CHAPTER IV
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Devi cult of worship is the most popular one in India especially in Kerala. For the people of Kerala Bhagavathi is synonym of divine power. There is no village without a Devi kshetra or ‘Kavu’ in Kerala. Goddess or Devi is considered as the source of fertility and energy. Some of the popular Devi temples in northern Kerala are Kodungallur Srikurumba temple, Paramakkavu Devi temple in Thrissur, Kadampuzha Bhagavathy temple, ThirumandhamKunnu Bhagavathy and Cherukunu Annapurneswary temple in Kannur.

Worship of Devi in her ‘Sathvic’ appearance as “Lalitha” is commonly conducted even in the houses of Kerala besides temples. This type of worship is the most intricate and prominent one which is called as Bhagavathy Paattu. This ritual is performed by drawing a Kalam or diagram of Bhagavathy on the floor with natural powder in five colours. This ritual maintains a high level of purity or sanctity. Bhagavathy Pattu is believed to have originated before the time of idol worship. Bhagavathy Paattu is conducted in almost all Devi temples of northern Kerala.
Story of the Bhagavathy Paattu

The tale of Darika Vadha is the content of Bhagavathy Paattu. Legend says that after demolishing Darikasura Devi was not satisfied. Devi agitated out in anger and reached Kailasa before Lord Siva, from whom she was born. Siva tried to console her in many ways. Finally Lord was able to succeed in his mission by bringing her to normal mood. Soon after Devi seeks Lords blessings and he blesses her requesting her to go and reside in the Parasurama Kshetra, later known as Kerala.

Among the Devi temples of Kerala the Thirumandhamkunnu temple is the prominent one. This temple which is situated in the Perinthalmanna town of Malappuram district is the main attraction of many devotees owing to its Puranic importance. The legend says- “Mandhathavu Mahipathi, a popular king of Ikshuaku tradition and follower of great Ambarish was an ardent devotee of Vishnu as well as Bhagavathy. According to Indian tradition the rulers in their old age
hand over the rules to their sons and will proceed for Vanaprastha, the
final stage or final Asrama in a life. So Mandhathavu lived in a forest
which was on a hilly region and the gradually the place got the name
Thirumandhamkunnu. In the Saptama Skandha of Navamadhyaya of
Devi Bhagavatham it is quoted as

“Visvavisruthan Mandhathavanavanisvara!
Mahathirthangal palathilum
Noottettu Devikshetram theerpicha Mahabhagan
Oottamam devipreethikkuthama kelirangam”

Followed by a long lasting penance he had a vision of
Sivasaktiaikarupini and entered in to Samadhi. The place where he
resided came to be called as Thirumandhamkunnu. Later when Sri
Vallabharaja became the ruler of Valluvanadu the Goddess of
Thirumandhamkunnu temple was proclaimed as their royal deity. Devi
is seated facing towards the northern direction and the Nithyanidana
Pooja and the annul festivals like Poorotsavam came to be observed in
a disciplined manner in this temple.

The Panthiradi Pooja performed daily both in forenoon and
afternoon, is a specialty of this temple. Panthiradi Pooja is conducted
during the morning hours at a time when the shadow of a person who
stands facing sun will be 12 feet long. Evening there is a special Pooja
called “Thirinju Panthiradi”¹ sponsored by the Zamorins. This is a
unique Pooja and it is done when the shadow of a person is twelve feet
in the afternoon. The timing fixed for this pooja is 4.30 pm. The main
ritual that attracts mass towards the temple is obviously the
Kalampaattu. The Kalampaattu ritual begins during the month of
Vrischika(Mandalamasam) lasting till the Rohini day in the month of
Meenam (March 15 to April 15) in which the Poorotsavam is
celebrated. This divine rite ends with “Lalitha Sahasranama Laksharchana” performing Archana for one Lakh time reciting the Lalitha Sahasranama.

The very next day is the Makiryam day which marks the beginning of Poorotsavam, celebrated during the following 11 days in a grand manner. The celebration starts around 10 o’clock in the morning where the idol of Bhagavathy is welcomed in a procession that comprises of elephants. This procession will also be accompanied by Valluvakonathiri and his family. The “Chaverpata” family wearing Pattu and holding weapons will be standing ready for Padayani. Afterwards the Velichappad dances vigorously and this will be followed by crackers and fireworks. In Pooramahotsavam Arattu will be performed twice a day which is also a specialty of this temple. Moreover during these days different types of temple art like Kadhakali, Koothu, Harikadha Kalakshepam are performed in the temple. Other special Poojas performed in Thirumandhamkunnu is Sivasaktyaikia Svarupini pooja and the Umamaheswari Saumangalya Pooja.

The Bhagavathi Paattu ritual as conducted in Thirumandhamkunnu temple

This is performed by drawing a Kalam of Bhagavathy. This ritual is staged in place called Paattarangu where everything will be arranged earlier for the performance. The space where the Kalam has to be drawn will be fenced with a rope. A lamp will be lit after cleaning the place. The seat called as “Peetam” in which silk (Pattu), mirror (vakkannadi) and sword (Udaval) are kept. Banana, Cucumber and Jaggery are also kept for Naivedya. Afterwards the Tantri gets ready for Pooja. Before starting the ritual the artist receives nine yard silk
from the person who offers the Paattu. Then he seeks the permission of the audience by asking them “Paattu kurayidukayalle” three times. He chants the Panchakshari Mantra and then hangs the Paattu Kura about the Paattarangu towards eastern direction. A Sankhu is blown and the Tantri sits for Pooja facing towards the eastern direction in front of the Peetam. The Kalam Paattu singers will be seated in the southern tip of Paattu Arangu facing to the northern direction.

The singers will be accompanied by Nanthurni³, Kuzhitalam and Chengila. The singing will be in Sopana style and is known as Uchapaattu. This comprises of invocatory songs of Lord Ganapathi, Goddess Sarasvathi and Lord Vishnu. Most of these songs are set to Triputa tala. The song next sung to this will be the “Thingalilimpu Chilambilakkum” in praise of Lord Siva set to Eka tala. As soon as the song ends the Chenda player will perform the Valamthala.

Followed by this will be the song which describes the origin and the birth of Devi which is set in Triputa and Eka tala. The description will be mixture of prose and poetry. Some times they sing the song in Ragamalika also. By the time the singing comes to an end, Tantrivarya concludes the Pooja which will be the marked by the performance on Chenda. Thus ends the Uchchapaattu. Right after this the Peetam, cucumber and lamps are taken back and the place will be cleaned again. After this they lights the Nilavilakku and the Paattarangu will be decorated by hanging tender coconut leaves. The next step is the drawing of Kalam. First an outline structure of Devi is drawn by rice powder. The colloquial word used for drawing is “Kuriykkuka” or “Ezhuthuka” etc.
Firstly a Shadkona Padmam\textsuperscript{4} is drawn for Ganapathy and prayers are done systematically. Then the artists start drawing the picture of Bhagavathy. The drawing will be ornamented with red coloured Veeralipattu\textsuperscript{5}. The picture of Devi will be of the one with eight hands, each one of them will have weapons except one which will be holding Darikas head. The expression will be of anger. Moreover Devi has three eyes and large canine tooth protruding outwards.

For drawing Kalam the artists should possess caliber and the knowledge to do it scientifically. The colours used for drawing are made out from natural products. They are white, yellow, black, red and green which symbolise five metals. The white colour used is the rice powder. Yellow colour is made out from turmeric. Likewise red colour is got by mixing turmeric and lime. The leaves of Manchadi are dried and powdered to make the green colour. Black is made out of husk.

A ritual called “Sandhyavela” is performed while the Kalam is drawn. Only Chenda is played for this. Meanwhile the four sides of Kalam will be decorated with tender coconut leaves and the leaves of banyan and mango. Again the Arangu will be decorated with Peetam having Thiruvudayada and Kaduthitta Val. The southern portion of the Kalam will be occupied by Nanthurni. As soon as the drawing is completed Tanthrivarya performs Kalam Pooja followed by Paattu. The Paattu performed in Thirumandhankunnu is of two ways, one done in small scale and the other in large scale. The small one begins with the song “Amarakal Palarumirangiyamrithu” also called as “Ammanachaya”\textsuperscript{6}. Song sung next to this is “Umbarkkum Varunnallan Thaduppanayi”. This song is also called as “Paadivaykkal Pattu”. When the artist finishes the song Chenda will be played. An invocatory song of Bhagavathy follows which is a Ragamalika set to Eka tala. Chenda
is played again as soon as the song is completed. For the grand Kalam Paattu, the artists sing Bhadrolpathi, a Ragamalika set to Triputa tala. “Ishtamayi kattana”, a very interesting song is recited next. The most important item is the “Kesadipada Varnana” starting with the lyrics “Chemponnum Pura Adi” set to Atanta tala. The following song is “Varika Darika”. When all these songs are sung in their sequential order, one among the artists performs “Kalampoli” and “Thiruuzhichil”. Another person plays the role of Velichappadu. He circumambulates the Kalam with the accompaniment of Chenda. He dances around the Kalam with a roar cutting of the tender coconut leaves hanging in the Paattu Pura. Then he sits on the Peetam and drags it over the Kalam. Afterwards he gets up from the Peetam and dance energetically to the booming sound of Chenda. It is his duty to distribute the coloured powder to those who are present there considering it as oblation. Afterwards he rubs the kalam completely. In order to wind up the ritual, the Kalamezhuthu artist pulls of the Paattu Kura with the permission of the devotees present there.

If the Kalamezhuthu ceremony lasts for three consecutive days then it will be accompanied by “Chuttu Talappoli” and if it exceeds 12 days then “Paattu Talappoli” is performed. If a Kalam Paattu ceremony exceeds more than 120 days then it will be called Purushanthara Paattu. Thirumandhankunnu temple has the rare distinction to have conducted the Purushanthara Paattu.
Other rituals conducted in Devi temples

Brahmani Paattu

Brahmani Paattu is a ritualistic art estimated to have originated in AD 8th century. This ritual is restricted mainly to Bhadrakali temples and Brahmanical houses. Brahmani Paattu is prevalent in the temples of central and northern parts of Kerala like Kodungallur Srikurumba temple Urakathamma temple and also Thirumandhamkunnu temple. These songs are sung by the women from the Nambeesa community called as Brahmaniamma.

Brahmani Paattu comprises invocatory songs of Goddesses Durga, Bhadrakali, Parvathy, Lord Ganapathy, Lord Siva, Surya and Chandra. Songs based on stories like Parvathy Svayamvaram, Parvathy Charitham, Darika Vadham and Savithry Svayamvaram is also sung for the ritual. Even though these songs are not rhythmical in nature, they excel in melody, devotion and lyrical beauty.

The main theme of Brahmani Paattu is Darika Vadham. Darika challenges Devas and with the help of Asuras he starts attacking them in order to conquer Devalokam. Devas out in panic approached Paramasiva and pleads for help. Lord calls Bhadrakali and assigns her to kill Darika. He also sends Bhoothaganas for help. The battle between kali and Darika lasts for 3 days. But kali failed to demolish Darika even the last day. Kali wondered and thought why she was not able to kill Darika. So she allotted Mahamaya to inquire into the matter. Mahamaya visited Darikas place where she found his wife Manodari chanting mantras to propitiate Bhagavathy. Mahamaya understood that
it is because of these Manthras that she was failing to fulfill the task. Mahamaya thought of a plan and she approaches Manodari in disguise of a pious lady. She requests her to pass over the Manthras. She agreed to do so. But while passing over the Manthra she failed to stick on to certain regulations regarding time and Kshethra. Thus Manodari loses the power of Manthra and kali was easily able to kill Darika. The Manthras earned by Mahamaya in disguise of Brahmani later came to be called as Brahmani Paattu. The songs are not supposed to sing loudly which is followed even now.

The Brahmani Paattu ceremony is conducted in three ways. The first one being Cheriya Brahmani Paattu sung by 1 or 2 Brahmanis together which takes approximately an hour. The second one is the Valiya Brahmani Paattu done in grand scale. For these arrangements are done by constructing a Pandal and decorating it with different elements from the nature such as leaves of tender Coconut beetle, Banyan, Mango and Areca nut. A diagram of Kshethra is drawn with rice batter. A decorated Peetam with Thiruvudayada, Valkannadi, Udaval is kept inside the Pandal. Then 4 or 5 Brahmanis together render the songs. Another Brahmani stands on a wooden plank holding Ashtamangalyam\(^7\), a plate containing stuffs which are considered as sacred on occasions like marriage. This is Mada Pidikkal\(^8\) ceremony that continues for at least 2 hours. This is followed by Ucha Pooja and Srikovil will be closed thereafter.

The third one is the Ghosha Paattu which takes a whole day to accomplish. Same arrangements are done here. The idol of Bhagavathy is carried with solemnity from Srikovil to Peetam installed in the Pandal. As per tradition married woman should welcome her with Vaikkurava at this time. Moreover various instruments like Sankhu,
Idakka, Timila, Chenda, Chengila, Maddalam, Maram, Ilatalam, Kombu and Kuzhal are also played according to the need of the occasion.

In Ghosha Paattu the Mada Pidikkal ceremony is performed in the morning, noon and even night. The ritual performed in the morning ends with Ucha Pooja. Next one is performed in the noon. A number of songs in praise of Durga are the main feature of this Pooja that lasts for 2 hours. The next session begins in the night after a long break.

The main ritual of this session is the Ponguradi. A plate containing dried rice and turmeric are kept for Ponguradi. A separate vessel containing Guruthi is also kept aside. As the main singer called Tantri Brahmini sing the songs in their sequential order, the other two Brahminis begin to grind the rice and turmeric kept in the plate. This ritual accompanied by the songs and instruments is called Ponguradi which is a great entertainment to the viewers. As the ritual ends, the Brahmini holding Mada, begins to dance and command like Velichappadu. Kali Darika Yuddham is the theme embedded in the Paattu rendered for night ceremony.

Each temple has their own songs for different ceremonies like Neerattu, Thirumanjapodiadal, Ezhunnallippu, Poorakkudanna viral etc. Brahmani Paattu is conducted in Tharavadus as an offering to get a good alliance for unmarried girls.

Another famous temple where Brahmani Paattu is performed is the Arattupuzha temple near Thrissur. This temple is nearly 1430 years old. Arrattupuzha Pooram is considered to be the next biggest to Thrissur Pooram. In connection with Pooram, a ritual called Padi
Purappeduka or Kotti Purappeduka is accomplished in order to welcome deities of near by temples. Brahmani Paattu is a main feature of this ceremony.

Some characteristic features of Brahmani paattu are

1. Brahmani Paattus are rendered in poetry style.
2. There are also some songs rendered in prose manner.
3. Songs are set to Tharangini metre.
4. We do not come across to any ragas as the songs are set to two Svaras only.
5. Influence of Tamil language is evident in many of the songs.
6. Singing resemble to that of Yajur Veda recital.
Rituals in Cherukunnu Annapurneswary temple.

When we go towards the northern side of Kerala, we see a large variety of rituals also comprising the rustic types in the Devi temples. Cherukunnu Annapurneswary Kshethram is one such temple where both the Tantric rituals as well as some folk rituals like Theyyampadi Paattu and Kothamooripaattu takes place.

Routine Poojas begin with Abhishekam that is done by playing the Valamtala of Chenda. Usha Pooja, Uccha Pooja and Atthazha Pooja are accompanied by Melam. For Sreebhootha Bali, Marapani is played. The Vishu day is very important and Vishu Vilakku conducted on that is accompanied by performance of Paani on Maram.

Utsavam is conducted for 7 days which begins on the Sankrama day in the month of Medam or middle of April month. For the Sri Bhutha Bali performed as part of Utsavam instruments like Kuzhal and Valamtala of Chenda are played. Ashtapadi is rendered in the first Pradakshinam of Sribhutabali. Half part of the second Pradakshinam will be accompanied by Panchavadyam and second half by Nadasvaram and Tavil. The third Pradakshinam will be followed by Melam. The 6th day of Utsavam will be featured by Pandimelam.

Tidambu Nrittam is performed in this temple like the other temples of Northern Kerala. On the last day of Utsavam the Theyyam Paadi Nambiar would perform the Theyyam Paadi Paattu without Kalamezhuthu. This is rendered with the accompaniment of Nandurni and Talam. Nagapaattu is also conducted inside the temple during
Mandala season. During the month of Tulam, Kothamuri Paattu is performed outside the temple. This is type folk-ritualistic song in which the stories and legends associated with the temple are sung.

There are many ritualistic folk art forms which are mostly conducted in the Bhagavathy temples or sometimes in the Kavus towards the Northern parts of Kerala. A brief description of some of them such as Mudiyettu, Ezhuvattam kali, Theyyam, Poorakali, and Thira are dealt herein.
**Mudiyyettu**

Mudiyyettu is a ritualistic folk dance-drama commonly performed in the Bhadrakali temples of central and southern districts of Kerala. Theme of Mudiyyettu is the story of Darika Vadham. Mudiyyettu is performed by a community called Marar. But this is not the same Marar who are the traditional musicians of a Brahmanical temple.

Prior to the performance of Mudiyyettu a Kalam of Bhagavathy is drawn. The colours used are the same ones used in that of Kalam Paattu. The picture of Bhagavathy with her numerous arms is drawn by the artist. In her hands, she will be holding weapons like the bell, shield, sword, Darikas head, curved dagger, bowl, trident, anklet, rope and hook. The drawing is done as part of the preliminary session which begins around 3'oclock in the afternoon.
As soon as drawing is completed, the Poojari performs a special Pooja to the accompaniment of Chenda and Ilatalam. He gradually goes into trance and performs a dance. He wipes the image soon after the dance and distributes the powder to the devotees as Prasadam.

The next session of Mudiyettu performance begins with Keli. The purpose of Keli is to announce that the dance drama is going to stage during night time. We come across some characters like Lord Siva, Naradamuni, Darika, Danavendra etc other than the main character Bhadrakali. Other characters who figures in Mudiyettu are Koyimbata Nair, Kooli, Darika’s messenger and Vetala. Kali’s face is painted with black colour with red patches under the eyes, on the forehead and lips.

The Mudiyettu performance begins around 9.00 pm in the night with the lighting of a tall brass lamp kept in the front of the stage. The percussionists then start playing on instruments like Veekkan Chenda, Ilatalam, Kombu and Chengila. This is called ‘Kotti Veppu’. Followed by this an item called Todayam will be played.

The second item is the Arangu Vazhtal which is a prayer also serving as the introduction to the story. This particular song is rendered in Carnatic ragas like Sankarabharanam and Natta.

The scene that depicts the anger of Bhadrakali is accompanied with the loud beats of Chenda. The whole performance lasts for at least 6 hours from night till dawn. A ritual called Bhagavathy Theeyattu performed by Theeyaattunnikal mostly in the southern province of Kerala is similar to Mudiyettu. In Theeyattu the instruments like Acchan Chenda, Veekan Chenda, Chengila and Ilatalam are used.
Ezhuvattam kali

Ezhuvattam Kali is a ritual cum folk art performed in the areas of Chittur and Tathamangalam in Palakkad district. Those who belong to the Panar community take part in this art form. Anyone from the age group from 18 to 60 can participate in it.

The main purpose of this act is to propitiate Goddess Kali. They perform in a group and sing the praises of Kali. The group consists of 10 members or a minimum number of 7 is required to form a group. The performance is bound in 7 stages that is how it got the name Ezhuvattam. The artist has to take bath first and put marks on the forehead. Afterwards they tie a towel round their waist and start dancing. Women can also join the performance along with men. They dance according to the beats of Chenda and Ilatalam.

Usually Ezhuvattam Kali is performed during night between 7 and 10 pm. The act will be staged in a Mantapa decorated with tender coconut fronds. An idol of Kali will be kept in the Mantapa and a big Nilavilakku will be lighted before the performance.
Theyyam

Theyyam is the most prominent ritualistic dance form performed in the districts of Kozhikode, Kannur and Kasargode districts. This art form is closely associated with the Bhagavathy cult. Theyyam is usually performed widely in front of village shrines called Kavu, Tharavadus etc. most of the Kavus have idol of Kali for worship, if not a Peetam is kept with weapons such as sword, bow, shield, trident etc. almost all these Kavus celebrate annual festivals and the Goddess Kali will be represented by the Theyyam artist himself.

This elaborate art form is preserved by the eight caste communities like Vedan, Kopalan, Parayan, Mayilon, Munnuttan, Anhuttan, Malayan and Vannan. Theyyam is usually performed by men. But there is shrine of Bhagavathy Devakanya in Cherukunnu of Kannur district where this art is performed by women. This type of Theyyam is called as Devakoothu or Malayi Koothu and is performed by the women belonging to the Malaya community.
Three categories of Theyyam.

First category is based on tribal worship. Those belonging to the communities like Velan, Kopalan, Parayan and Mayilon perform this variety of Theyyam. The make-up and costume is not as much elaborate and intricate as those of other Theyyams. The rituals conducted are slightly rustic in nature such as alcohol libation to the deity and also the sacrifice of cocks and goats.

The second category of Theyyam is more sophisticated in some manner than the former one. Communities such as Parayan, Malayan, Munnuttan, Anhuttan and Vannan are assigned to perform this. The dance patterns are also of refined type in this category. Some of the characters enacted in this type of Theyyam such as Pullipoti, Karinchamundi, Narambilpoti, Theechamundi, Ucchaveli and Ucchitla are the most ferocious of all. Few among the above said characters are local heroes and heroines. The characters like Teechamundi and Ucchitla are taken from Puranas.

The third category of Theyyam is performed by Vannan and Malayan. This type is very complex in nature. More refined and divine rituals are associated with this type of Theyyam. Important Theyyams that belong to this category are Mucchillottu Bhagavathy, Thai Paradavata, Kathivannur Veeran, Puliyoru Kannan, Vishnumurthy and Narasimhamurthy.
All these above mentioned characters assume their roles almost in every Theyyam performance conducted in the major shrines of northern districts of Kerala. Fire is used in all these 3 categories because it is considered as the embodiment of power and purity. The steps generally to which they dance and also the Kalaasams varies according to the type of Theyyam performed. Some characters dance very gently as if swaying in breeze, while some others take extremely vigorous steps.

Musical aspects of Theyyam

The vocal part of Theyyam is performed by the characters themselves or by their assistants also. The preliminary song is called the Tottam in which the history of deity is told. At this time the artists would be wearing their costumes and headgear. The recitations are very musical and dramatic. Each deity has their own Tottam songs. Music of Theyyam is powerful, sometimes soft. Likewise some songs will be in slow tempo and some faster. The language of these songs is very specific since they use a typical dialect which is some what similar to Malayalam. Soon after the recitation it is customary for the Theyyam to bless the devotees.

Usually six instruments comprising 3 drums-Chenda, Veekkan Chenda, Maddalam and others such as Chengila, Ilatalam and Kurunkuzhal are used through out a Theyyam performance. Of these Veekkan Chenda is the most important one. Some times more than a dozen Chenda players take part depending on the deity. These players will be led by one performer on Veekan Chenda. Normally the
orchestra will be comprised of 2 Maddalam players, 3 or 4 Ilatalam performers and 1 or 2 Kurunkuzhal players. The vocal part will be performed by the dancer himself with 4 assistants.

Only Maddalam is accompanied for Tottam recitations. For a heroic or valorous character powerful playing on the Chenda is required to support the Theyyam and to appeal the audience. For the character named Mucchilottu Bhagavathy drumming is done vigorously especially during the time of costuming. But the moment she stands up behind the curtain and when it is removed, all the instruments stop playing for pin drop silence. At this point only kurunkuzhal is played to the soft beating of Maddalam. Muchilottu Bhagavathy will then start dancing slowly in a swaying manner to this musical background. This part of Theyyam is truly very attractive and pleasing.
Poorakkali

Poorakkali is a folk ritual performed in Bhagavathy Kavus of northern Kerala. The term Pooram shows its similarity to the word Pooram which means Utsavam or celebrations. Poorakkali is performed in connection with the Poorotsavam which begins in the month of Meenam, on the Karthika day and lasts till the Pooram day. During these days young ladies propitiate Kamadeva by offering him a variety of flowers with devotion. They make a configuration of Kamadeva with different flowers like Thoranji, Erikkinpoo, Murikkinpoo, Ilanjipoo, Palapoo, Chembakapoo etc. Pooja is done for 9 days with so much of urge and discipline. On the ninth day, the custom is to see off Kamadeva and they take off all the flowers with which they adorned him. There are songs sung on that occasion like

“kallile mullile pole kama
Pattarattinu pole kama
Kunjangalatharattinu pone kama
Palli velarattinu pone kama
Iniyathe kollome nerathe kalathe varane kama.”

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The lyrics of the song itself convey the meaning, where the ladies are requesting Kamadeva to come again next year.

Poorakali performed in connection with Poorotsavam are generally done by men. But some opines that Poorakkali was earlier performed by woman. Later it was pursued by men. There is a section called Pooramala that talks about dance and songs performed by the Sapthakanyas, Shadkanyas, Panchakanyas in Devaloka, Pathala and Earth respectively. This shows the probability of having being performed by women.

A number of communities are associated with Poorakkali like Maniyani, Theeyan, Mukkuvan, Moyon, Chaliyan, Ashari, Mushari, Thattan and Muveri. Among them Maniyani and Theeyar community are the pioneers in this field. Maniyani community is considered as the authority of Poorakali. Maniyanis are again divided into Ayanmar and Mayanmar, of which Ayanmar alone has the right to perform Poorakkali. The following song conveys this matter.

“Asthnamakumarangu tannil
Aadaral padunna pooramaya
Ayanmarorkkkum njayamilla
Mayanmar cheyyendum velayellam
Ayanmar cheyyuka yogamalla
Narayana enna namam kondum
Poorakkali enna vela kondum
Ayanmar padi kalikkunnathu
Njayamallennu kelpppudu pande
Narayana sthuthi padendathu
Mayanmarenorkka njayamathre.”
Theeya community is the other one who has the right to perform Poorakkali. They believe that they got this privilege from lord Paramasiva. Origin and evolution of Theeyars or Divyar are found in some songs.

Poorakali has different Rangas like Angam, Pada, Chayal, Saivakoothu, Sakthi Natakam and Yogi. We get a picture of these Rangas from the following song.

“Vandanayadiyay malakal pathumedum
Mumbinal stutikal munnum mulamam kathakal random
Angavum padayum chayal alarsaran thante pattum
Anthinadakavum yogi andum pal adalame.”

The above mentioned Rangas may be a later development. Earlier Poorakkali was based on the stories of Ramayana and Mahabharatha. There are many communities who have contributed to the development of Poorakkali. The most prominent among them is the Theeyars, who bestowed Rangas like Sakthi Koothu and Saiva Koothu. The Marathu Kali tradition is their contribution. Another important Ranga of Poorakali is Pambattam that shows its relationship with serpent worship. We come across the sections like Yogiattam and Yogiiruthal in which traits of yoga culture could be seen. The relationship with agriculture is evident in the dance performed on the last day namely “Andum pullum”. This tells the story of Parvathi and Parameswara in disguise if Pallan and Pallathi who engages themselves in agriculture. Different stages that come across cultivation from sowing to reaping are resplendent in these songs.
The performer of Poorakali should possess a flexible body. Poorakkali in many senses similar to Kalari Payattu. The performer of Poorakali is generally addressed as Panikkar. The attire worn by Panikker is similar to the one used by Kalari performer. Certain sections like Pongam, Pada reminds us of the art of Kalari. Valorous deeds of great Kolathiri raja are the theme of the songs of such acts. Velakali of southern region is similar to Poorais often referred to as Poora vela.

Poorakali is not only an entertaining art form but also informative. It appeals to both educative class as well as laymen. It is designed in such a way as to impart knowledge of Vedanta, Tarkam, Vyakaranam, Nyaya, Dance, Drama, Astrology and Puranas to the illiterate class. Poorakali undoubtedly reveals a wholesome picture of socio cultural activities prevalent in northern Kerala. The idea of Saivism and Vaishnavism are dealt with in the art form. Different modes of worship such as serpent worship are given importance in Poorakali. The very relationship with the nature that portrayed in the songs like Andum Pallum is a predominant feature of Poorakali. Poorakali is four art forms in one. One can have a glance of dance, drama, music and Kalaripayattu. Lyrics of pooram songs have a Tamil flavour in them. More over the songs portray deep devotion and there by making them highly ritualistic. Thus Poorakali is considered as divine art.
Poothan and Thira is a ritualistic art form performed in Bhagavathy temples of the south Malabar region of Kerala. In this art form Poothan represents Shiva’s Bhoothagana and Thira, the Goddess Kali. They dance according the accompaniment of drummers. It is usually performed in villages and temples to ward off evil spirits especially in the pooram festival season between December and May.

In a Poothan and Thira Performance percussion instruments play an important part. They also use horns to accompany them. The costume of Poothan will be a coloured one and embellished with gold coloured ornaments. The dancer playing Thira usually wears a semi circular black crown.

The performers are traditionally from Mannan and Paraya community of rural Palakkad, southern parts of Malappuram and northern parts of Thrissur.
End Notes:


2. The Zamorin head

3. The actual term is nandurni, but now a day it is called as nanduni.

4. Padmam usually drawn for Ganapathy having six corners.

5. Silk cloth

6. It is a peculiar tune in which the song is sung.

7. Eight stuffs comprising Nellu (Paddy), Unakkalari (Dried rice), Puzhungalari (Boiled rice), Chanthu, Kannezhuthu, Valkannadi, Chandamutti and Vasthram or white cloth.

8. The plate containing these eight stuffs. In some places unmarried girls also hold this in a brahmini paattu ceremony.

9. Ritual pouring of a liquid as an offering to God.

