CHAPTER - 3

THE TRADITIONAL ARTS OF KERALA AND THEIR RITUALISTIC ASPECTS

‘Kerala’s folk ritual heritage is as varied and rich as its landscape.’

There are two spheres in the tradition of the folk performing arts of Kerala: rituals and performing arts. Kerala being a land of all castes, communities and religions even from time immemorial, gives us a variety of interesting ritualistic dances. In Kerala most of the performing arts are rituals. Only a few have no connection with rituals. A great number of the folk forms have faced extinction over the period of time. However, the rituals and the various visual forms associated with them are still of great reverence to the rural community. “And among these rituals the most important are the ceremonies connected with the ‘Mother Goddess worship’.”

The general opinion is that the worship of the Mother Goddess must have come down to the southern parts of India owing to the Aryan invasions. In addition to this aspect, that the invasions have influenced our customs, rituals, way of life and the literature in a significant way is a topic of interest with regard to the present art traditions prevalent in the regions of Kerala. Thus, Mother Goddess worship is the most significant ritual tradition of Kerala. The rituals take

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1 Durgadas Mukhyopadhyay Lesser known forms of Performing Arts in India; Sterling Publishers Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, 1978, Ch 2 Thottam, G. Shankar Pillai, P. 5

2 Dr.S.K.Nair; The Folk Dances Of Kerala, article in a journal, April 1959, ch 1 P.3


4 Durgadas Mukhyopadhyay Lesser known forms of Performing Arts in India; Sterling Publishers Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, 1978, Ch 2 Thottam, G. Shankar Pillai, P. 5.
place as a major part of either the religious beliefs or that of sorcery and magic. Teyyam, Tira, Poorakkali, Kotamuriyattam, Pootanum Tirayum, Kanyarkali, Teeyattu, Padayani, Kalikettu, Kaliyoottu are some of the popular religious rituals of Kerala. These are closely associated with magic very often. They are performed in the shrines or the temples as part of the annual festival, propitiating the concerned deities. However the most popular amongst these is the Teyyam, Mudiyettu and Padayani, representing the regions of north, central and south of Kerala respectively. “From primitive times, dancing has featured prominently in various forms of ritualistic worship. The dance is in the folk style and the accent is on effect rather than fineness of execution.”

The Teyyam is performed in the months between November and June as a major ritual festival tradition. These performances are either held annually or once in two years, or three or five years on particularly auspicious dates that are previously decided wherein the whole village community is involved. There are also instances where the Teyyam is performed by an individual to fulfill a vow made after the former’s wishes have been granted by the Goddess. There is the practice of the whole village commissioning a Teyyam after a span of about five years or in circumstances to ward off the whole village from the epidemic that has befallen them, in which case it is identified as Otta Kolam. The one and only aim of the festival is the creation of a divine being such that its presence is felt by all the people around it in spite of being in this present world. The ritual sequences help to unfold the idea of the Divine’s presence

5 K.T.John; The illustrated weekly of India; July 20,1958; P.27.
in the form of the performer. Initially the performer narrates the story of the
deity, and is later seen to be speaking as if he is the deity himself, as he
proceeds. This is achieved by using the means such as drumming, singing of
sacred texts, wearing of elaborate costumes and make-up, gesturing,
processions, besides the use of flags, lamps, swords and shields. The
performer adores a partial costume in the event of the invocation and the
narration of the story of the deity. As the narration of the story proceeds the
performer is seen to enter a state of ecstasy, as if being possessed. The
movements of the performer turn out to be more vigourous leading to the
performer running over a heap of burning cinders at this point signifying the
act of purifying himself after the act of killing the demon in the related story.
However the face is not made up. It can be noticed that the Teyyam follows
certain systematic rules in its execution. As mentioned earlier the Teyyam
dons the full costume and is taken around in a procession after the
invocation and the narration of the history of the Teyyam. It is at this point
the performer becomes possessed and dances as the deity. The performer
speaks as the Lord himself and offers blessings to the assembled. After
having completed the dance, the performer, narrates an additional story of
the deity, he is personifying. The concluding part of the performance is seen
when the performer removes the headdress ceremoniously in front of the
shrine.

Portraying of Divinity could be through the various artistic skills of
dancing and singing music. “As the myth goes the king of the Kola dynasty,
Chirakkal, asked Guru Manakkadden an adept in the art of black magic and
sorcery to compose Teyyam within a span of twenty four hours.”
Subsequently, thirty nine varieties of Teyyams were composed within the stipulated time.

**Teyyam**

The place where the worship of the spirit or the Teyyam is held.

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6 As quoted by Nishanth A in Colour and Form in Teyyam with its relation to Visual Arts; 2001
The shrine in front of which the Teyyam is conducted.
Kundora Chamundi

It originated out of the varying cults such as those representing the ancestors, Mother-Goddess, Hero, Snake and the animal. Sometimes mythical characters are also personified in the Teyyam. It can be noticed that there is a very close resemblance to the Bhoota worship of the South Canara region in coastal Karnataka. There are at least four hundred variations of the
Teyyam. The variations arise due to the variation in form, the content or the myth representing it, the ritual, style of performance, song, make up and costume.

It is performed by male members of the lower cast communities like Malayan, Vannan, Kopalan and Velan. The performer gets possessed and each family inherits this tradition. “Each family has its own performing territory.” The costumes are prepared indigenously and drumming is taught to the performers. The performance includes invocation of the deity, the description of the story of the deity, the ecstatic dance of the deity, the offering of blessings by the performer to the needy and disturbed people.

Preparations for this festival are austere. A festival lasts anywhere between two to five days or longer. Sometimes during the festival, individuals vow special rituals consequently a festival is extended to accommodate these. The performer dons a special costume, meant for the invocation and the narration of the story. No makeup is used. During the offerings of blessings to the people the performer adorns himself with a full costume to appear as an incarnation of the deity himself. The performer is escorted to the entrance after the drums are sounded. The performer gets possessed and initially begins with the shaking movement in his legs which travels upwards and conquers the rest of his body. The shaking of the whole of the performer’s body increases in vigour and the drums sound more.

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7 Farley.P. Richmond, Darius.L. Swan, Phillip .B. Zarrilli; Indian Theatre Traditions of Performance, Motilal Banarasidass Publishers Private Limited, Delhi; 1990; Ch,4; Teyyam, Wayne Ashley, Regyna Hooloman; P.135.
deafening. “Enacting the legend as narrated in the Tottam, the actor gets possessed and becomes the Teyyam.”

The Teyyam assures that all problems; individual or those of entire village shall be taken care off, deals of every kind shall be settled and social relationships and conflicts between groups and individuals shall be solved. Sometimes a cock is sacrificed to appease the frenziful Teyyam. Throughout the process of making up, the performer recites the sacred syllables of the deity by chanting the mantras repeatedly special colors are dabbed on to specific areas of the face to create the transformation. This process takes as long as two hours of concentrated activity to complete. The costume is made of coconut leaves and stems, bamboo, the bark of banana tree or from that of the bark of the areca nut tree. Besides these dried grass, flowers, coloured cloth, gilded paper are also used. The head dress is elaborate and is fitted with coloured glass and other accessories. The performer wears breasts carved from wood or coconut in the situations where the deity is a female one. Thus the Teyyam appears to be a three dimensional God or Goddess moving and capable of warding off the problems of the people. “Teyyam continues to be performed today in large festival contexts, as ‘vows to god’, and to propitiate deities who affect the destinies of the village.”

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8 Jiwan Pani, World Of Other Faces Indian Masks, The Director Publications Division, Ministry of I & B New Delhi, 1986, P, 46.

The traditional theatre of Kerala includes the forms such as Koodiyattam. “It is a form of temple theatre of Kerala.”\[10\] This is perhaps one of the extant forms of the Sanskrit Dramas. The performance is invariably staged in the precincts of a temple and the performers are those that are associated with the temple activities belonging to the communities known as the Chakkiars and the Nambiar. The performance is presented to the accompaniment of the Mizhavus, a pot shaped percussion instrument, Edakka, a small drum that is played with the striking of a stick, the Kuzhithalam, a pair of cymbals and the Kurumkuzhal or a small flute or a

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10 Jiwan Pani, World Of Other Faces Indian Masks, The Director Publications Division, Ministry of I & B New Delhi, 1986, P, 38.
The presentation is rich in Aharya, Angika and Vachika. The themes are chosen from the Puranas and there is an attempt at exaggeration with very less realism in its presentation. It is interesting to note that the hand gestures used by these performers are those that are from the Hastha Lakshana Deepika, which owes its origins to the Tantric mudras prevalent in Kerala. The Aharya of the performer is designed to represent the character symbolically rather than representing the physical features of the character to be portrayed. It can be seen that the qualities inherent in these characters are highlighted through these costumes and hence no two characters are similarly dressed or codified alike.

The most fascinating aspect of these presentations is the rendering of the Vachika, which is akin to the chanting of the Yajur Veda, by the Namboodri Brahmins of Kerala. Till date, these performances have no dialogue in their rendering which is naturalistic. The Vidooshaka adds comedy to the play, interprets the Sanskrit dialogue of the actor in the colloquial medium by adding a number of versions to the understanding of the same, besides giving a humourous sense to the same which are also enacted in a multiple number of ways by the actors for the comprehension of the audience. The element of humour by the Vidooshaka makes the elaborate presentations colourful and enjoyable. The prime element of its relation to the temple is of great interest to this study of Ritual and Dance since the performers are also associated with activity of the temples traditionally and the performance being invariably staged in
the precincts of a temple are the facts that fascinate their inclusion in this study.

The folk, ritualistic traditions of Kerala, are rich and enormously varied in their execution. These are associated with the life and beliefs of the rural folk who revere the Goddess Kali, and identify Her as the Mother Goddess. There are a great number of Kali temples in the state which have practiced these rituals from ancient times as part of their rites and ritual offerings to the Goddess. She is thought of as the one who bestows them with children and that if displeased, She could destroy the whole village by bringing small pox to the same. She is thought of as “fierce”. For she avenges the evil doers and perhaps punishes them in a way similar to the vanquishing of Darika, the demon who was torn to pieces by Her. Many ancient families follow the worship of the Goddess ardently even to this day.

**Muchilottu Bhagavathi:**

The myth around this Bhagavathi is that, after being untruly accused of bad behaviour and character, a young Namboodri Brahmin girl bravely gives up her family and decides to take refuge in a shrine of Lord Shiva. She leaves the place only at the end of forty one days, when the Lord appears before her, declares her innocent, and also divine. Also she is transformed into a blaze of fire and eventually disappears. The succeeding omens reveal her presence spiritually. The Tottam hence is sung in praise of the Goddess Muchilottu Bhagavathi which lasts for a great length of time and thus is sung in sections on all the initial three out of the four days of the ceremony that marks the festival in her honour. It is on the Last day alone that the Goddess appears as the Teyyam. The huge head dress of the Teyyam symbolizes the
Virginity of the Goddess. The impersonator is generally a man and he is supported by the drums, which are played at the very entrance of the main shrine.

**Muchilottu Bhagavathi**

The *perayankali* is a dance of the Parayans also belonging to the Bhagavathi cult. These dances are performed in the shrines of the Bhagavathi which are found in every Parayan village. Also found amongst the ritual dances in Kerala are the *Palliyarkali* performed by the Palliyars of Kottayam. The clan traces its origins to Goddess Valli the consort of Lord Subramanya. The Pannans perform the *Pannankali* and the *Kaniyakali*, performed in Cochin is dedicated to the Gods Lord Shiva, Subramanyya and Goddess Parvathi. The *Kolam-Thullal* is yet another dance that eulogises
the Bhagavathi. The Goddess is welcomed to the accompaniment of the five different musical instruments. There is an altar set up for the purpose which is richly decorated. The Kolams are escorted by young maidens dressed traditionally, carrying offerings in one hand and oil-lamps in the other. This part of the procession is termed as Thalapoli. The Kolams follow the maidens and are accompanied by a priest who adorns himself with dancing bells on his ankles and holds a shiny sword. The Kolams are also adorned in splendid costumes and a head gear. The atmosphere is charged with the singing of the girls, the rhythm of the musical instruments and the gorgeous costumes, thus creating a special atmosphere, which helps to recreate the idea that the Kolam is none other than the demon sent by Lord Shiva to ward off all the evil that is bothering the community and to bless the people with happiness and prosperity. Interesting to note is the fact that the performers sway to the rhythm of the music until the Kolam enters a stage of exhilaration and begins to appear possessed from head to toe. The accompanying musicians add to the ecstatic dancing atmosphere raising the music to a crescendo. The ensemble comprises of the Thudi, Chenda, Maddalam and Thimila, which are percussion in nature and the Elathalam or the cymbals and the Chengila or the gong. The entire group dances in a frenzy leading to a climax and culmination of the ritualistic dance. It can also be inferred that these dances of the Bhagavathi cult have also been significant in contributing to the Make-up of the Kathakali artists. Ritual has thus influenced the arts of dancing in the regions of Kerala so much so that one finds that both the art of dancing and ritual have been complementary to each other in their origin, growth and preservation.
**Thottam** is a ritual relating the worship of Kali meaning ‘Restoration to life’, for the word Thottuka from which Thottam is derived means to ‘Invoke’ or to ‘Reincarnate’.\(^{11}\) Thus Thottam is a ritual that reincarnates Goddess Kali in a specific area or place marked for the occasion and sanctified for the same. The rituals however vary regionally with variations in the lyrics, the ceremonies and the songs. In the southern most part of Kerala the goddess is invoked in a small hut that is made ready for the purpose after the harvest in the midst of the fields using coconut leaves. A high platform or Pitha is placed inside this hut which is covered with a deep red cloth that is identified as the ‘pattu’. On this is placed a sword which is followed by the singing of the “Thottam Pattu” eulogising the Goddesses’ fight with Darika, the demon and the valour of the Goddess in the said context. The ritual is carried on for about seven, fourteen or twenty-one days and is generally performed by the Nairs, which follows the oral tradition of passing on the songs to their Matriarchal heirs. “Pana” is yet another song to invoke the Goddess that is followed which is a variation with a great difference altogether. There is the enacting of the Chilapatikaram, a famous legend of Tamil Nadu, in which the Goldsmith who cheats the husband of Kannagi, whom the Goddess represents in this episode, meets with the same fate as Darika, in the hands of Goddess, Kali. At times, it is also termed as ‘Kali oottu’, in Central Kerala it takes the form of revelations (Velichapadu or Komaram) and towards the north the most spectacular ‘Theyyam’.\(^{12}\) The Kali oottu re-enacts the story of the beheading of Darika as mentioned

\(^{11}\) Durgadas Mukhyopadhyay Lesser known forms of Performing Arts in India; Sterling Publishers Pvt Ltd, New Delhi,1978, Ch 2 Thottam, G. Shankar Pillai, P.6

\(^{12}\) Ibid; P; 8.
earlier in a complete theatrical form utilizing the vast area around the temple as its place of presentation.

The Northern cult of Kerala follows a variation in the practice of these rituals. There is the interpretation of just the story of the Goddess and Darika with no other additions to it. The performers belong to the traditionally chosen families like those of the people belonging to the communities like Mannan, Velan, Malayan and it is customary to be performed by them every time in the particular cast.

The Velicha padu is also possessed and prophecies are made in this state as in the case of the other ritualistic forms of theatre and folk presentations.

The revelations made by the Bhagavathi has elements of theatre in its presentation and the predictor is possessed and in a state of trance. It is generally accepted that the Teyyam is the Goddess herself and not a representative of the Goddess. The presence of the Goddess is invoked by the chanting of several thottams. Teyyam means God. Hence the Teyyam is a dance of the Gods. The teyyams are danced in praise of various Gods and Goddesses, sometimes to eulogise any great Hero for the heroic deed and valour shown by him.

It can be noticed that the Kathakali art form of Kerala has drawn a good number of movements from the Teyyam and the Mudiyettu. It can be the very basis of the beautiful dance forms of Kerala, since the ritual is visually a treat to the onlooker, for it is unsurpassed as a colourful spectacle that it creates and is perhaps the foremost ritual that incorporates the art of dancing, as an important media to convey the
triumph of the good over evil in a manner that is comprehended by the community in a very easy and joyous way. Further it can also be viewed as an important link between the ancient rituals and the sophisticated performing arts of Kerala.

One can infer from the observations made so far that spirit worship is characterised by prominent make up, huge head dresses, painting of motifs on the body of the impersonator, oracles at the end of the spirit worship, the execution of miraculous cures and various acrobatic feats of which fire walking could be considered as a significant one where in the performer jumps and leaps in certain cases and still remains unhurt. These features are found to be common to the coastal regions of both Karnataka and Kerala where their prevalence is in its highest order.

The following pictures of Kandanar Kelan describe the above facts. The body has the figures of a couple of serpents painted on it, besides the elaborate make up, head dress, colourful costume and the total fierce look of the spirit impersonator. The picture following this, has been caught in the act of fire jumping as performed by the spirit impersonators when possessed by the spirits.
Yathrakkali:

This is yet other traditional art forms of Kerala perhaps on the verge of extinction. The art is also known by the following names owing to the variations in its presentation at different places and occasions; Sanghakkali, Sasthrakkali, Chathirakkali, Sasthrangam, Kshetragnam, Pannakkali, Panayemkali and Panayum Kaliyum. The general belief that the Namboodri Brahmins had formed themselves to inculcate a military discipline after their founder, Parusurama, describes the fact that the art is known after the word that denotes a group of warriors, since Sangham also denotes warriors. The presentation is a pastime which is religious, social, martial and expressive in its presentation. There yet another belief that the art derives its name from the Yathra or a procession to celebrate victory that was held by the learned people of Kerala called the Mimamsakas, over the Buddhists.

The origins of this art are however traced to the Shiva temple at Thrikkariyur\(^{13}\) and the performers are the Chathira Namboodris. Eighteen such groups were assigned the authority to participate in this presentation.

The actual presentation involves a great number of rituals which is followed by the Kanamirikkal, an invocation to Lord Ganesha, or to the Goddess for the success of the play. A great feast of food is served after which is played the Keli, the sounding of the drums to alert the whole village about the presentation of the play for the whole night. This is followed by the Arkkal where in the group beats an inverted copper cauldron with their Thavis; a ladle made out of the shell of the coconut; by seating themselves

\(^{13}\) Durgadas Mukhyopadhyay Lesser known forms of Performing Arts in India; Sterling Publishers Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, 1978, Ch. 3 Yathrakkali; Kavalam Narayana Panicker, P, 9.
around the same and singing songs in praise of the goddess. At this point of time two or three of them get possessed to the joy of the rhythm, the songs and the dance movements. The entertaining aspect of this dance begins only after a sumptuous meal in the night.

This is followed by the Nalu Padam; songs eulogising their favourite deities. The entertainment is done in two distinct phases. The first one being the humourous one or Asyam and the other being the one involving the gestures; or Angyam. The variety entertainment begins soon after the Nalu Padams are sung. Since the performers are cooks themselves there is the singing of songs about the dishes during the supper that is served. This also accompanied by the Thoni Pattu or the Vanchi Pattu which are Boat songs that are quick in their rhythm and help activate the people to enjoy the night long spectacle that is to follow.

The night long performance provides a great variety in its presentation. Two or three of the performers move into the centre of the Pandal and imitate the frogs in their faces, eyes, holding of their hands and jump and leap around for a while. There is the entry of Itty Kandappan which gives ample scope for a great number of sequences to be enacted, the dance of the gypsies, magic, the entry of a humourous character, who is at liberty to speak about anything, and his song is called the Manjapattu, followed by the entry of the characters belonging to the different castes speaking different languages making the presentation an interesting one. One of the performers enters dressed in the attire of a Kongini and has a frightened look on his face. There is a humourous, verbal interaction between this character and yet another performer highlighting the
exaggerating nature of the Kongini people. There instances of a Nayar-Namboodri mock fight where in the lighter side of life is given importance.

There is one of the sequences in the presentation of this dance where in the performers’ exhibit martial arts using the sword and the shield. This is danced to commemorate the incident, when Parasurama supplied the Namboodri regiments with arms. At day break, the dance comes to an end and the performers are gifted with customary gifts and presents by the special invitees.

**Thullal:**

This is a satirical presentation that owes its origins to the poet Kunchan Nampyar, a very famous poet of the eighteenth century and has come into existence as a challenge by the poet to a Chakkyar. Thullal is now known as the dance of the men in Kerala. There are other forms like Kolam Thullal (dance by men who wear special costumes and masks) and Thumbi Thullal (dance of the butterfly). This art of Thullal is a blend of the various aspects of Kuthu, kutiyattam, Kathakali and Patayani. The humourous aspect is chosen from Chakyar Koothu, music from Kathakkali while the Aharya and the Angika abhinaya are chosen from the classical traditions. Patayani Thullal has been broadly classified as Ottam, Sitankan and Parayan and is executed by using the folk motifs that are widely prevalent in the southern areas of Kerala. Ottam thullal is the most highly evolved form of these both literally and visually. The performer sings and dances all by himself while the Maddale player and the Kaimani or the Tala player repeat the song.

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14 Durgadas Mukhyopadhyay Lesser known forms of Performing Arts in India; Sterling Publishers Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, 1978, Ch.4 Thullal- a visual at of Kerala, V.S.Sharma; P,12.
besides providing the respective instrumental support to the performer. The themes chosen are from the Mahabharatha, Bhagavatha or the Ramayana and are more often a criticism of the various characters belonging to any caste or creed. Some of the present day presentations also portray the contemporary life with the basic story chosen from the epics. The episodes and the characters are beautifully portrayed exposing the humourous content in them. **The performance also thus aims at educating the public about the wrong doings of the various sections of society or the exploitations of the hierarchy, if any, leading to reformation of the society. The presentations generally, form part of the religious or seasonal festive celebrations held at the premises of the temples attracting great crowds.**

The other aspects of the presentation include the lesser use of the conventional hand gestures as compared to the classical forms of art prevalent in Kerala and the direct communication of the themes by the artist which is easily comprehended by the general public. It is interesting to note that the art form has a homogeneous blend of the four aspects of Abhinaya, which makes it one of the most popular forms of presentation in the State. It serves the purpose of an amusement by all standards which is yet another fascinating aspect of the theatrical form. The presentation has gained its popularity owing to the Vachika abhinaya it incorporates, as one of its prominent aspects and its approach to social criticism which is perhaps one of the best ways to educate the masses in a very easy and appropriate way in a democratic Nation. The dominating rasas in the presentation of the thullal are veera, hasya, abhuta and raudra. The other rasas are transitory. Thullal dance is occasionally performed during seasonal festivals in temples.
FOLK DANCES OF KERALA:

To the south of Karnataka and to the west of Tamil Nadu is situated in the state of Kerala bounded by the Western Ghats. This Land has coastal regions, forests with trees of teak, rosewood, ebony, jackfruit, mango, cashew and other spices. The forests are full of animals and several tribes. The state is known for its coastal line and has served as an important world trade route for visitors in the past few centuries. There are a large variety of tribes and groups in Kerala. The inhabitants vary from the early Negroes to the Dravidians and the Aryans. The tribes include the Nomads and agriculturists. There are professional musicians, dancers and acrobats too, thus contributing to the innumerable performing art forms. From the earliest of times thus, Kerala has been the native of a great variety of art forms. “Indeed, the gods here are propitiated in various ways, of which folk dance forms are the most extensive.” Dance has featured as one of the prominent forms and means of ritualistic worship in most of the regions in India. While the classical dances are purely devotional in their presentation, there are a great number of lesser known dance forms that performed, in the folk tradition, completely serving the purpose of invoking the supernatural beings. The most important amongst Hence it varies from the dance of the Irulas, the hunting tribes and the Kedars to the ritual singing and dancing of the Brahmins as seen in the presentation of the Krishnanattam. Amongst these, some are purely ritualistic in nature. They invoke deities, particular spirits and heroes of gone-by days. Hence the folk dances of Kerala may be classified as ritualistic, martial and secular and the general types of dance. The dances are generally circular in their formation and depend on at least

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one musical refrain and like all folk forms, have simple repetitive movements. Dance is thus an indispensable, popular and prevalent activity of the people of Kerala. Amongst the tribes the Kalanadis, Kunduvidians, Karimpalans, Pallivars, Panivans, Irulas, Kadaras and Cherumars are distinguished as prolific dancers. Men are transformed into Gods and Demons by applying heavy paint on their faces, and are attired in areca nut and palm-leaf costumes. 

It can be noticed that there is a striking similarity in the costume, theme and presentation of such dances to the Bhoota Kola as seen in the coastal dance. From time immemorial Kerala is known as a religious land of many castes and communities leading to a variety of ritualistic dance forms. The earliest of these dances are those that have been connected with the communities of mother Goddess Kali, Lord Ayyappan and the Snakes. The variations in presentation are very few since the motifs and themes are the same. This is the dance that is performed to propitiate the demi Gods and the various characters from the legend that relates to the ritual called the Therayattam and performed in the regions of North Malabar. It is believed that the spirits of those invoked enter the body of the performer. Therefore the performers observe certain austerities prior to the day of the actual ritual, such as fasting and prayer. The shrines are generally decorated and brightly and beautifully lit with oil lamps. There is the sounding of the drums to the accompaniment of the pipes and the cymbals as a prelude to the major ritual that follows. The festive atmosphere also includes the firing of crackers, processions with torch lights and ceremonial lamps lasting for about a couple of days or more number of days. The performance is usually held in an open area with no specific stage set for the purpose and stretches for several hours. The dance does not exhibit any finesse as such in its execution but is closer to the folk element. There is
an emphasis on the dramatic element with the drums accentuating the whole performance. There is the use of elaborate make-up with intricate and complex patterns painted on the face and sometimes on the hands and the body too. Besides this, the performer wears a huge head dress and also adorns with armlets and bracelets. A multi coloured frock like dress is worn from waist and downwards with anklets on the ankles.

Hence it varies from the dance of the Irulas, the hunting tribes and the Kedars to the ritual singing and dancing of the Brahmins as seen in the presentation of the Krishnanattam. Amongst these, some are purely ritualistic in nature. They invoke deities, particular spirits and heroes of gone-by days. Hence the folk dances of Kerala may be classified as ritualistic, martial and secular and the general types of dance. Dance is an indispensable, popular and prevalent activity of the people of Kerala. Amongst the tribes the Kalanadis, Kunduvidians, Karimpalans, Pallivars, Panivans, Irulas, Kadaras and Cherumars are distinguished as prolific dancers. Men are transformed into Gods and Demons by applying heavy paint on their faces, and are attired in areca nut and palm-leaf costumes. From time immemorial Kerala is known as a religious land of many casts and communities leading to a variety of ritualistic dance forms. The earliest of these dances are those that have been connected with the communities of mother Goddess Kali, Lord Ayyappan and the Snakes. The variations in presentation are very few since the motifs and themes are the same. At times it is Darika who is killed by Kali as in Mudiyettu or it is the varied form of Goddess Bhagavathi who appears in magnificent, astounding attire in the form of the varied Teyyams. The special feature of these rituals is that, at times the deity is first painted on the floor and then the story is enacted to
the background of the drums, pipes and variety of various musical instruments. These are termed as Kuttus, Attams, and the Bhagavathi and Kali forms are akin to Cannanore and the districts adjoining it. The movements in the Teyyam and the Tirayattam are pure dance or nritta in form. Masks and painting of the faces is an essential feature of these ritualistic forms, especially in the performance of the Mudiyettu, the Kolam tullal etc.

A spirit propitiation in process.

Irulas are worshipers of Lord Shiva and accept Vishnu as a deity, along with many other village Gods and Goddesses. Their dances are hence either worship to Lord Shiva, or depict the functions of hunting or food gathering. Ancestral worship is yet another occasion to dance. The dances are circular, accompanied by a musical melody with vigorous repetitive
movements. The actions reveal different phases of hunting. Elekaradi is a prominent dance of the Irulas.

The Kadars, the kattunavakans and tulus are also known for their ritualistic form of dancing. The Kadars are worshipers of Kali and Shiva and their dance revolves around the worship of the above said deities. Snakes and animals are elevated to the levels of mother Goddess Nagakali, Pulicamundi, Pllurkali, Pulikkarimkali and so on. Besides these, there are the evil spirits that are personified as the Mother Goddesses as in the case of Verancira Bhagavathi, Kakkara Bhagavati, Narambil Bhagavati, Cooliyar Bhagavati which are perhaps the localized versions of Kali.

**Tiyyaatu:**

This dance is characterized by the whirling of the fire torches. It is also popularly known as Tiyattam and is usually performed in a temple dedicated to the Goddess Kali. It is an ancient form of rituals performed by the Shaman or the professional exorcist. The dancer dresses up as a spirit or the Bhoota and performs a dance until the victim is revenged. The spirit then leaves the body of the veshadhari or the one who adorns it. This is generally performed to ward off the physical and mental diseases of the people who seek the help of this bhoota in this regard and are people belonging to this community.

There are two types of tiyattam, one to propitiate Goddess Kali and hence called Kali tiyattam and the other to propitiate Lord Ayyappan and hence called Ayyappan tiyattam. The Kali tiyattam is performed by the

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16 Kapila Vatsyayana, Traditions Of Indian Folk Dance, India Book Company, New Delhi, 1976, ch,8, P.254.
tiyattu Unnis also known as Ambalavasis and the Ayyappan tiyattu is performed by the tiyattu Nambiars. The dance begins with the drawing of the picture of Goddess Kali on floor which is smeared with Cow dung. Various powders of different colours are used to draw the picture. These are obtained by the use of powdered rice, turmeric powder, lime mixed with turmeric powder, charcoal powder and powdered green leaves. The chief priest performs the preliminary rites and gets made up to dance as mother Kali. The face is painted black using a paste of charcoal powder and coconut oil and white dots are marked on the face to symbolize pustules of small pox. The Goddess is personified as the deity of the epidemic which is represented by the dancing priest. The story of the battle between Goddess Kali and Darika, the king of demons is depicted. The dancer performs the dance until Kali meets Shiva at Kailasa with the bleeding head of Darika whom she slays in the fight. The Dancer is in a frenzy and dances to the beat of a chande and the cymbals. The breaking of a coconut, with the lighting of a torch and spinning around the patron of the dance with lighted torch marks the end of the ritualistic dance.

**Ayyappan Tiyatta:**

“Ayyappan Tiyyatta is one of three members of a special group of Kerala ritual performances which share common elements.”\(^{17}\) In the Ayyappa tiyattu the same procedures are followed that is the figure of Ayyappan is drawn with the colouring material, the preliminary rites are observed and then the dancing begins in accompaniment to the tottam songs

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\(^{17}\) Farley.P. Richmond, Darius.L. Swan, Phillip .B. Zarrilli; Indian Theatre Traditions of Performance, Motilal Banarasidass Publishers Private Limited, Delhi; 1990; Ch.5 Ayyappan Tiyatta, Phillip.B. Zarrilli, P;151.
which narrate the stories of Ayyappa. This dance is popularly seen in South Malabar. The Lord is believed to have been the saviour of the people of Kerala in the sense that he incarnated as a human form and resurrected these people during their times of utmost misery. Hence this particular ritual is conducted in either the temple of the Lord or at the residence of the Namboodri Brahmans. It is performed for reasons like fulfillment of any vow or in honour of the Lord as an obeissance. It is performed to thank the Lord for having granting their wishes like; the birth of sons to a childless couple. The three major ritualistic presentations that are similar in their execution are the Ayyappan tiyattu, Bhagavathi pattu and the Nagayakshi Kalam. The most common element that is observed in the execution of these is the elaborate drawing i.e. the Rangoli or the Kalam that is made on the floor, which generally corresponds to the specific deities that are to be propitiated as mentioned in the Kale Tiyattam and the elaborate set of rituals that are performed as part of the ceremonies that are to follow. These incorporate the singing of the songs in praise of the corresponding deities or the playing of the drums, dance and the like. The drawing of the image of the Lord is perhaps an important aspect that has been followed from as early as the eleventh century A.D. or the sixteenth century onwards. The source of the image could have been the Murals of Kerala. Generally five different coloured pieces of chalk are employed for the purpose of creating an absolutely magnificent figure of the Lord. The colours include white, red, yellow, green and black. The Lord is represented as one of the following three forms. He is therefore represented as riding a divine white horse or in the role of the protector of the forests wherein he is accompanied by a tiger or as a either a warrior or hunter where he appears alone without any animal but armed with a bow and arrow in his left hand and a sword in the right. It
is interesting to note that the figure is drawn meticulously with a three dimensional effect highlighting certain features of the Lord such as the eyes, nose and the like. This brings the image to life, in its appearance, besides which the invocatory ceremonies inviting the Lord to life are conducted. This marks the beginning of the Lord’s presence which continues until the destruction of the image is performed ceremoniously and the image on the floor is no more considered ritually alive. The ceremonies are performed in the tekkini, a raised platform where the possessed dance is also performed. This is a collective ritual and involves the participation of three different groups to accomplish the same. The major performance organizing the ritual and the entire responsibility of its arrangements are credited to the Tiyatti Nambiyars, a class that is placed at the highest ranking in the society. The Brahmin who conducts rituals generally, is also employed for conducting the purificatory ceremonies, and also to initiate the preliminary ceremonies. These incorporate the singing of the songs in praise of the corresponding deities or the playing of the drums, dance and the like. As an important feature of the Ayyappan tiyattu, the mythological story of the Lord is enacted. There is a highly energetic dance of the performers who narrate the story and mime the same, leading the dancer to state of ecstasy as if he is possessed. The performance begins when one of the Nambyars begins to chant an introduction even before the completion of the drawing of the Lord. At this juncture, the main performer begins the act by playing the role of Nandikeshwara and narrates the stories of the Lord. With the completion of the drawing, the narrator then dances a short stylized dance which is followed by the enacting of the story of the Amrutha Manthana and the story of the Birth of the Lord. The performer then slowly enters a state of possessed dancing to the accompaniment of the drummers’ faster pace and
begins to destroy the drawing and the decorations around the same, are also destroyed using the sword in his hand jumping furiously. He then places the sword on the stool placed in front of him and makes an offering of coconuts to the deity. The sword which is believed to be alive with the power of the deity is again held in his hands and he begins to predict the happenings for the forthcoming year. The possessed dancer expresses his joy, gratitude to the person who has commissioned the ceremony and also blesses him with prosperity and happiness, besides pronouncing the wish to have the ritual conducted again. With the dancer places the sword in the stool and it loses its power and the dancer also comes back to his normal state and the deity leaves him.

It is interesting to note that the regions are different, the deities worshipped are different, but the rites, rituals and the ceremonies the predictions by the possessed performer, the conducting of the entire ceremony is basically the same but has been termed differently. The beliefs of the people and DANCE being an INSEPARABLE part of these ceremonies emphasizes the fact that ritual and dance are always interrelated and are complementary to each other ever since mankind formulated such ritualistic ceremonies.

AYYAPPAN PATTU:

Ayyappan Pattu is a ritualistic dance to worship Lord Ayyappa. As an important feature of the Ayyappan pattu, the mythological story of the Lord is enacted. The theme of the song deals with the romantic journey of the village deity through the forest to fetch the tiger’s milk on his way back he meets Vavar a Muslim saint. At this juncture, a duel is performed between
Ayyappan and Vavar. Ayyappan fights with a sword while Vavar has just a
defensive shield like weapon. The duration of the fight relies on the capacity
of the performers and varies from duration of a few minutes to a few hours.
In certain contexts the Lord is viewed as a Nayar hero, who has performed a
great feat. The duel ends in a friendly manner with the Lord extending an
invite to Vavar to see him occasionally. This is performed to the
accompaniment of the rhythm of the music of the singers. The preliminaries
of the pattu include a big pandal supported by the 64 pillars with four pillar
at the center supporting a cella or a Garba gruha. This is decorated with
tender coconut leaves and a set apart for propitiating Lord Ayyappa. Initially
a branch of a tree with sprouts is ceremoniously planted. A pooja is
conducted by the leader of the Nayar community. There is a highly energetic
dance of the performers who narrate the story and mime the same, leading
the dancer to state of ecstasy as if he is possessed. He dances round the
place to the accompaniment of the drums and cymbals offering flowers to
the deity. Following this is the dance of the Lord as described earlier.

TIRAYATTAM:

Tirayattam is ritualistic dance of the people of North Kerala. “The
dance is full of ritual and symbolic significance. The costuming, masks and
makeup are fantastic and elaborate. It is this makeup which has formed the
basis of the colour-symbolism in Kathakali makeup.”18 In the Tirayattam
Gods and Goddesses like Amman, Muttappan, Uchitta, Chattan and
Chamundi are propitiated. Hence a variety of Tirayattam corresponding to
each of these deities can be seen and it can also be noticed that the rites and

18 Kapila Vatsyayana, Traditions Of Indian Folk Dance, India Book Company, New
Delhi, 1976, ch,8, P.256.
rituals pertaining to each deity are adhered to while propitiating and dancing the tirayattam. The performers are chosen exclusively from the communities of the Malayar, Munnruttar, Anhuttar and the Vannans. These are privileged to perform the tirayattam. The Nattatira or a sort of a rehearsal is performed on the night preceding the actual performance. The actual performance begins with a martial dance in the morning of the day it is to be danced and the dance is called as Vela. This is followed by the rituals conducted by the priest. The performer paints his face with the yellow turmeric powder and dances to the beat of the drums that are played in the vicinity, while a few other dancers join him in dancing. There is the bursting of crackers and a frenziful playing of the drums after which the gathering is required to throw rice and flowers on a white cloth spread on a higher pedestal, for the purpose. The cloth containing this is then encircled thrice and then placed on the head gear of the chief performer. The dance is termed Vellayattam, owing to the above formality. “Among the oldest forms of ritualistic dances in Kerala, is Therayattam, which is prevalent in the Northern districts.”

The tirayattam of the goddess Kali is called as Bhagavatittira and the following rituals are followed. The Tottikaras, a community of bearers, choose a place near the shrine to conduct the ceremony and hoist a flag, on the day of the Nattatira. The rituals are conducted by the priest on the following day and the people assemble in the temple premises to participate in the ritual of throwing the rice and flowers. The drummers line up on the left of the performer and face the onlookers. At least six drummers take part in the ritual. Two to three pipers also join in. Tottam pattu or songs are sung

19 The illustrated weekly of India; an article on the Therayattam; a Kerala Festival published in a weekly magazine of the 1960’s.
to the accompaniment of these. The performer wears the costume, appears and dances to the accompaniment of the Tottam. An obeissance is offered to Lord Ganesha, which is followed by the enacting of the story of Darika Vadham, as rendered in the Tottam songs. The dance is purely Angika with very little or rather no Satvika in it. The dancer begins the dance at a very slow pace and proceeds to a frenziful tempo with the drummers also rising the tempo gradually and simultaneously with the dance. During the course of the dance, by the time the episode of the demon, Darika meeting Kali is narrated in the Tottam, the performer gets possessed with the spirit of Goddess Kali and dances in great ecstasy, looking for the demon. Kali spots the performer playing the role of the Demon – King Darika, who is seen on another platform at a short distance. Kali jumps off the platform she is dancing on and chases Darika. The Tottam ends at this point. A fierce battle is enacted by Kali and Darika. The Kali Tirayattam ends with the victory of Goddess Kali over the demon king which is interpreted by the removal or the discarding of the Head-Gear of Darika.

**Mutiyettu:**

It is the earliest form of ritual theatre in Kerala.\(^\text{20}\) This means the adorning or the wearing of the Muti or the crown. It is a dance-drama popular even to this day. Mutiyettu is a ritual as well as theatrical performance.\(^\text{21}\) This is performed in the Kali shrine, and depicts the story of the fight between the Goddess and her opponent Darika- the demon. “This is


also a ritual theatre of Kerala performed traditionally near some Bhadrakali temples, especially in Travancore and Cochin regions.”

The preliminary rituals are conducted in the temple of Goddess Kali. Some of the important rituals in Mudiyettu are Kalamezhuthu, Kalampooja, Kalammaykal and Tiriyzhichal. Following this is the performance of the Mutiyettu which is performed by the Nayars in Kerala, who belong to the community of drummers in Kerala. The performance is presented in eight scenes. The characters depicted include those of Shiva, Nandi, Kali, Kooli, Koyimpidarar, Darika and Denavendra. The musical instruments that accompany the performance include the Chande or the Drum the Changila or the Gong and the Ilattalam or the Cymbals. The performance begins with Lord Shiva and Narada in the first scene. The misdoings of Darika are reported to Lord Shiva by the sage Narada. And that Darika will meet his end in the hands of a Woman alone is revealed. The lord offers his assistance to quell the wrong doings of the demon. Kali appears as part of the next scene and dances. She then challenges Darika to a fight and invites him to a duel. This part of the dance is termed as the ‘Poru Vili’, meaning the declaration of War. The following scene is the enacting of Darika’s declaration of war against the Goddess. The last scene is the war between the Goddess and the demon, at the end of which the demon’s Head-Gear is removed symbolizing the beheading of the demon and the triumph of the Goddess. The presentation gets its name from the final act.

Kavatiyattam:

This is an offering to Lord Muruga or Lord Subramanya, and is danced annually by the devotees. Worship of Murukan or Subramanian is also very popular in Kerala. They offer their obeisance to the Lord either at the pilgrimage shrine Palani or at any locally available shrine of Muruga. The devotees offer a group dance carrying the Kavati during the season of the worship which is held between the months of December and January every year. The dance is also associated with the Peacock dance which is also the other unique way of offering prayers to the Lord. These are danced to the accompaniment of the Nagaswara and the drums. The dancers numbering six to eight carry the kavati on their shoulders and exhibit rhythmic foot movements, often leading to an ecstatic state of dancing. It is generally believed that the Lord possesses them and hence a convulsive dance is performed. The accompanying musicians also add to the convulsive dance such that the onlookers are more often tempted to join the dance.

The peacock dance is more attractive and fascinating. It is performed by young men who hold a bundle of peacock feathers in both their hands. A Vel or the weapon of the Lord is thrust into the tongue by these dancers. They perform the dance as a group presentation and the movements and motifs are similar to the Kummi, a dance performed by the women folk of Kerala, around an oil lamp. The songs accompanying the dance are specially scored for the purpose and are sung by a group of singers. The ‘Uttukku’ is also played as part of the musical accompaniment. Towards the finale, the dancers enter into a state of ecstasy and are accompanied by the onlookers.

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23 Dr.S.K.Nair; The Folk Dances Of Kerala, article in a journal, April 1959, ch 1 P.12.
too. It can be noticed that this dance has its counterparts in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka where the Lord is worshipped in a similar manner and the Kavadi holds a great importance in these dances too.

**Pampan Tullal:**

This is an offering to the snake-god and is performed by the Pullavan cult of people. The Nayars commission this offering to the snake-god through the Pullavans. It is believed by the Nayars that they are under a curse of the Snake-god, to ward off which the Pullavans are sent for. A clean place is specially chosen for the purpose on which the figures of two intertwined snakes are drawn by the Pullavan on the evening preceding the offering. The area is then sanctified and the puja offered by the Nayar on the following morning, on the day on which the offering is to be made. The snakes drawn here represent the two different sexes. Dances similar to the Pana are then performed around the figures. Two young girls then seat themselves on these figures with their faces opposite each other. The Pullavan begins to sing the songs related to the mythical snakes and is accompanied by another woman on her instrument. The girls begin to get possessed; their movements slowly begin to imitate the moves of a snake. They sway to and fro and to the sides and swing like snakes and reach a point of ecstasy when the songs are stopped and a conversation begins. The possessed girls answer queries and convey the wish of the snake deity to the people who have conducted the ceremonies. This marks the end of the ritual.

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24 Ibid P;13.
and the dance. At times the ceremonies are initiated by the Kurup, who generally initiates the ceremonies for Goddess Kali, in place of the Pullavan.

The picture shows the painting of serpents on the body of the impersonator

Brahmanipattu:

This is a dance and ritual conducted exclusively by the womenfolk. Women of the sect belonging to Ampalavasis, identified as the Pushpinis or Brahminis conduct this variety of Pattu. A pitha, or a stool is sanctified for the purpose and placed at the place chosen for the purpose of the ceremony. The women then stand around this Pitha and sing songs in praise of the Goddess. They are then gradually possessed by the presiding deity and begin to dance, to a state of ecstasy, around the Pitha. This is followed by the conveying of the wishes of the Goddess, by these possessed women.
The Martial dances of Kerala are an important and indispensable aspect of their dancing culture. Many of their dances owe their origin to the art of Kalari Payattu, or the art of combat, that was patronized by the Zamorin of Calicut, the Princes of Travancore, rulers of Kerala. As a matter of fact Kalari forms the chief martial art of Kerala even to this day. “It is the chief martial form of Kerala, used for combat and originally patronized by the Zamorin rulers.”

The Kunduvidians are believed to be associated with the descendants of the martial fragments of the Raja of Kottayam. They have a great collection of interesting music and dance of which many are martial in character. Besides these is the dance of the agriculturists, which the Cherumars, performed as a harvest dance.

**Poorakkali:**

Men trained thoroughly in the art of martial dancing, the Kalaripayattu, take part in this dance presentation. This dance is popular in the northern parts of Kerala. The dance begins with their leader in the centre who starts an invocatory song. The rest of the performers copy the movements of the leader and also sing the refrain of the song along with the leader. They exhibit various movements, geometric patterns through their dance which is vigourous in its nature and moves on to themes chosen from the puranas for its song after the invocation. This is followed by the men dividing into two groups when topics selected from the great treatises on Sanskrit Grammar like the Paniniyam or any other metaphysical treatise is chosen for a quizzing session between the two groups. At this juncture the dance becomes very interesting since the intellect of the performers is

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challenged and the performers are expected to give a comprehensive answer to the ‘sutra’ or the ‘aphorism’ that is put forward to one of the groups by the other. The audience enjoys the performance and is given an opportunity to rate the intellect as well as the physical strength and capacity of the performers.

**Vela Kali:**

This is a dance that is a martial art in its presentation and is performed during the festivities that are observed in the temples of Kerala. The dance is so spectacular in its presentation that it is said that one who views this dance would forget even to remember, who gave birth to him. It is performed in front of the deity that is carried on the back of an elephant in a procession around the temple as part of the circumambulation rite. “The dance recreates the battle of Mahabharata, with dancers representing the Kauravas and wooden effigies the Pandavas.” The performers are all men, sporting a well built muscular bare-chested body, with very thin waists, adorned with red turbans on the head and red traditional military uniforms placing themselves in two parallel rows in front of the deity. In the centre of these stands the leader of the group in between the first row of performers. The leader commences the moves of both the feet and those of the sword and the shield, which are echoed by the rest to the accompaniment of the music of the drummers. Various feats of the sword fight are exhibited by the performers including movements like hiding behind the shield for an ambush which makes the presentation a visual feast to the eyes of the onlookers. “The

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26 Dr. S.K. Nair; The Folk Dances Of Kerala, article in a journal, April 1959, ch 1 P. 13.
27 Kapila Vatsyayana, Traditions Of Indian Folk Dance, India Book Company, New Delhi, 1976, ch,8, P.255.
training of the Kalaris, the gymnasia, the martial traditions of Kerala have all contributed in making the Vela Kali into a very dramatic dance full of vigour giving immense scope for solo dancers to exhibit their prowess.”\textsuperscript{28} The performance generally lasts for of about an hour or two in duration. “The male dancers, costumed in combat gear, demonstrate the martial character of the people of Kerala by carrying swords and shields.”\textsuperscript{29}

**Thapolian:**

“A dance called Thapolian is dedicated to Kali.”\textsuperscript{30} The agriculturists, Kalanadis are worshippers of Goddess Kali. They perform the Thapolian as an offering to the Goddess. There is the extensive use of the shield in this dance. Many patterns pleasing and intricate are woven into a fascinating presentation by the performers. The art borrows a great number of movements from the other stylized dance forms of Kerala.

**Patayani:**

This is a dance that is of Martial character as the name of the dance itself suggests a ROW OF SOLDIERS. It is danced in front of the Kali temples in the months of Meenam and Thulam, on the days that incorporate the Bharani and the Pooram asterisms. This dance is believed to replicate the battle of the Pandavas and the Kauravas at Kurukshetra. The fight and the weapons used are symbolic in nature as the swords are represented by the little sticks that are held by the performers and struck against each other.

\textsuperscript{28} Kapila Vatsyayana, Traditions Of Indian Folk Dance, India Book Company, New Delhi, 1976, ch,8, P.255.

\textsuperscript{29} Ashish Mohan Khokar, Folk Dance, Tribal, Ritual and Martial Forms, Rupa & Co; New Delhi, 2003, Kerala, Ch 11, P.54.

\textsuperscript{30} Kapila Vatsyayana, Traditions Of Indian Folk Dance, India Book Company, New Delhi, 1976, ch,8, P.252.
the time of the performance the people of the village gather in front if the temple and divide into the respective groups on either side of the façade of the temple. Huge mannequins representing the Pandavas are either carried and brought to the venue or are brought along by the wheels fixed on to these and placed in front of the temple façade. Besides these are rolled in Swan shaped figures which are termed as ‘Annam’ measuring anywhere between three feet to fifty feet in their construction, also made with the purpose of competing with each other by the two said parties. The performers face each other in two rows, the space between which is lit with torches made out of coconut leaves. The conches, drums and the pipes herald the beginning of the dance. A few performers move closer into the area of the burning torches representing both the parties on either side and initiate the performance through simple mimetic movements of either an animal or a bird. This is followed by the singing of songs that are religious as well as secular in their theme to which the mock fight wielding indigenous sticks begins to the continued accompaniment of the drums and blowing of the pipes. More often the mock fight turns into real fights leading to a chaos in the atmosphere if unchecked.

Parisamuttukali:

This is a dance similar in its presentation to the Vela Kali. It is performed amongst the Christians of Kerala during the wedding ceremonies held at the churches and the church festivals. It is danced purely as an entertainment and the dancers wield their shields and swords in an artistic manner to the rhythm of the religious songs that are sung. The Muslim, the Ishava and other communities also have similar entertainments in Kerala.
Koithu Nritham:

Besides these is the dance of the agriculturists, Cherumars, performed as a harvest dance in which both men and women participate. The youth perform this dance with great fervour to celebrate a good harvest. The men and women stand side by side and interlock their hands at the back and exhibit various patterns and movements in their dance. The entire group sings and moves swiftly shifting patterns, thus dancing vigourously, developing beautiful motifs. The song is generally in praise of Nature thanking it for helping to reap a good harvest. The interlocked hands exhibit wave-like movement as they move their feet to the rhythm and rejoice the occasion. This is danced on the occasion of a wedding too, besides the harvest. They use the veekam, chanda, edakka, maram and kuzhal as the accompanying instruments for these dances.

Margamkalipattu :

This a dance of the men, martial in character, performed as part of a wedding ritual amongst the Syrian Christians in Kerala. The men clad in white dhotis and white turbans dance around a lighted lamp which is placed in the centre to represent Jesus Christ, with the performers correspond to the twelve disciples. The songs are religious in nature and depict the story of the visit of St Thomas to Kerala to which the men dance. The fact that dance is a perhaps a way of life and is not an additional activity that is done, for purposes of appreciation and awards can be inferred from the above performance, for, irrespective of the religion dance can be seen as a part

31 Kapila Vatsyayana, Traditions Of Indian Folk Dance, India Book Company, New Delhi,1976, ch,8, P,253.
of the religious ceremonies and rituals of everyday life and the life of the common man.

Kolkkali:

This is also a male dominated form and is a dance danced with the striking of little sticks held in the hands of the performers. They dance to the songs that are religious in nature with the rhythm being maintained by the striking of the sticks. This is danced in a circle beginning with a slow tempo after which the dance is performed to a very fast pace to culminate the same. It is purely a dance that is performed as a pastime by these men in their native dresses. When the Thappa or the Daph, a little drum that can be played by holding in the left hand at different positions such as at the level of the knee, waist, shoulders, head and the like the dance is termed as the Thappa Kali. It is also performed by the Moplahs, the Muslims of Kerala. The dance derives its name from the thappa to the accompaniment of which the dance is performed. The dancers sing after their leader, in a chorus. The song has a mixture of the Arabic, Tamil and Urdu dialects in its rendering. The movements of the dance are very vigorous and the song adds to the energetic fervour. These are danced purely for the joy of the dancers themselves and the songs have the praise of the seas, the harvest or any ancient romantic love stories for their themes. Also interesting to note is the presentation of the Thappu Melakali performed with greater energetic movements that incorporate footwork that is vigourous in nature, swift hops, swirling, jumps, leaps and squatting. There is the weaving of the extraordinary rhythmic patterns on the thappu besides all these, in the presentation of the dance.
The Pulvars, a class of people in Kottayam, perform a great number of Martial dances that have been in vogue since many years. The dancers hold a stick in their right hand and a shield in the other. The dancers themselves sing the song to the accompaniment of which vigorous steps are exhibited. Two people carry the effigies or painted figures of the Demons around whom the dancers encircle and brandish their weapons as if in combat. They later form two rows as if in a fight and dance, ending the performance in a circle. These dances are performed during the celebration of the festival of Onam and other important festivities.

**Kaikottakali:**

The dance is performed all along the night during the Tiruvathira festival. It is also identified as Thiruvathirakali. The Thiruvadirkali resembles the Kaikottikali but in this form only adult women take part. As part of the Kaikottakali is danced the Kummi, which is the most popular and one the most graceful dances of Kerala. Women predominantly perform this dance thus enabling the Lasya form. However, in the Malabar regions one can find the involvement of the men though it is very uncommon. The women dance to the refrain sung by one of the group which is a melodious Thiruvathira song, followed by the whole group singing in chorus and dancing simultaneously clapping their hands and moving sideways gracefully. The uniformity in gracefully moving their hands is one of the most fascinating aspects of the dance. The dance also forms part of the

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festivities performed during the celebration of the Onam festival. “It is performed during the festival seasons like Thiruvathira and Onam.”

**Aivar kali:**

This is a dance that is performed in the little districts of Travancore as a mere entertainment. The performance lasts for two days and can be considered as a game played during the day by players belonging to the Izhavas. The Pandavas are represented by each player and the whole story of the Mahabharatha is enacted. The teacher sits on an altar on the closing day and divides a piece of jaggery that is hung in the centre of the dancing ground as it is customary to do the same traditionally.

**Pankali:**

This is a dance with love as its important theme. The story of two lovers is enacted with the teasing of each other and various movements that suggest love. The presentation involves the soft and delicate dance of the performers to the songs that sung as dialogues between the performers. This is a dance of the lower sections of the Hindu society and hence there is the mime of a buffoon as part of the performance, wherein there is the punning of the activities of the higher sections of society.

**Tolpaya Koothu:**

This is the shadow puppet theatre of Kerala performed annually during the temple festival of Kerala. There is a great difference in the

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33 Kapila Vatsyayana, Traditions Of Indian Folk Dance, India Book Company, New Delhi, 1976, ch,8, P.258.
execution of the play in comparison to its counterparts in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. The presentation shares many common features with the traditional forms of dance and dance dramas. The ballads are selected from the Ramayana and the singers are either the Tamil Getti Pulayaras or the Nayar Kavis.

**Kotamuriyattam:**

This has the features of a street play. The occasions for the performance is the celebration of a harvest and is performed as a dance of fertility. Myth, ritual and theatre are interwoven in these forms. The most significant song of the presentation includes the praise of the goddess of fertility, Annapoorneshwari, describing the story of her travel to reach Kolathunadu from Aryunadu. Godavari, the sacred mother cow is eulogised as part of the performance too, although the presentation is not directly associated with any ritual. However the present day presentations incorporate the theatrical elements predominantly, rather than the ritualistic aspect.

Initially the rituals were performed as individual rites but have later grown into public performances, with perhaps the addition of the various elements that are both audio and visually attractive. The Sarpam tullal, or the Snake dance is performed to appease the snake deities. Besides these, there are innumerable ritual forms that are associated with the magical spells that are performed by the various cults of people in Kerala. The women

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34 Kapila Vatsyayana, Traditions Of Indian Folk Dance, India Book Company, New Delhi, 1976, ch.8, P.259.
dominated theatrical forms include the execution of the Malayikkuttu, a folk drama meant for women.

As part of the ritual tradition, there is the presentation of the Porattukal which is basically a comical divertissement presented during the intervals between the rituals. The porattu is designed to be a part of the rituals but absolutely cut off from the rituals in the sense that it does not involve any ritualistic ceremony.

A brief survey and study of the dances of Kerala leads to the inference that the folk, traditional and the classical arts of Kerala are ritual based in nature, performed for ritualistic occasions besides being part of the festivities that are either secular or of religious affiliation and have been so ever since their origins and have stood the test of time inspite of the innumerable hurdles that have occurred due to the invasions of people of varied cultures and religious beliefs. It is therefore appreciative and commendable that our Motherland, India, has such a rich cultural heritage with its roots are deeply embedded in its people. The striking similarity of the dance forms, their execution, costume, theme and make-up in the majority of the dances to its counterparts in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu drives home the fact that dance as an art is a universal language that knows no barrier of religion, region, caste or creed.