste is Pottan theyyam. Pottan Theyyam, in the home of a wealthy upper caste in Ramanthalli village, is the most significant theyyam. The people of all castes revere Pottan

Theyyam as a divinity. Pottan Theyyam is highly valued in the village of Adaiyidam, where a

Perruppai Illam (home of the upper caste) is located. The theyyams are performed in the illam's compound, and the artists there are revered and worshipped like gods. According to Karl Marx's conflict theory, there is a connection between the higher and lower castes. The upper caste individuals set up stages for the lower caste members to perform on and revere them as gods. The moment the theyyam performance begins, those who were members of the Dalit community—also known as "the other"—assume the role of God.

The theyyam is told about the concerns of the people, and the people find comfort in his words. The theyyam performer's utterances are revered as being the divine words of God. Theyyam aids in resolving social conflicts that are pervasive in society. Through the use of theyyam, a link is being formed in this situation. Even members of the upper caste turn to performers from the lower caste for assistance in solving their difficulties. Here, a sense

of equality is being established and the repression of the lower caste is being removed. During the performance of this particular theyyam, Pottan theyyam is thought to be a platform where the suppression of the lower caste is expressed loudly. It is thought that the performer's character evolves and is compared to a deity. Through the ballad that is performed, the performer dances and sings out loud about the oppression that the lower caste members of society experience. Through the song, the performer also serves as a reminder to the upper caste members that they are all just people and have nothing in common. The forum provided by this art form helps to end oppression. The ballad song that the performer sings serves as evidence for this. When compared to other art forms, Pottan theyyam is the only one that removes oppression from society and promotes harmony and peace. This theyyam has also made it possible to lift up the underprivileged population. Pottan theyyam instills in the listeners' thoughts the idea that the lower community should speak out against their oppression and the violence they experience. This encourages the victims of violence from lower castes to speak out against it. Even now, by keeping the upper caste in check, this theyyam aids in the advancement of the lower society. If we look at certain examples, we can find that the upper caste also participates in the theyyam performance. The theyyams are carried out at either the temples or the illams, which are the homes of the upper caste. People from many castes attend a Pottan theyyam performance where they come to talk to the performers, who are regarded as deities, about their issues. The theyyam singer hears about issues that affect families, societies, castes, and occasionally even single people. Problems and conflicts are occasionally resolved with the help of the theyyam performers. "Pottan Theyyam is a prerogative of the Dalit community, despite the fact that. When compared to other types of art, the "Pottan Theyyam" performance is the only one that does away with the oppression of the lower caste. The removal of the suppression is demonstrated when upper caste individuals accept blessings from the performer and request that the performer, who is subsequently revered as a deity, resolve family disputes. Additionally, when members of the upper caste set up a stage for theyyam performances, discrimination is removed. Only members of the lower classes of society are allowed to do Pottan theyyam. The lower caste folks created this theyyam because they had become weary of the discrimination they had to endure. and revealed the real truth—that all people are created equal. People have no differences; they are all the same. The narrative of this theyyam focuses on the concerns expressed by the Dalits to Sree Sankaracharya against the unjustified discrimination. It also asserts that everybody is the same. Through its narration of the tale, it ends the subjugation of the lower caste.

In an article by Dr. Rajesh komath, he sparks issues and raises concern over young kids performing Theyyam art at a very tender age instead of pursuing the study of science, language , literature, history, music and camera to become valuable artists of this society amongst the backdrop of child rights Commission filing a case against a 14- year old boy in Chirakkal Chamundi Kaval.

The conversations with Pappan Mash, an author of articles about Theyyam and its communities, provided a more intriguing perspective on Theyyam. He claimed that Theyyam isn't revolutionary in the slightest, as it only serves to temporarily give the lower caste a sense of power before they return to the established order and submit to the higher class after the act.

The ability or potential of theyyam as a form of social protest is called into doubt by the fact that Devakooth isn't even a form of theyyam, a 14-year-old kid forced to perform ritualistic dance, theyyam being a means of diversion from tyranny,. The stories and ballads of Pottan Theyyam and what they represent show how influential the art form was in strengthening a particular underprivileged population.

Theyyam's impact was significant and revolutionary at a time when atrocities and oppression were occurring in a more severe and intense manner, but as time goes on and the methods of oppression and hegemony change, it's important to consider more severe and intensified methods of revolution and a higher level of social protest.

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