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CHAPTER - 6

POTENTIALITIES OF ART AND ARCHITECTURAL CULTURE

OF KERALA

6.1 MUSIC OF KERALA

Music of Kerala is as old as her people and their culture. Many branches of music became noteworthy when it emerged out of its hoary past. They could be classified as,

a) The folk music which remained as the starch root, nourishing all its offshoots
b) The Vaideeka or the sacred line of music, which later on developed into Maarga Sangeetham and Sopana Sangeetam practised in the Sanctum Sanctorum of the Aarya and Dravida temples;
c) Laukeeka or the secular line, which gradually became the body and spirit of Desi Sangeetam, to prosper later on under the patronage of rulers and public, paving way for the later carnatic music;
d) The Naatya line, the soulful imitation or combination of the three if not their fusion, to exist initially on the temple stages like Koothambalam, sacred groves called Kaavus and the temporary village stages.

Deepti Omcherry (2006) maintains that “The root and the grammar were the same in all these schools and they were all governed by the basic principles, called ‘Tauryatrikam’ which denoted the harmonious blending of the Triad forms of Art viz, Geetam (vocal), Vaadyam (instrumental music) and Nrityam (dramatic dance). In dealing with the history of the music of Kerala, whether folk, sacred, secular or the traditional theatrical, what strikes one most is its sparkling varieties, each of which had an exhilarating charm and melody of its own while their songs had an unadorned beauty and simplicity, their music was marked by a natural freshness and sweetness. In their expression, hovering mood, music, dance and rhythm, they maintained a supreme balance."

From the 8th century, music in Kerala, especially of the religious line, got a new form and eloquence which were mainly in the line of the ideas and expressions of Thevaaram, Tiruvaachakam etc, of the Shaivites and Tiruvaaymozhi, etc, of the Vaishnavites which
were collected later, under one volume called Naalayira Prabandham or the Draavida-Veda Saagaram by Naadamuni, a famous vishnu bhakta kavi gaayaka. In the words of R.V. Poduval, “The composers of these hymns have showed an admirable instinct for form, grace, colour, sweetness and spiritual emotions, and they have left for posterity, gems of spontaneous songs, mellifluous and well-balanced in diction having a delicate beauty of sound and a mounting and piercing melody which goes straight into the hearts of man.” So many Malayalam prayer songs were composed after them, both in form and content, by Malayali saint poets. The development of the Manipravalam language and Malayalam script also might have influenced their growth. A style of singing, combining the old ritualistic music of Kerala with the music of Oduvaars the temple singers of Thevaaram and Araiyyars, the temple singers of Thiruvaaymozhi came into prominence under the name, Soopana. This music which was based on the principles of Tauryatrikam was handled by certain communities called Maarar, Nambeesan, Poduval, Nambiyaar, etc, who were the Araiyyars of Tamil Nadu and the music was always accompanied by its typical instruments of the sanctum, religious festivals and the traditional theatrical productions, etc of the Kerala temples belonging to both Arya and Dravida.

The aforesaid music according to Deepti Omchery (2006) continued to flourish in the state for a few succeeding centuries without much change except that it swelled in size at all levels. It was from the 14th century that the music of Kerala experienced an added charm and appeal through the introduction of Geeta Govindam. The popularity of Geeta Govindam, both as a model for religious singing at the sanctum and as a dance drama at the traditional theatre called Koothambalam, in many respects transmitted the musical melodies extant in the state. “A new form of music modeled after the Padas of Jayadeva’s Ashtapadi, dipped in melody and moving moods emerged as a result.” (R.V. Poduval)

In the opinion of Poduvaal, “Geeta Govindam caused mellifluous modification on the sentiment of the music and drumming and in the elaboration of dressing. Out of the changes of the subject, sentiment, and method, arose the distinctive Krishnanaatam which reached its fullest development in the 14th century.” Krishnanaatam, views Deepti Omchery, paved the way for Raamanaatam, and the general structure of Kathakali was more like Jayadeva’s Ashtapadi than anything else.
The value of the Kerala music, its primitiveness, nativity and spontaneity, can be assessed from its rudimentary usage, preserved in the rustic musical and dance forms of a wide variety. Apart from the fact that most of the ragas in Carnatic music, including the major ones like ‘Kalyani’, ‘Kambhoji’ etc., are abundantly used in Kathakali music, in the peculiar singing style that Kathakali demands, the region has maintained in it its flourishing repertoire of some of the rare melodies, specially conceived for the purpose of embellishment of certain emotions. These melodies are ‘Pati’, ‘Indisa’, ‘Puraniru’, Kanakkurinji’, etc. Certain other ragas like ‘Sreekandhi’, Desakshi’, ‘Nalatha’ and ‘Samantamalahari’ used in old devotional songs can produce remarkable fascinating lilt and swing of a local character. Coupled with this, the rhythm accompaniment to those songs with instruments like Edakka, Maddalam and Chenda creates a parallel process of graceful rhythmic music bringing out the universality of sentiments with musical roots reaching into the past. The genius of the people of Kerala for music could be seen from the days of ‘Chilappatikaram’. It came down to the present generation with its profound grace as it was originally conceived in this treatise as isai(music) which had two divisions, pan (full fledged raga) and tiran (its offshoot or Janya raga). There were innumerable varieties of tunes of ancient music created as a result of the combination of these pans and tirans.

Veera Kerala Varma Raja of Kottarakkara (17th A.D.) the originator of Kathakali, was a great musician, and composer as is evidenced from his Kathakali plays. Poduval records that “The music of Kerala Varma Raja has, on the whole, a strangeness added to beauty modeled after the Geeta Govindam of Jayadeva”. Since then, Kerala music which was dominated by the Thevaaram and other religious musical traditions of the southern states had to adjust itself to accommodate the Naatya line of music sprung from Geeta Govindam.

In the first quarter of the 20th century, a cultural revival started effectively and uniformly under the tireless efforts of the illustrious king Sri Chithira Thirunal, scholars and masters like Muttaiyath Bhagavathar, Kalyana Krishna Bhagavathar, T. Lakshmanan Pillai, Kutty-kkunji Thankachi, Vallothal and other celebrities, earning for Kerala, a high place in the field of music, dance, and other fine arts. Deepti Omchery (2006) highlights that “In establishing classical music and kritis at their best, and popularizing the compositions of Swathi Thirunal and others in a manner they highly deserved, various
cultural organizations, Academic institutions, and media, played a prominent role. Due to all these, today, Kerala dots a significant place in the realm of music.

Music plays a significant role in most festivals of Kerala. There are songs for harvest festivals like Onam, Tiruvathira, Pooram, etc., The pastoral life of Kerala has a rich ambience of music that accompanies the leisure time dances like Kummi, Kolkali, Margamkali, Dappumuttukali, etc., Besides there are songs of Padayani, Theyyam Kummatti, etc. All rituals that are performed at the different stages of a person’s life have their own music in Kerala.

Folk Music

Kerala boasts of a gigantic wealth of folk music to which songs, dance and its instrumental music are blended in an inseparable and, melodic harmony. The state, during the past was divided into various regions like pastoral, arable, desert, oceanic, etc, each having different communities with typical songs and dances, suitable to their requirements. Subsequently, down the ages, the folk songs and dances of Kerala swelled into countless varieties conveying common themes like devotion, love, grief, tender affections and lullaby. There emerged typical themes suitable to ones own festivals, games, costumes, food habits, dress and ornaments, etc,. Serious studies in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century paved the way for collection and codification of folk songs under various titles and topics. Mahakavi Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer, grouped them under two powerful schools, viz, Vadakkan – Pattukal (songs of the North) and Thekkan Paatukal (songs of the south) along with innumerable songs based on history, mythology, science, geography, socialism, astrology, ghosts, worship, festivals, labour, romance, hero worship, male and female games, children’s pastimes, etc.,

Refrain is another special feature of folk music. Most folk songs are set in ragas that have given life and vigour to Carnatic music. For instance, Thottam songs carry elements of kedara raga and Thumbithullal songs have elements of saveri raga. Some folk songs are so composed as to create the right atmosphere required for a ritual. Pulluvanpattu for example starts with a slow rhythm that gradually gathers tempo. A variety of musical instruments are used in the folk tradition. Only rarely as in Poorakkali, Kummi, etc., are folk arts performed without them. Forms like Kolkali, Kambadikkali, Kolattom, Vattakkali etc., use sticks. Deepti Omchery argues that “the nature and
status of folk arts have changed considerably since Independence and with the advent of audio-visual media, yet, folk arts should be safeguarded.”

**Carnatic Classical Music**

The carnatic classical music, made its presence known in Kerala, a little before the time of Swathi Thirunal, and had its efflorescence during his reign, when a stream of musicians came from all over the South, and North. The great task of restoring the original musical excellences of the compositions of Swathi Thirunal, Irayimman Thampy, Meruswami, K.C. Kesava Pillai and others, and, safeguarding a tradition that was solely original, rests upon the patrons and lovers of music and organized bodies in Kerala.

### 6.2 ARTS OF KERALA

Kapila Vatsyayan (1989) remembers thus about his visit to Kerala “I am identified as one amongst the millions of visitors to this land of Kerala who have become in the past and the present, admirers almost devotees, of its richly textured fabric, lush green, natural environment, its deep mysterious dark forests from where emerge burning bright fed flames of energy, and its quiet dignity and austerity symbolized by the colour white, which both manifests and clothes the culture. In Kerala, fortunately so far the entire spectrum of rainbow colours is available. Each colour (i.e., each facet) distinctly defined and yet leading to that colour white”. Most important is the fact culture and artistic traditions are not ruins of a dead archaeological past, they are the living traditions always dynamic, changing and yet perennial.

**Kathakali**

Kapila Vatsyayan (1989) categorically states that “Kathakali is the bridge between forms classified as tribal and folk and those termed as classical”. Local festivals at temples such as Ambalapuzha in central Travancore and among certain of the ancient tribes, and general festivals such as that of Onam, at which traditional dances are performed, are regarded by scholars as continuations of seasonal celebrations. They began among the tribes in primitive dances and songs with instrumental accompaniment, praising the deities of hills and forests. Such folk-dances are regarded as the original material of the later Kathakali.
The progressive social changes in Kerala have affected the growth of Kathakali as well. Every effort has been made to reform Kathakali with a view to meeting the needs of a reformed and changing society and making it attractive and enjoyable to the common people of all communities and classes. The reduction in the hours of performance to three or four hours, change in the stage direction, use of modern make-up materials, freedom for women to act on the stage as female characters and above all, adoption of non-Hindu themes like Maria Magdalana are some of the innovations which have made Kathakali a more progressive form of art.

Kathakali which symbolizes the visual art of Kerala has now developed to be qualified as a universal art. This distinguished art which has not even a distant connection with any foreign art has attracted the whole world and received unequivocal praise from them all. Despite the complex technics of dramatization, intricate artificiality in the dressing system and miming action, kathakali is still being appreciated by everyone.

The main reason for its appeal is its attractiveness gained by the perfect blending of numerous varieties of fine arts. Kathakali is an art form to which the term 'total theatre' may be applied. Various art forms such as dance, dance-drama, music, instrumental-music, perfect mechanical art (shilpam) etc., have been incorporated into kathakali. The ancient preceptors of kathakali have combined various facets of many important arts in it, so that various levels of appreciation emanate from it. Kathakali has the ability to entertain an audience of varying tastes. The organizational beauty of the art increases the impact of its outward appearance.

Kathakali is related to the religious and social art forms that existed in ancient Kerala. Various art forms which can be classified as dance, drama and thullal influenced the cultural life of people. The village arts which were related to modes of worship and rituals like Thottam, Theeyattu, Mudiyettu and Padayani were the originating points of dance, instrumental – music and other fine arts. The forms of attire, the four forms of acting and the various techniques in stage presentation of kathakali also merit consideration. Kathakali, though in a sense is a particular way of dramatic action, is certainly different from the modern form of dramatics, in its dressing systems, ways of action and stage arrangements. In this case, it is indebted to the ancient Indian dramatic
systems like Koodiyattom. The attires in kathakali do not represent individuals, but are manifestations of the three gunas of nature, i.e., satya (light or noble), rajas (aggressive), and tamas (darkness) represented by pacha, kathi and thadi respectively.

In kathakali the attappadams meant to convey the verbal concepts are sung from the background. The meaning of each padam sung by the Bhagavatar (Musician) is represented through symbols and bodily expressions by the actors. Aaharyam, is the arrangement of the stage and the dressing of the actors. Kalari and aniyara have a very important place in kathakali. Kalari transforms an ordinary novice into a gifted actor. The kalaris follow the gurukula system of instruction even now, Aniyara is the place where the elaborate attire that form a major part of the visual spectacle is made. The artists of the aniyara perform the face of transforming an ordinary man into God, asura or superhuman beings.

The middle of the twentieth century was a period of modernization for kathakali. The founding of Kalamandalam under the initiative of Vallathol Narayana Menon and programmes given by them in many parts of India and foreign countries helped to propagate this art. It also gained recognition and laurels from the developed part of the world. In Delhi, Patna and Calcutta new kathakali centres were established. Several foreigners came to Kerala Kalamandalam and other centres and were enrolled as students. Kathakali is a genuine classical art. There is an opinion that in order to transform kathakali into a popular art, certain reforms are necessary. But in the name of reform some people introduce distorted and awkward forms. However changes in a technical visual art like kathakali can be brought out only after very careful consideration.

As part of modernizing, propagating, promoting and popularizing Kathakali, the International Centre for Kathakali at New Delhi has taken up a continuing projects since 1980 of producing new plays based on not only traditional and mythological stories, but also historical stories, European classics and Shakespearean plays. Recently the ICK produced Kathakali plays based on Shakespear’s Othello and Greek-Roman mythology of Psyche and Cupid.

Kathakali is considered to be a combination of five elements of fine art:

- Expressions (Natyam, the component with emphasis on facial expressions)
• Dance (Nritham, the component of dance with emphasis on rhythm and movement of hands, legs and body)
• Enactment (Nrityam, the element of drama with emphasis on “mudras”, which are hand gestures)
• Song/vocal accompaniment (Geetha)
• Instrument accompaniment (Vadyam)

Even though the lyrics/literature would qualify as another independent element called Sahithyam it is considered as a component of Geetha or music, as it plays only a supplementary role to Nritham, Nrithyam and Natyam.

The most popular stories enacted are Nalacharitham (a story from the Mahabharata), Duryodhana Vadham, Kalyanasougandhikam, Keechakavadham, Kiratham, Karnashapatham. Recently, as part of attempts to further popularize the art, stories from other cultures and mythologies, such as those of Mary Magdalene from the Bible, Homer’s Iliad and William Shakespeare’s King Lear and Julius Caesar besides Goethe’s Faust too have been adapted into Kathakali scripts and on to its stage.

There are 24 basic mudras—the permutation and combination of which would add up a chunk of the hand gestures in vogue today. Each can again be classified into ‘Samaana-mudras (one mudra symbolizing two entities) or misra-mudras (both the hands are used to show these mudras). The mudras are a form of sign language used to tell the story. Known as Sampradayam, there are leading Kathakali styles that differ from each other in subtleties like choreographic profile, position of hand gestures and stress on dance than drama and vice versa. Some of the major original kathakali styles included.

1. Vettathu Sampradayam
2. Kalladikkodan Sampradayam
3. Kaplingadu Sampradayam

Kathakali is an efflorescent art form of Kerala. It has been described as a true representation of the artistic traditions of India and one of the most magnificent theatres of imagination. It is a highly stylized dance-drama which serves to present story themes
derived from the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and other Hindu epics, myths and legends. The dance aspect consists of pure dance (nritya) as well as mime (abhinaya).

The roots of kathakali need to be nourished first in Kerala. It would automatically gain popularity in foreign soil. Efforts should be directed to enrich the art form and cultivate interested groups who will take pride in the propagation of Kerala’s own art extravaganza. Kathakali is to be viewed as a complete expression of art. Kathakali is the designated, flagship art form of Kerala” (Panayoor Sankarankutty, 2004)

Mohiniyattam

The Devadasi dance tradition which developed through the temple danseuses is an important type among the dance patterns of India. Mohiniyattam in Kerala took shape in the tradition of Devadasi dance and grew and developed a classical status.

The word ‘Mohini’ literally means a maiden who excites desire or steals the heart of the on looker. It is a solo female dance in which the striking features is the musical melody and rhythmical swaying of the dancer from side to side and the smooth and unbroken flow of the body movement. The dance is focused essentially on feminine moods and emotions. In recent times the contribution made by Mohiniyattam to the cultural heritage of Kerala has come to be increasingly recognized. Along with Kathakali and Ottam Thullal, the Kerala Kalamandalam, Cheruthuruthi, is offering a course of instruction in Mohiniyattam also. The present day Mohiniyattam has evolved from the regional variation of Dasiyattom which was prevalent in south India. This regional variation of Dasiyattom was known as Avinayakoothu. The main feature of this dance is the rhythmic interpretation of the meaning of songs with hand gestures and body actions. The basic approach is the same in present day Mohiniyattam as well. Here also the meaning of the song is brought out through the movements of eyes, brows, hand gestures and dance. The musical instruments used like the kuzhithalam, tudi, mukhaveena etc., are also the same. From Avinayakkoottu to Mohiniyattom it might have been a long process of evolution involving addition, elimination and experimentation.

The present day mohiniyattom has evolved from the regional variation of dasiyattom which was prevalent in south India. This regional variation of dasiyattom was
known as avinayakkoothu. The main feature of this dance is the rhythmic interpretation of the meaning of songs with hand gestures and body actions. The basic approach is the same in present day mohiniyattom as well. Here also the meaning of the song is brought out through the movements of eyes, brows, hand gestures and dance. The musical instruments used like kuzhithalam, tudi, mukhaveena etc. are also the same. From avinayakkoothu to mohiniyattom it might have been a long process of evolution involving addition, elimination and experimentation.

Folk Dances

Folk dances represent the beginning of Kerala dance. The unsophisticated imagination and rhythmic impulses of a sensitive people found supreme expression in a variety of indigenous folk dances, the earliest forms of which were developed by the tribes. The primitive songs and dances practised by them to the accompaniment of instrumental music praised the deities of the hills and forests. It may be noted that folk art of Kerala can be classified into two broad categories – ritualistic and non-ritualistic. Ritualistic can be further divided into – Devotional, performed to please a particular god and goddess, and Magical Art Forms. Theyyam, Thira, Poothamthira, Kannyar Kali, Kummattikali, etc. are some of devotional art forms.

Traditional folk dances are of great variety. One of the most charming is the Kummi, where the rhythm of the song and steps begins in slow beats and gets exciting acceleration as well as complication.

_Thiruvathira kali (Kaikottikali):_ This is popular all over Kerala. The main ritual of this is performed on Thiruvathira day, in the month of Dhanu. This is also performed, sometimes, during Onam and during marriage celebrations. Without distinction of caste of creed, this is performed by all sections. Young women present this. Thiruvathira Day in the month of Dhanu is the birthday of Paramasiva. Legend has it that this was the dance form presented by Parvathy, in honour of the birthday. The first ritual is the ceremonial bath by the young women who go either to the river or the pond and perform what is called Thudichukali (beating the water to produce a loud report). This is observed from Aswathi day to Thiruvathira day (seven days).
After the bath, the costume and make up are donned. At the pond or river itself, the young women done fine, snowhite, freshly washed and ironed clothes, and preparing Ashtamangalyam and lighting Nilavilaku adorn themselves with sandalwood paste, Chandu, Kumkum, and turmeric powder and return to their homes. Pathirapoochoodal is yet another ritual. Such flowers as Koduveli, Adakamanian are usually used for this.

The songs of Thiruvathira, or Thiruvathira Pattukal, are in the sopana style, the Kerala version of the classical carnatic music. As for the performance, the performers stand in a circle. Two lines of the song are sung, to a rhythm, by the leader of the group. In tune with the rhythm all move in attractive, stylized steps and beat their palms together and sing, in unison, the two lines already sung by the leader. The performers go through two different movements. They take dance steps and clap their palms. Or pairing off and turning face to face, without disturbing the circle, strike their palms against those of each other. They go through various permutations and combinations of steps.

Another favourite form is the Tiruvathira dance by maidens in a circle which revolves with steps alternating with the palms of each maiden meet those of a girl next to her in rhythmic claps. A narrative song is also sung by the dancers as they go round. The cultural level has always been fairly high in the middle and upper classes and women fully participate in it. Charadupinnikali or Urikkali is a dance form practiced in South Kerala. The play is performed holding the cords hung at place of performance. At the end of play, the cords become a rough form of uri and later the uri is undone. This makes a part of Thiruvathira.

**Margamkali** : Among the performing arts of Christians, Margamkali deserves special mention. It is a group dance developed by the Syrian Christians of Kerala. The word ‘Margam’ means path, way, religion or creed. The real source of inspiration for Margamkali was Kalaripayattu which was very popular when the Christian community had developed the form. This is a martial dance form practiced by the Christians of Kottayam District. References are seen in ramban songs about this art form. Margam kali is performed at the festival occasions of Church and marriages of Suriyani Christians.

Twelve men stand around a lighted nilavilakku and dance with song. Song and chuvadu (steps) have equal importance. They dance fourteen padangal with different
songs. White dhoti, banian and talekkettu (turban) are used as costumes. Lighting of nilavilakku and rangavandanam are the preliminary rituals. Titthaka thintha, mukkanni, kaccappatta and irattappadam are the important chuvadukal. Certain historical facts related to the old testament and old churches are seen in the songs of Margamkali.

Margamkali is a ritual folk art of the Syrian Christians of Kottayam and Thrissur districts. A dozen dancers sing and dance around a lighted wick lamp (Nilavilakku), clad in the simple traditional white dhoti and sporting a peacock feather on the turban to add a touch of colour.

This is an allegorical enactment with the lamp representing Christ and the performers his disciples. The performance is usually held in two parts and begins with songs and dances narrating the life of St. Thomas the apostle. It then takes a striking turn with a martial play of artificial swords and shield.

Kolkali: Muslim Kolkali is similar to the Kolkali practiced by the Christians and Harijans. It is a group dance in a circle with short sticks in the hands of the dancers with which they make the rhythm by beating them. The vibrant steps are accompanied by the vocal music consisting of meaningless syllables followed by songs. The dance goes from slow to a fast tempo creating an interesting climax. There are diverse choreographic patterns in the dance.

Oppana: Oppana and Aravumuttu are the popular forms of entertainment among Muslims. Oppana is a form accompanied by clapping of hands. Both men and women participate in it. In marriages the women, move in a circle and receive the bride while men stand aside singing songs and receive the bridegroom. Aravana is a dance, which the Muslims of Kerala had learned from the Arabs. Being an Arabic dance, the music that accompanies it is also Arabic. The rhythm is played on an instrument called daf or tap, a round percussion instrument with one side covered with hide. Oppana is a popular form of social entertainment among the Mappila community of Kerala, south India, prevalent all over, especially in the northern district of Malappuram. Oppana is generally presented by females, numbering about fifteen including musicians, on a wedding day.
Harmonium, Tabla, Ganjira and Elathaalam are the musical instruments employed for this performance. Only the Mappilapaattu will be sung on the occasion. The word Oppana may have been derived from an Arabic form Afna. There are two types of Oppana, one is Oppana chayal another is Oppana murukkam. When Oppana chayal is performed, they do not clap their hands. If it begins with Chayal it would also end with Chayal only.

**Kathaprasangam**

Kathaprasangam is one of the most popular forms in central and southern Kerala and at present spreading into northern Kerala also. Secular themes, which have inspirational and emotive value are normally chosen. Most of the artists have radical persuasion, and often select themes that conveys a social message. Great works by Shakespeare, Ibsen, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Victor Hugo and others have been adapted by these artists. Many outstanding novels and stories by Malayalam writers have also been adapted. The artist narrates the story interspersed by songs and anecdotes which often beat the mark of sharp social criticism, with the accompaniment of a few musical instruments like violin and harmonium. Kathaprasangam is a unique form that has grown along with the secular and democratic movements.

**Ochirakali**

It is held at a place called Ochira in Alleppey district. The kali (play) in which a large number of people participate is held as a part of an annual festival to commemorate a battle fought between the kings of two feudal principalities, Kayamkulam and Ambalapuzha. The festival falls around 15th June and it lasts for two days.

**Chavittunatakam**

Chavittunatakam is a Christian dramatic form which was introduced during the time of the Portuguese in Kerala in the 16th century A.D. ‘Chavittu’ means the rhythmic steps which accompanied the recitation of lines. Though it developed as the Christian counterpart of Kathakali, the Chavittunatakam is modeled more after the European Opera and Ballet than after Kathakali. It resembles the miracle plays of the West in
several respects. The costumes, make-up and stage settings show unmistakable traces of Western influence.

Chavittunatakam is a musical drama with songs in Tamil meter; sung by the actors themselves with musical accompaniment of chenda and elathalam. Maddalam, mridangam harmonium, nadaswaram, flute and fiddle are also used. The rhythmic stamping is extremely important; it not only sets the tone of the drama, but also provides variations in expression among the characters. There are sixteen types of basic chuvadu with a number of variations like irattippu, kalasam, idakkalasam and kavittam in each chuvadu. Chavittunatakam has also a marital aspect as war scene is an essential ingredient of the performance. The dress worn by the characters include western forms including helmet, breast plate, boots, gloves etc. The most sensual blend of cultural influences can be seen in this Christian dance-drama. In Chavittunatakam there are large numbers of characters all in glittering medieval dress. It is the form of traditional musical dance drama, which symbolizes the martial tradition of Kerala Christians.

Chavittunatakam is usually performed on open stages. Sometimes the interior of a church is also a venue. The whole play is performed through musicals. Dance and instrumental music are combined in this art form. Foot stamping dance, fighting and fencing are essential part of Chavittunatakam. Royal dresses and ornamental costumes are necessary.

Krishnattam

Manavedan, a great scholar and patron of art was considered as the creator of Krishnattam. He wrote a drama based on Krishna’s life and choreographed it into an elegant art form called the Krishnattam (the play of Krishna). He also gave it a dance base.

**Semi Classical Dances**

**Kerala Natanam (Kerala Dance):** Kerala Natanam is a new style of dance that is now recognized as a distinct art form evolved from Kathakali, a form of Indian dance-drama.

**Thullal:** Thullal is the solo-dance which tells a story, normally drawn from puranic legends, through verbal acting and miming. Compared to Koodiyattom and Kathakali,
the mode of dancing and miming are simple and the language used in the performance can communicate with the ordinary people directly. The Thullal emerged in the eighteenth century. Thullal literally means dance. This art form is the cumulative product of all traditional theatrical arts of Kerala, both folk and classical. Kunchan Nambiar the creator of Thullal, was vigorously earthy. The art form still retains its satirical touch, and lends the artist the freedom to improvise, more so on humour. Its incidental satire makes this art form more popular among the common man.

The art of Thullal was evolved as a system out of the various singing and dancing art forms of the people incorporating apt features of classical styles, so that, by the harmonious blend of the folk and classical forms of art, it represented the accumulated aesthetic experience of all sections of the people, high and low. The themes were drawn from the never failing myths and epics of India. Based on different styles of narrative singing, rhythms of dancing, foot work and make-up of the dancer, three varieties of Thullal were evolved in course of time. They are: Ottan Thullal, Seethankan Thullal, Parayan Thullal

Koodiyattom: The Koodiyattom which emerged by the ninth century was a full-fledged dramatic presentation in Sanskrit, the repertoire including plays by Bhasa, Harsha, Mahendra Pallava and Sanskrit plays by Kerala writers like Saktibhadra and Kulasekhara. Koodiyattom is a temple art performed traditionally by a specific community. It belongs to the genre of drama. Koodiyattom is probably the only surviving form of the traditional presentation of Sanskrit drama. Koodiyattom embraces elements of music and dance.

Koodiyattom is the earliest form of dramatic art in Kerala. Tha Malayalam poem, Unnuneelisandesam (14\textsuperscript{th} century), contains a reference to the Koodiyattom performance in the Taliyil temple. “Koodiyattom” literally means “acting together” and has two or more actors appearing on the stage at the same time as in modern dramas. The Chakiar performs the role of male characters and the Nangiars (women of the Nambiar community) those of the female characters. The Nangiars also help the Chakiars by sounding cymbals and reciting the Sanskrit verses which he enacts. The Nambiar has also a role to play, viz., to work the Mizhavu, a close necked copper metal drum. There is also a Vidushaka (clown) who recites for the benefit that the Chakiar
enacts. The verses in the Koodiyattam are all in Sanskrit and the Chakiars use twenty plays of different authors for staging Koodiyattam; eg: the plays of Bhasa, Saktibhadra, Kulasekhara Varman, Sri Harsha, Bodhayana, Neelakanta and Kalidasa. The Attaprakarams and the Kramadeepika written by the Sanskrit poet Tolan provided detailed guidelines in regard to the various modes of acting.

Koodiyattam, meaning “combined acting” signifies Sanskrit drama presented in the traditional style in temple theatres of Kerala and Tamil nadu. It is the only surviving specimen of the ancient Sanskrit theatre. The abhinaya for Koodiyattom is highly conventionalized and to a great extent follows the precepts of Natyasastra. There is no regular music in Kudiyattam but there are different modes of reciting the verses or even the prose passages. The modes depend on various factors, such as the type of the characters who are reciting, then the nature of the situation described, and the sentiments conveyed. These modes of recitation have different technical names such as Indala, Tarkan, Veladhuli.

**Koothu**

Information on Koothu and Koodiyattom shows that they were in vogue in all major temples from ninth century, with the formal aspects fully developed before fifteenth century. Koothu performed in temples were of three types, Prabandhakoothu, Nangiar koothu and Koodiyattom. Koothu was conducted chakkiyar, where the story is enacted by vachika abhinaya i.e., verbal acting, Nangiar koothu, which used to be in vogue in earlier centuries, were performed by women, who sang the songs and acted with considerable emphasis on acting. Koodiyattom used to be combined dance drama conducted by chakkiyar and nangiar in which more participants were possible, Separate nangiar koothu apparently disappeared in later centuries with nangiar becoming an accessory to chakkiyar, singing crucial songs or hymns and using the instrument, kuzhithalam.

Nanniar Koothu is a dance form conducted in some prominent Kerala temples purely as a ceremonial ritual, presented by women only. The Nanniars, who are the womenfolk of the Nambiar community, staged the Nanniar Koothu in a hereditary tradition.
Yakshagana

The Kasargod area of Kerala has its own characteristic folk play or dance called Yakshagana. An ancient form of dramatic presentation in Kannada language that has been in vogue in the Karnataka region, Yakshagana bears some similarities with Kathakali in the matter of dress, songs and accompaniments. However, the costumes worn by female characters are different from those in Kathakali and again, unlike in Kathakali, the actors in Yakshagana speak. Parthi Subha who was born at Kumbla in the Kasargod Taluk of Kerala is hailed as “the father of the Yakshagana.”

Martial Arts

Kalari: Kalari is a martial art of Kerala. The origin of the Dravidian word Kalari itself is doubtful, whether it is derived from the Sanskrit word Khalurika or vice versa. The meaning of the word is – a parade place for military exercises. The word is used to mean both military training centre and a place for acquisition of knowledge, Kalari also means a temple where the family deity presides. The word has also other meanings like assembly, business place etc. Some of the choreographed sparring in Kalari Payat can be applied to dance and kathakali dancers who knew martial arts were believed to be markedly better than the other performers. Some traditional Indian dance schools still incorporate kalari payat as part of their exercise regimen.

Ritual Arts

Teyyam: Theyyam is the most colourful and spectacular ritual theatre form of Kerala. The meaning of the word Theyyam is Daivam i.e. ‘God’. Theyyattom means the dance of God. In theyyattom the performer is supposed to transform himself into God. The worship of Mother Goddess, ancestor, hero, animal, snake are the important theme of Theyyam dance. People who died in the battlefield, innocent women who had to commit suicide, persons killed by the local chieftains, were deified and they were propitiated in the form of Theyyams in front of the shrines. All the villagers gather there and seek blessings.

There are about four hundred varieties in Theyyattom. Each has got its own myth, costumes, make-up, choreography and songs. The period of Theyyam festival is between Tulam and Edavam. Tender coconut leaves and red clothes are the materials
for costumes. The structure of headgear and uduthukettu (waist-dress) are made of arecanut tree and bamboo. Huge headgears and lighted wicks fixed on the waist are some of the characteristics of theyyattom.

There are two stages in Theyyattom: Thottam, the preliminary ritual and Theyyam. For some Theyyams there will be another stage names Vellattom. The myth of the deity is recited by thotta, in terms of songs with musical accompaniments. At the end of thottam the possession takes place. There will not be elaborate make-up and costume for thottam. Theyyam is the second stage. To establish the super-human level, costumes, headgears and facial make-up are employed to that of super-human characters. Theyyams hear the complaints and requests of the people and console them by giving prasadam. The Theyyam dance has different steps known as Kalaasams. Each Kalaasam is repeated systematically from the first to the eighty step of footwork. A performance is a combination of playing of musical instruments, vocal recitations, dance, and peculiar makeup and costumes. The stage-practices of Theyyam and its ritualistic observations make it one of the most fascinating theatrical arts of India.

Theyyam is a ritualistic dance with its rare and grotesque make-up and costume, lively foot work, gymnastic fervor and ritualistic vitality. Theyyam represents a glorious period of folk life in Kerala and the souls of the dead heroes of the land and the gods and goddesses are supposed to come in the midst of the people through the medium of the possessed dancers and converse on matters of even contemporary significance. It is the worship of spirits by invoking them to the mortal body of the dancer who impersonates them and gives blessing to the believers.

According to K.K.N. Kurup, “The over emphasis given to the sophisticated arts like Kathakali and other Attam’s (dances) caused negligence towards the folk culture. Generally the Theyyams were treated as mere superstitions of the illiterate masses. Having origins in antiquity, the folk culture of Theyyattam withstood the mighty flow of centuries and moulded themselves into the present form according to the aesthetic and religious imagination of the masses. The cumulative growth of the folk arts over several centuries became an inspiration to the sophisticated arts of Kerala.”

In Kadathanad and other places Theyyam is known as Tira or Tirayattam. There, the performance is conducted on a mansory stage called ‘Tara’ and the word
Tarayattam was probably changed into Tirayattam in course of time. The person who plays and personifies the deity is generally called Kolam. One of the salient features of Theyyattam is its colourful costume. The hierarchy of gods, goddesses, heroes, demons, spirits and other mythical beings are personified in the plays. In the makeup and costumes, the Theyyams still preserve its folk character. The later sophisticated arts and dances are much indebted to this folk culture of Theyyams for its vivid costumes and colourful make up. Actors, priests, painters and decorators, craftsmen and musicians, have with their co-operation and hereditary skills preserved Theyyattam as a great festival. Even though related to religion and its rituals, they are presented on a large scale with theatrical artistry, with the co-operation of all communities. Many of the Theyyams have a dramatic development of the plot and action. The heroes like Kathiavanoor Veeran have touching stories and a gradual development of the action in the performance. The Theyyattam as a ritual and a dance form is supported by a vast literature of folk songs. Being a common festival the Theyyattam has created a cultural integration among several castes and communities of the area.

“The present position of Theyyam is precarious. The present performers belong to the last generation of practitioners of this traditional art. The future of Theyyattam is indeed dark for the present generation who live in an age in which cheap novelty is preferred to tradition, and vulgarity masquerade as art. It is the duty of Government, Universities and other cultural bodies to preserve these art forms which reflect the past sentiments, high aesthetic sense and cherished values of the people (K.K.N. Kurup, 1973).

According to Kapila Vatsyayan (1989), “The Theyyam form of dance-drama in Kerala holds a power which has bewildered participators for centuries and has today attracted the attention of foreigners for its spectacular headgears masks, etc.” Theyyam is a common annual celebration in all the major Bhagavathi temples in North Kerala. The annual Theyyattam in Muchilottukavu (Chirakkal) attracts enormous crowds. In Madayikavu the Theyyattam which lasts for 17 days is an important festival. The members of a particular caste called the Theyyampadi Kurups have Theyyattam as their time-honoured occupation. Apart from the large scale Theyyattam performances which take place annually there are certain temples where a variant of the Theyyattam is performed as an offering to the deity every day. A kind of ceremonial dancing called

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Vellattam performed by the Peruvannan is a daily feature in the Urpazhachikavu in Edakkad amsam near Cannanore.

**Kalam-Kalampattu:** The Kalam in the Kali cult, denotes a floor painting of the goddess. The Kalampattu begins with the beginning of the Kalam itself. The Brahmin priest is assigned the privilege of doing the first special puja of the image before the onset of the Kalampattu. Kalampattu is a kind of song sung by persons belonging to different castes which are lower down in the caste hierarchy. Kaniyan draws the Kalam of Gandharva, and Pulluva that of serpents. Vannan uses a stringed instrument called Nantuni. The Kurup who sings Kalampattu uses a percussion instrument with cymbals and gong as accompaniments. This is traditionally a temple art known as Bhagavathyppattu or Bhadrakalippattu. It is also like ‘Mudiyettu’. The figure of Devi is developed with the judicious combination of various colors made from roots and leaves and grains. Usually a particular sect Brahmin called Kuruppanmar has inherent devotional skill in this art.

**Thookkam** which is performed as a nercha (offering) in Bhagavathi temples, particularly in Alleppey and Kottayam districts, though strictly speaking, it is not a performing art which entertains the audience, Thookam attracts a number of spectators. Thookkam is of two kinds, viz., Garudan Thookkam (kite swinging) and Toni Thookkam (boat swinging).

**Garudan Thookkam (Eagle Hanging)** is a ritual art form performed in Kali temples of south Kerala, south India. The people who dress up as Garuda perform the dance. After the dance performance, the hand-designate dangle from a shaft hooking the skin on his back. In some places, the ritual is performed colourfully with Garudas taken in a procession on bullock carts or boats or hand pulled carts.

**Mudiyettu** : This is a more elaborate and dramatic form of ritual dance in which the Kali cult emerges in all its entirety. Mudiyettu portrays the fight between Kali and Darika, ending up with the slaying of Darika. Mudiyettu begins with Kalamazhikkal (wiping out of the floor painting). Mudiyettu literally means the placing of the crown on the head. The moment the person impersonating Kali in the ritual dance drama wears the headgear, he get possessed and remains possessed all through the night in the battle scenes that ensue. Mudiyettu is the symbolic form of Kaali worship. In this art, according to Sasidharan Klari (2004), Kaali, Kalam and Kali are presented as strong bonding forces.
This is a ritual drama in vogue in Ernakulam and Kottayam Districts. Kuruppanmar and Maranmar are the performers. Mudiyettu takes place in Kali temples. The myth is the fight between Kali and Darika. The musicians gather in front of the lighted lamp and play with the drums and elathalam which is called arangathu keli. After that they sing a raga, kedara gourula. Entrance of Darika, entrance of Kali and Kooli, the fight between Kali and Darika, killing of Darika by removing the headgear symbolically, are the important sequences of the performances. These could be divided into eight scenes. Mudiyettu comes very close to drama.

Mudiyettu is a ritualistic dance springing form the bhagavathi or bhadrakali cult. The dance performed by the Brahmin is known as Kuruppanmar or Purohithan or Ezhavathy or Kavutheeya or Kuruppan. The theme depicts the glory and triumph or Bhagavathy over the demon Darika. The characters are all heavily made up with gorgeous costumes, intricate and elaborate and with conventional facial paintings, tall head-gears etc. Attired and adorned exotically with a unique weirdness and hideousness, the characters seem quite supernatural. Their mien and array make them colorful, imposing and awe-inspiring in the extreme.

Kotamuri: In Kotamuri, the cow is held as the symbol of prosperity of the village. The vegetative cult find its identity with the social context in the form of a ritual in which a young boy is made up as Kotamuri. A protruding wooden cow face is fitted on a frame tucked into the boys waist. A couple or so of jesters wearing masks painted on green sheaths, dance to the rhythm of songs by the accompanying singers.

Poorakkali: Poorakkali is a temple festival in the northern areas of Kerala, held in the Bhagavathy temples extending for nine days in the Malayalam month of Meenam. This festival celebrates the rejoicing on the rebirth of Kama, the god of love and the enjoyment of people in regaining the feelings of love that were lost when Kama was
burnt by the third eye of Shiva. Poorakkali combines in itself, the rich elements of dance, music, martial art, literature, poetry and philosophy. Poorakkali is still a resourceful dance form of North Malabar. Contemporary issues and social problems feature in this meaningful folk cultural expression. Poorakkali is the manifestation of sublimation of the ecstasy experienced by a society transmitted from any individual’s emotional fantasies (K.K.Karunakaran, 1999).

This is a folk dance performed by the men of Kasargode and Kannur districts. This could be classified as a folk drama as well as a martial dance. No instrument is used in this art form. Marathukali is the second part of Poorakkali. This means, the competition of two troupes. Only the leaders of the groups participate in the arguments, question and answers etc. Chidambarasasthra, yogasastra, bharatha sastra, natryasasthra and yogi natakam are the important parts of Marathukali.

**Parichamuttukali:** It is a group dance with the dancers holding sword and shield made of wood. With a major stress on the Kerala folk tunes, the rhythmic mould of these being shaped from the meaningless syllables which form the language of the folk instruments. The dancers tie a string of bells around the ankles and they move in a circle. For Parichamuttukali, the dancers have to undergo rigorous training in Kalari.

**Pampinthullal or Sarpam Thullal:** There exists an elaborate ritualistic ceremony called Pampinthullal (Serpent dance) conducted for propitiating the serpent gods. This ceremony takes place during the Malayalam months of Kanni, Thulam, Kumbham and Medam. The Ayilyam (the Aslesha star) on which falls the birthday of serpents is held auspicious for the serpent dance ceremony. This is a magical ritual practised by the Pulluva caste for the prosperity of the family. Apart from songs in praise of snakes, specific offerings are given to the snake deities. It was practised all over Kerala in olden times. The ritual is known as sarpakkalam and pampinthullal.

**Velakali:** Velakali, a dance evolved from the martial culture, is performed in some temples as a spectacle during festivals in which the whole village participates. This dance originated in Ambalapuzha which gained importance in the 16th century AD as a coastal principality ruled by a Brahmin Raja having the family name ‘Devanarayana’. Most of these Rajas were great patrons of art and learning. One Devanarayana who lived in the 18th century had encouraged many poets and artists in his royal court.
During the 17-18th centuries, the coastal principality of Ambalapuzha had commercial contacts with the Portunguese and Dutch. Several wars were fought in the sea with these powers by the raja and his predecessors. Velakali was conceived as a reminiscence of these armed conflicts, a re-enactment of those wars waged in the sea and land. The dance form assumed the shape of an earlier art called Naikkan Tullal.

The subject-matter and technique of the Velakali point back to a period in the history of the Kerala region when the conjoint military discipline and folk relaxation came under the growing influences of the culture that had established itself in North India, and proceeded southwards, carrying with it the philosophical ideas and religious conceptions and observances, of the ancestral Aryan seers; carrying also what is more apposite to the subject, the imaginative embodiments of deific powers and processes in the Puranas, whose stories became the inexhaustible source of the arts of Hindu India, and have remained so to this day.

This spectacular martial dance is performed by men in some of the temples of southern Kerala. The dancers, clad in the traditional clothes and colourful headgear engage in vigorous movements and dexterous sword play, to the accompaniment of an orchestra comprising the maddalam, elathalam, kombu and kuzhal. Velakali originated in Ambalappuzha. The dance form is a regular feature of the annual festivities at the Ambalappuzha Sree Krishna temple in Alappuzha district.

**Patayani:** Patayani is a ritualistic dance, which literally means an array of common people. Patayani involves many powerful themes of esoteric appeal. The whole village activity corporate in this popular art. The figures in Patayani consists of Pisachu, Kali, Karakkura, Pillatini, Bhairavi, Kalam etc. The masks are painted with a grotesque surrealistic touch. The round eyes and the triangular ears and abnormal size of the head gear give a touch of super human dimension. Patayani is a ritual art form of Kottayam and Pathanamthitta districts. Kadammanitta, Othera, Chengannur are some of the places, where patayani is still existing. Padayani starts as a procession which is comprised of various kolam, musical accompaniments, indigenous torches etc, from a place distant from the Devi temple. Small groups of people join it and the procession becomes a huge one when it reaches the temple premises. Kappoli, pulavrittam and thavadi are some of the important rituals in padayani.
Kutira (horse) Ganapathy, Pakshi (bird), Yakshi, Madan, Marutha, Pisach, Kalan and Bhairavi are the important kolams appearing in this ritual form. Tappu is the dominant musical instrument of padayani. The performers also use chenda and elathalam. The musicians sing and the kolams dance. This is a folk theatre form in which audience participation takes place widely during the performance.

Folk Arts and Songs

There is a very rich folk song tradition in Kerala. Farmers, peasants, ploughing or harvesting and the boat men plying the oars on the palm-fringed back waters forget the tedium of toil by singing songs. Then the happiness of the harvest season, of the sacramental union of man and woman, of the advent of progeny also found expression in beautiful melodies.

Many classical composers also used folk songs. Irayimman Tampy, wrote a lyric for the melody of the traditional lullaby which is one of the most beautiful songs of this kind in Malayalam. Another lullaby melody was chosen by Cherussseri in the fifteenth century to retell the Krishna story from the Bhagavatha in mellifluous verse in a Kavya of classical dimensions with forty seven cantos. The boat song melody was used by Ramapurath Warrier in the eighteenth century for a fine narrative poem on the story of ‘Kuchela’, and by Kumaran Asan, for another narrative poem on the great compassion of the Buddha and the disciples.

Ayyappanpattu (Sasthampattu): This is staged by devotees of Lord Ayyappa, all over Kerala in general, and in Kottayam District particularly. All age groups and occupation groups could participate in this. The period of origin cannot be fixed. In these Pattu (song) the story of Pandalam Raja and his family, before the birth of Sastha, is incorporated. In addition, the fight between Devas and Asuras, the churning of the celestial ocean Palazhi are detailed in these songs which also acclaim the character of ‘Vavar’ as a tough man with immense physical skills. Sastha had soveriengnty not only over Pandi country but also over ‘Ezhathu nadu’ and the dealings between Ayyappa and a toddy-seller in Ezhathunadu, named Ponninanka, is also incorporated in these songs. A troup is made up of at least five persons. Each of them will have an ‘Uduku’. In the Pandal put up for the show, there would be a ‘peetam’ (low stool), Nilavilaku and offerings to Lord Ganesa. There is a rule which lays down that only after prayers to
Ganapathy and Saraswathy, in their praise, should songs about other gods of the pantheon be sung. First ‘Pranam’ are made before the Guru, and singing praises of Ganapathy to the background effects provided by a particular rhythm known as ‘Ganapathy Thalam’, the narrative song commences. All the various stanzas have fixed modes of rendering (tunes). Along with singing, the devotees dance about and sometimes do fire walking too. The percussion instruments employed are Cymbals and Uduku. This is performed at night in specially prepared Pandals. Black dhothi and necklace of ‘Rudhraksha’ beads form the costume of Ayyapas or performer.

**Arjuna Nritham (Mayilpeeli Thookam):** This is peculiar to Kottayam and Alleppey Districts. This could be seen in Arpukara, Kunnankari, Kurichi, Amboridesam, Paripu, Kidangoor, Mattakara, Puthiyakavu etc. in Kottayam, Alleppey and Changanachery Taluks. At one time this used to be performed in most Devi temples in central Travancore. This is the ritualistic art of Hindu devotees. This is as old as the ‘Badrakali’ (Devi) temples of Kerala, i.e., nearly two hundred years. Either singly or in a pair, this dance is performed. Ezhavas and Vilkurupanmars of the Hindu community, usually perform this. The participants could be of any age ranging from 16 to 60. Songs based on the epics are sung. The songs are known as ‘Kavithangal’. Both the dance and the Kavithangals are pegged strictly on rhythm. Different rhythms, belonging to various classified groups, are expounded. Each Kavitham is suited to the particular rhythm employed. These are laid down on strict traditional lines. The spectators get the benefit of an explanation of the intricacies of the particular rhythm that is going to be employed and how this rhythm is translated into dance steps, before each leg of performance.

Chenda, Madalam, Thalachenda and Cymbals are the accompaniments. A performance extends right through the night. The dance is performed on specially built platforms. Green paint is applied to the face and a distinctive type of headgear is worn. Jingling bells would be worn round the ankles. In lieu of the lower garments of Kathakali, known as “Uduthukettu” garments made of peacock feathers are worn round the waist. Thus the name ‘Mayilpilinirtham’ (‘Mayil’ means peacock and ‘peeli’ tail feathers), came into vogue. Lighting is provided by Nilavilaku. Nowadays over and above this, lights for decorative purposes are also used.
**Kuthiyotam:** This is in vogue in Trivandrum district, performed mostly in Devi temples. Five persons are needed for a performance. This is presented during festivals. A performer, wearing a crown similar to that used by the Ottanthulal artiste, and three other characters, with three different facial make-ups, dance rhythmically to the background of percussion instruments.

The songs are in praise of Durga, ‘Pandapattu’, and ‘Kalaripattu’ and songs in praise of deities. These are sung while the performers dance to the accompaniment of the background instruments. Humourous songs are also sung. Ganjira, Bells, Chaplakatta, are the musical accompaniments used.

**Kakkarissinatakam (Play):** This is a community entertainment form popular in Koorampala, Karakadu, Karunagapalli, Pandalam, Cheravalli, Ambalapuzha, Mankompu, in erstwhile Central Travancore area and in Kilimanoor, Nedumangad regions of Trivandrum District. The style of presentation in the two main regions show differences. The narrative begins with a conversation between the kakan and the Thampuram (chieftain) who follows him. In central Travancore, a character known as Sundara Kakan, enters and commences a dialogue with the public gathered there. Then he calls the kakathis and the play commences.

Over and above this character, there are others including Vedan (hunter) Kakathis, Thampuram, Kuravan, forest tiger, and Kurathi. In both the regions, nearly 12 persons are needed to present this. Nrittam (dance), music, acting,- this art form is a fetching combination of all the three. Harmonium, Ganjira, cymbals, Mridangam, are the musical instruments used. There are no stage props. Costumes are in rustic style. Kakathis don colourful costumes. Kakan wears black cloth. Vedan and Kuravan smear charcoal over their bodies.

In the South, the face of Kakan is painted black and designs in white dots are executed on this black background. Turmeric, rice powder, charcoal, are also employed for make up. This has certain resemblances to the Terukoothu of Tamilnadu and the Porattu Natakam (play) of Palghat.

**Kurathiattam:** Kurathiattam is an ancient dance form performed in some temples in Kerala, during festivals. People of the Kurava tribe perform this ritualistic art. The
participants eke out a livelihood by catching snakes, fetching medicinal herbs and by telling fortunes with the help of tame birds and through palmistry. This is an ancient art form. But the period of its origin cannot be fixed. In the Southern style, the participants number three and in that of the Northern style they number eight, or more. The Southern style:- Two actors dressed to represent the wives of Vishnu and Siva respectively, appear first. Songs to the accompaniment of rhythm are sung. To this background the two in female garb, dance. The dance is highlighted by expression and gestures. Verbal exchanges are made. And when the verbal warfare reaches a climax a Kurathi comes and makes peace between them, and sends both away.

The Northern style:- This seems to be related to operatic drama. The characters include, Kuravan, Kurathi, toddy shop keeper, the leader of village, etc. Kuravan and Kurathi who go to see the Trichur temple festival get separated. And the theme of the song and the accompanying dance is the recital of their experiences to each other. This dance is intended to discourage the habit of drinking and the observance of untouchability. Mridangam, small cymbals, harmonium – any two or three of these are employed for background effect.

Kummati: This is an art form prevalent in Wayanad, Trichur district, and in Wadakanchery, Alathur, Kunisseri and Chittoor in Palghat District. The Mannans, in Palghat district, the Nairs in Trichur District and all castes in Wayanad participate in this performance. Nowadays, in Trichur District, youngsters of all castes perform this. In Trichur, during Onam, this is presented as a community entertainment. In other areas, the performance is a ritual to propitiate the Goddess. In Ottapalam Taluq, Palghat District, this is performed as the curtain raiser to the harvest festival. Those who participate in this are drawn from various professions. This is said to be an ancient art form. The period of origin cannot be fixed.

Eight or ten participate in Kummati garb. In addition, five or seven other characters also take part. The leader and director of the troupe is known as Tallakummati. With drum beat and songs and the thin strains of sound produced by Villu (a typical Kerala instrument, made of a plinth of palmyra palm stem shaped as a bow and with bamboo sliver as bow string) the Kummati characters begin to dance. The Thallakummati with a baton Kummati Kol in hand begins to act. Characters, wearing the
masks of the Gods, Siva, Srikrishna, Krishnamurthy, Ganapathy, Dharikan, Kattalan, stand by as spectators. Kummati charactertrs go and perform from house to house. To herald their arrival, there would be loud, characteristic shouts. A small type of drum is employed for percussion effect.

**Kuthirakkali:** This is a ritualistic art prevalent in Ernad Taluq, Malapuram District. Menfolk of the Kanakka community perform this. Their usual occupation is casual labour. This is an ancient art form. This is linked up with agricultural operation. A horse is fashioned with bamboo splints and tender fronds of the coconut palm. The horse is lifted and carried on the shoulders of the performers who dance to the rhythm of the Chenda, and to the accompaniment of songs sung by them.

**Kolkali: Kolukali: Koladi : Vettum Thada:** This is a widely prevalent exposition of physical skill in Kerala. Twelve to twenty persons participate in this. They stand around a lighted Nilavilaku. Each carrying a stick, twenty four inches long. They hit one another and defend themselves with sticks. The art is reminiscent of the Kalaripayattu technique. Some hold that it is reminiscent of cock fight. The display is marked by the stylized manner in which steps are evolved and executed, rhythmically. The art includes such observances as bowing obeisance (Kalthozhal) etc. After the formal gestures of bowing, begins the display with actors sitting, then warding off blows, then dancing to the timing of the rhythm, Thaduthuthettikol Oru Mani Muthu, Chavadichuttal, Churachuchuttal, Chindu etc. are displayed. These displays are related to the display of Poorakali during festivals. To the timing of percussion instruments the exponents sing, take rhythmic steps, deliver blows as they go round and round. The accent of the art is on physical skill and training. Songs, and dance steps to the rhythm of the instruments are important.

**Kozhiporukali:** Kozhiporukali is prevalent in Trivandrum, Chirayankizhu, Kilimanoor, and Pazhayakunnimal. Vedars, Parayas and Kuravas perform this art. This is meant as a community entertainment. The main feature of the performance is the singing of a rhythmic song, about cock fight, with performers holding staves, two to three feet long, with which they deliver stylized blows in the air and show off their valour. Background accompaniments are provided by bells and dolak. There are many intricate martial movements which the performers go through. At the end of each complex move the
performers shout in imitation of cock’s crow. After commencing in a slow tempo, this is worked up to a high pitch before the performance concludes. Dolak and bells are essential musical instruments needed. This is a village art to uphold valour, reminiscent of the Kozhiangam (cock fight) detailed in Vadakanpattu.

**Gandharvan Pattu : Gandharvan Theyyam:** This is popular in Cannanore District. People belonging to Vannan community perform this ritualistic art. When the woman, possessed of evil spirits, comes and sits in the Kalam the Vannars begin their song, known as Kannal songs. At the end of the song a performer in the costume of Gandharva (celestial being) makes his entry.

When this character makes his appearance, suitably dressed maidens enter the Kalam and present bunches of coconut flowers to the possessed woman. The woman, under possession of evil spirits, begins to shake and shiver. The entrance of the Yogi and his dance is the next item of the programme. When the Yogi enters the scene, songs in praise of Rudraksham, Conch, and sacred ashes are sung. When the actor, who is dressed up as Gandharva removes his headgear, the show ends. Maddalam, Chenda, Cymbals provide background effects.

**Chavittukali (Cherumakkali):** Popular in Ponnani, Tirur, Perinthalmanna, etc, in Malappuram District. Ten to sixteen persons are needed for presenting this. When the performers stand in a circle, the leader of the troupe recites two lines of a song. The others repeat the lines. After doing this twice, they dance in a circle, with hand gestures, to a peculiar kind of rhythm. When the song nears the end, the tempo of the dance rises. Mostly the rhythm remains unchanged. But the steps, could be circular and diagonal.

**Chozhikali:** Chozhikali is prevalent in Trichur District, central Kerala. Stages Kumbaranmars (potters), this is an entertainment. Children and grown-ups participate together. Children don the garb of Chozhi. The elders don the costumes of Kalan Chitragupta, Muthiyamma. Including children and grown-ups, twenty five artistes are needed to present this.

The leader stands in the midst of children, garbed as Chozhi. The leader makes the Chozhis sit in a circle round him and begins to sing. The Chozhis clap their palms.
Later, the elders in the garb of Kalan (God of Death) and Chitragupta enter to the accompaniment of yells. The Muthiamma sings humorous songs. After commencing the performance, in a vacant lot, the performers go from house to house and perform this. By dawn they return to the starting point.

**Thappumelam (Chadikottu):** This is prevailing in Tirur, Ponnani regions. The participants stand in circle and produce a peculiar rhythm with the help of Chenda and Thapu. Those who play on the Thapu, dance to this rhythm. They use a thick short stick to beat on the Thapu. Chenda and Thapu are the instruments used: in the ratio of four chendas for twelve thapus.

**Thidambu Nritham (Dance):** This is prevalent in Cannanore District and in some parts of Calicut District, in North Kerala. This is presented by forward communities. This is a ritualistic art and there is no age limit for the performers. As per the belief of the villagers this is six to seven centuries old. One Namboodiri to bear the Thidambu, seven players on percussion instruments, two persons to carry lamps, in all ten persons are needed to present this. The dance is performed with the decorated effigy of the Devi carried on the head. Foot work is most important and this is executed to the rhythm of the drums. The dance commences with Urayal (oracle’s dance). The dancer goes dancing round the temple. The steps are attuned to various rhythms like Thakiladi, Adantha, Chembada, Panchari. The chenda provides percussion effects. Some are of opinion that the dance is according to the rules laid down by the sage Bharata.

**Theeyattu:** In most villages in Central Travancore-particularly in Alleppey, Kuttamperur, etc – this ancient art is prevalent. Namboodiris and Theeyattunnis perform this ritualistic art. The practitioners are mostly householders or cultivators and no age limit is laid down for the participants. After dusk a purification ceremony is performed in the front courtyard at a particular place and a fruit bearing plantain tree is brought and planted. The figure of Bhadrakali (Devi) is pictured in multicoloured powders, to costume resembles that of Kathakali. After the Kalam is drawn the prayers are offered to the favourite deity. To the accompaniment of rhythm instruments and with lighting effects provided by naked torches, and with songs by the dancer himself, it begins
**Theeyattu-2 Kaalitheeyattu:** This is performed in the Ayyappa temple and Amman temples of Kerala. Teeyattunnis belonging to the antharala sect are in charge of this ritualistic art.

**Theeyattu-3 Ayyapan theeyattu (Ayyapan koothu):** This is a ritualistic art performed in certain Ayyapan Kavus (temples), particularly in Malamakavu, Potrakavu, Chamravata Kavu, and other Kavus in Ponnani Taluq and Cherplacheri Kavu, Pulinkavu etc. in Valluvanad area. Koorayidal (preparation of the pandal), uchappattu (song at the noon), arangu vithanikkal (decoration) are some of the preliminary rituals. Then kalamezhuttu starts. The figure of Ayyappa is drawn of five colours of powders. Deeparadhana, kalampooja, Kuthu, thiri uzhichal pooja done by Nambiar and then by Brahman, oracle or velichappadu, erasing of the kalam are the important rituals.

**Thekkanum Thekkathiyum:** This is popular in Palghat and Malappuram Districts. This is performed both as a ritual and as an entertainment. This is more than three hundred years old. Two characters (one male and one female) and two percussion instrumentalists form a troupe. The characters sing, exchange dialogues and perform stylized movements, through well defined steps. The instrumentalists repeat the songs and put questions to the characters. Some portions from the Ramayana form the theme of the play. Sometimes, portions from the Mahabharatha are also used. When needed by the actors the accompanist keeps time with tiny cymbals (Kuzhithalam).

The performance begins with songs. Later to the queries by the drummer, the actors begin the story. Thus, this is a pleasant audio visual entertainment. This art is the presentation of characters in such drama oriented art forms as Poratunatakam and Pankali. Chenda and Kuzhithalam are used for percussion. The duration could extend from five to thirty minutes.

**Tholpavakoothu:** This is known also as Pavakoothu and Nizhalkoothu. Prevalent in Palghat and Ponnani Taluks. This is believed to have had its origin in the 18th century. Four persons are needed for a show. Thol Pavakal, or puppets, are made of deer skin to present characters in the Ramayana epic. The puppets are arranged behind along curtain. Behind the puppets brightly burning oil-wick lamps are kept
The singer recites songs from the Kamba Ramayana. To the trend of the song, the puppets are made to move and dance. When the song ends, an entertaining description of the puppet characters takes place. A Chenda in the shape of Para (measure) Idora is used to give percussion effects.

**Dappumuttikottu:** This art is also known as Opratheeb, and also as Dhapkavathu and Dhapukali. This is popular in Cannanore and Malappuram Districts. This is performed by the Muslims. Performed both as a ritual and also as an entertainment, along with festivals in mosques and also during marriages.

During festivals, at a specially prepared area, the artistes stand in a circles carrying a peculiar kind of musical instrument knows as Dhapu. The bole of a tree with a circular hole hollowed out, and the opening is covered with leather at one end and on this drumming goes on with the right palm. The leader of the group sings. According to the rhythm of the song, the others take stylized steps and beating on the Dhapu repeats the song sung by the leader.

**Dharikavadham:** This is in vogue in the western regions of Palghat District, in Central Kerala. This dance is performed by members of the Pariah community, and is ritualistic in nature. But it is also performed as an entertainment. Middle aged men and youths join up to present this. Their profession normally is weaving of baskets, winnowing implement (Muram) and bamboo mats. Fourteen persons are needed for a performance. Separate Kalams are delineated for Bhadra Kali and Dharikan.

Bhadra Kali has a costume and make up of terrifying effect. Make up on the face, and reddened lips with tongue outthrust: this is her make up, Dharikan has a pleated cloth at the waist and carries a mace in his hand. There would be Vaji round the waist and the face is made up to project a contemptuous expression. Siva's costume is on the basis of description in the Puranas. Around the ankles there would be bells and around the waist too. Kavacha and Kundala are worn. Siva wears snakes and carries a trident when he appears on the arena. The scene when Darika is beheaded is bizarre. This is presented carefully and with speed. One could see blood dripping from the artificial head.
Nayadi Kali: This is prevalent in Trichur and Thalapally Taluqs of Trichur District. Performed during Temple festivals, this is ritualistic as well as community entertainment oriented.

Parichakali: Parichakali is found in the regions of Mavelikara, Cherikal, Pandalam etc, of Aleppey district. There would be ‘Kacha’ round the waist (cloth tied tightly, in characteristic style, to enable free and athletic body movement) a red silk band round the head, heavy anklets on the ankles form the costume. The performers stand round in a circle. To the accompaniment of the Chenda, the leader sings, and the performers, bearing swords and shields, take stylised steps and delivering and warding off blows, go forward.

Parichamuttukali: Parichamuttukali is in vogue in the districts of Palghat, Malapuram, Ernakulam and Kottayam. This community dance is performed by members of various communities. Christians present this in Kottayam District. This is performed both as a community entertainment and as a ritual too. The leader or Guru is known as Aasan. Clothed in white dhoti and with red silk band round the waist, the performers, carrying swords and shields, stand round the Aasan. The Aasan, standing in the centre, tinkles a handbell while he sings. Repeating the lines, the performers sing and dance to set pattern and style of steps. Kaimani (small cymbals), sword and shield are the only equipments employed.

Irula Dance: This is a tribal dance form of Irulas of Attappadi. The period of the dance is during harvest. Irulas have different types of dances. Some of them are centered upon their beloved Deva, Malleeswara. Ten or twelve men and women form a circle and dance in the night. When the dance reaches its climax all the members of the ‘uru’ – including children join the dance. Elela karati is one of the important dance forms of Irulars. Para, thakilu, kuzhal and Elathalam are the musical accompaniments for the dance.

Porattunatakam: This is a folk theatre in form vogue in the districts of Palakkad and Trissoor. The content and style of the play proves that it is originated by Tamil influence. This is a secular play performed in public places as a social entertainment. There is no specific story for Porattunatakam. Different castes and their foolish deeds are exposed
in the play and through this a story is unfolded. The entire performance is pinpointed on social criticism through satirical songs and dialogues.

**Thirayattom:** Thirayattom is a ritual dance form of Kozhikode district. This is the local variation of Theyyattom. As in Theyyam, Thira is taking place in the shrines (Kavus). Mother Goddess worship, hero worship, spirit worship and serpent worship are the sources of Thirayattom. Thirayattom is performed for the prosperity of the villagers. There are three stages in Thira i.e., vellattom, thirayattom and chanthattom which means childhood, youth and old age respectively.

### 6.3 ARCHITECTURE OF KERALA

**Preface**

Kerala’s architecture is an ensemble of simplicity and elegance. Simple and all embracing, it is tailored to suit Kerala’s climate and culture. The time-tested dexterity of Kerala’s master architectures is ostensible in the construction of umpteen temples, mosques and churches bestrewn across the state.

Kerala abounds in splendid architectural monuments. The State is dotted with prehistoric megaliths, tombs, caves, temples, mosques, churches, theatres, houses, palaces and public buildings, built and renovated over centuries representing a panorama of architectural development. “The aesthetic appeal of these buildings mainly arise from the simplicity of form and functional perfection:”The characteristic regional expression of Kerala architecture results from the geographical, climatic and historic factors. The form of the buildings with low walls, sloping roof and projecting caves was mostly evolved from climatic considerations for protection from excessive rain and intense solar radiation. The setting of the buildings in the open garden plot was again necessitated by the requirement of wind for giving comfort in the humid climate (Balagopal Prabhu, 1999). The architecture of Kerala used to be of a humble scale, merging with nature. Now, amid lush green vegetation has come up sprawling structures with mind-blowing designs.

In the words of K.V. Eapen (1980): “Kerala has made substantial contribution to the science of architecture. In Kerala, architecture could be noted a confluence of various influences all processed and transmuted by the demands of local conditions and
local culture. The ancient temples of Kerala bear witness to the high level of proficiency attained by the people in sculpture and engraving."

Kerala architecture comprises temples and dwelling houses, which latter until the middle of the 16th century at least, were built of mud; the local convention required that houses of wood and stone were built only for Kings and Gods. Everyone else had to live in mud houses (i.e. temporary structures)

Contemporary architecture of Kerala displays two diverse trends. The first one is derived from a modernistic style emphasizing concrete as the medium of construction and linear, cubical or curvilinear shapes for expressing forms. This trend prevails in the whole country. There is also an alternate stream which digs into the traditional style and tries to engage in the revival of functional architecture. Doyens like Laury Baker advocated the latter trend through the use of indigenous materials, adoption of traditional techniques and matching of climatic needs in architecture. Baker houses- which are cost effective and nature friendly gained immense coinage in Kerala.

Architecture stands out as an expression of social values. Kerala has witnessed constant changes in the architectural patterns, yet a distinct regional character has evolved, influenced by the indigenous materials, climate and aesthetic values. Innovations in technology and the synthesis of evolved architecture have posed a challenging proposition to contemporary architecture. The regional character acquired through the ages is put to test as there are several undercurrents as regards social values of simplicity, functional perfection and aesthetics. But as of now, the diverse tastes and interests of people of Kerala and the immigrants from outside the state are manifested in an admixture of skyliners and traditional Kerala architecture giving emphasis to the use of natural elements.

The building materials normally available for construction in Keral are stones, timber, clay and palm leaves. The availability of granite is restricted mostly to the highlands and only marginally in other parts. Balagopal Prabhu is of the view that the skill in quarrying, dressing and sculpturing of stone is scarce in Kerala. Laterite is abundant in many zones of Kerala. Laterite blocks may be bonded in mortars of shell lime, which have been the classic joining material used in traditional buildings. Lime mortar can be improved in strength and endurance by admixtures of vegetable juices.
Such enriched, mortars were used for plastering or for serving as the base for mural painting and low relief work. Many palaces and temples of Kerala stand testimony to this. Timber, since ages, is the prime structural material of Kerala abundantly available in many varieties from bamboo to teak. Prabhu states that “Perhaps the skillful choice of timber, accurate joinery, artful assembly and delicate carving of wood work for columns, walls and roofs frames are the unique characteristics of Kerala architecture.”

The extensive use of clay are also found – for walling, in filling, the timber floors and making bricks and tiles after pugging and tempering with admixtures. The effective use of palm leaves could be seen in thatching of roofs and in the making of partition walls. Due to the limitations of the materials, a mixed mode of construction evolved in Kerala architecture. The stone work could be seen restricted to the plinth even in temples. Laterite was used for the construction of walls. The roof structure in timber was covered with palm leaf thatching for most buildings and tiles were rarely used for palaces or temples. The exterior of the laterite walls were either left as such or plastered with lime mortar to serve as the base for mural painting. The sculpturing of the stone was mainly moulding in horizontal bands in the plinth portion (adhistans), while the carving of timber covered all elements – pillars, beams, ceiling rafters and the supporting brackets. The Kerala murals are essentially paintings with vegetable dyes on wet walls in subdued shades of brown. The indigenous raw materials and their projection as enduring media for architectural expression, through the ages became the dominant feature of the Kerala style.

In the words of Chumma Choondal (2003): “The architectural treatise of tribes of Kerala is really indigenous and reflects the essence of their social circumstances and lifestyle. ‘Erumadom’- made atop trees and used as a watch tower is made of bamboo, sugar cane grass, etc.” Such structures are modified as tree houses and is very popular as supplementary accommodation among tourists.

**Historic Factors of Development**

The locational feature of Kerala has influenced the social development and indirectly the style of construction. In the ancient period the sea and the ghats formed impenetrable barriers paving the way for the evolution of an isolated culture of Proto Dravidians contemporary to the Harappan civilization. The earliest vestiges of
contructions in Kerala could be traced to the period dated between 3000 B.C to 300 B.C. They can be grouped into two types – tomb cells and megaliths. The rock cut tomb cells are generally located in the laterite zones of central Kerala, for example at Porkalam in Thrissur district. The tombs are roughly oblong in plan with single or multiple bed chambers with a rectangular court in the east, from where steps rise to the ground level. Another type of burial chamber is made of four slabs placed on edges and a fifth one covering them as a cap stone. One or more such dolmens are marked by a stone circle. Among the megaliths are the umbrella stones, (Kudakkal) resembling handless palm leaf umbrellas used for covering pits enclosing burial urns. Two other types of megaliths, hat stones (thoppikkal) and menhirs (pulachikkal) have no burial appendages. They seem to be rather memorial stones. The megaliths are not of much architectural significance, but they speak of the custom of the primitive tribes erecting memorials at sites of mortuary rites. These places later became the annual rendezvous of the tribes and gave rise to occult temples of ancestral worship. The protecting deities of the villages were always in female form, who were worshipped in open groves (kavu). Such hypaethral temples had trees, stone symbols of Mother Goddesses or other naturalistic or animistic images as objects of worship. The continuity of this early culture is seen in the folk arts, cult rituals, worship of trees, serpents and mother images in kavus. Kerala started experiencing a cultural invasion by the slow ethnic migration of Aryans in the beginnings of Christian era. In the second rock edict of Asoka dated third century B.C., Kerala is referred as one of the border Kingdoms of the Maurya empire. It is possible that Buddhist and Jainas were the first north Indian groups to cross the borders of Kerala and establish their monasteries. These religious groups were able to practice their faith and receive patronage from the local kings to build shrines and viharas. For nearly eight centuries, Buddhism and Jainism seem to have co-existed in Kerala as an important faith, contributing in its own way to the social and architectural development of the region.

The nature worship of the early inhabitants of Kerala has its paralleled in Buddhism, in the tree worship owing to the association of Buddha’s birth, revelation and preaching under the Bodhi tree. Although sculptural relics of Buddhist images have been recovered from a few places of southern Kerala, there are, however, no extant Buddhist monuments in this region. The Sanskrit epic of the eleventh century 'Mushika Vamsa' contains some references which suggests the fact that Kerala had important Buddhist
shrines. The most renowned of these was the Sreemulavasa Vihar with a magnificent image of Bodhisatwa Lokanatha. The shrine is believed to have been washed away by coastal erosion. While analyzing some of the design features of temples such as Siva temple at Thrissur and the Bhagavathi temple at Kodungalloor, a belief has surfaced that they were Buddhist Viharas. For such beliefs there exist no unrefutable proof.

There are a number of Jain monuments in Kerala. They include a rock cut temple at Kallil near Perumbavoor, and remains of structural temples at Alathoor near Palakkad and at Sulthan Bathery. Sculptured Jaina figures of Mahavira, Paraswantha and other Thirthankaras have been recovered from these sites. Sulthan Bathery also has the remains of a Jaina basti, known as Ganapati Vattam, being an example of a cloistered temple built entirely of granite. Inspite of the absence of architectural monuments there is conclusive proof of the influence of the Buddhist school on Kerala architecture of later periods. The circular temples basically follow the shapes of the Buddhist stupas, the dome shaped mounds. The apsidal temples are modeled in the pattern of chaitya halls, the assembly halls of Buddhist monks. The chaitya window seen repeated in the decorative moulding of the thorana around the temple shrine is clearly a Buddhist motif adopted in Hindu style, according to Percy Brown. Basically thorana is a gateway provided in the palisade seen in the vertical and horizontal members of the vilakkumadam, which is a feature seen only in Kerala temples of the post Buddhist period. In its most primitive form, this construction is seen in the hypaethral temples, enshrining trees and later on the outer walls of the shrines proper. Along with the stylistic development of the Hindu temple, this form of palidade is removed from the shrine structure (srikovil) and taken as a separate edifice beyond the temple cloister (chuttambalam).

The early Tamil Sangam literature shows that by the first century A.D. the cherasru;led the central regions of Kerala and the Kongu lands (present Salem and Coimbatore region). Its capital was Vanchi, identified with the Thiruvanchikulam near Kodungallur. At this time the southern part of Kerala was ruled by the Ay chieftains and the northern parts by the Nannans of Ezhimalai. The early period of Christian era- first to third century is also marked by the contact with Aryans and their Vedic religion rooted in the fire sacrifices. Between 4th and 7th centuries AD, Brahmanas appeared to have settled
in Kerala and established their religion. The amalgamation of different cultures and religious philosophies helped to evolve the architectural styles of Kerala temples.

During the reign of Chera Perumals (8th – 11th centuries) most of Kerala except the extreme north and south got unified. This was highly conducive for architectural development and renovation of a large number of temples. There were many rulers like Venad rulers in the south, Kochi Maharajas in the centre, Samutiris of Kozhikode in the north and Kolathiri Rajas in the extreme north – who patronized architectural activities vigorously. The temples, sculptures and paintings of the South Indian type now in existence range from the eighth to the eighteenth century. In this millennium, Travancore contributed to the sum total of Dravidian art its own measure, rhythm and physiognomy. These contributions were at home not only in the southernmost part of the country but also in Central and North Travancore where Dravidian form entered but had no school of its own. There, in the country north of Quilon, Kerala art had its home, which extended beyond the confines of Tranvancore to south Kanara in the north.

The Dravida temples built in stone and bricks are preserved from an earlier age than the laterite, brick and timber temples, of Kerala. They may have been preceeded by brick and timber constructions which have perished. The Dravida temples are represented in several of their varieties, (1) as small shrines, consisting of a cell having a superstructure (the temples of Vizhinjam,) ; stairs led to it and sometimes a porch; or (2) as low, spreading structures or hall temples, having a pillared interior or (3) as high structures having several storeys, not in fact, only in appearance, as no interior or accessible space corresponds to the pillared and diminutive storeys of these superstructures. These varieties of the temple, based on a square plan, are representative of Dravida architecture. The temples in Vizhinjam, of the ninth century, are akin to contemporary Chola shrines in Kaleyapatti, Tiruppur and sites in Pudukkottai. A regional character in construction incorporating the Dravidian craft skills, unique forms of Buddhist buildings, design concepts of Vedic times and compatible to the climatic conditions was finally evolved in Kerala. The theory and practice of architectural construction were also compiled during this period. The compilations remain as classical texts of a living tradition to this day. Four important books in this area are Thantrasamuchayam (Chennas Narayanan Namboodiri) and Silpiratnam (Sreekumara),
covering temple architecture and Vastuvidyā (anon) and Manushyalaya Chandrika (Thirumangalathu Sri Neelakandan) dealing with the domestic architecture.

Kerala from very early days of its coming into contact with the outer world had experienced a wonderful process of cultural cross-breeding and transformed such experiences into very healthy and happy combinations and blendings. In some of the stately buildings in the capital city of Trivandrum, the Victorian touch of architecture with the local style of structure has made a heart-to-heart fusion. The famous palace, Kanakakkunnu, sets a dignified example of how the constructional nuances from Holland could combine well with local style of construction. The museum buildings at Thiruvananthapuram exhibit the ideal blending of the Kerala character with the foreign workmanship. And the high walls, creeping designs with flower motifs, etc. having a distinctive British flavor do not affect their total character. Padmanabhapuram palace at Takkala, which is now in Tamil Nadu, is an old palace preserved as an archeological monument with the typical architectural qualities of Kerala tradition, like the broad pathway to the frontage, walls resembling those of the temple, gabled roof, etc. In fact, the areas south of Kerala, which now belong to Tamil Nadu, have very prominent temple structures which constitute a combination of Kerala and Tamil architecture, like the Subrahmanya temple at Kumarakovil, the Devi temple at Kanyakumari, etc. However, the old dwelling house in this area, especially those of Nayars, have pure Kerala architecture.

The Kerala style is noted for its simplicity and is different from the Dravidian gopuram structure having coloumns with carved deific figures stretching to reach heaven in all its largeness and elaborateness. The Tamil concept of architecture was first brought to Kerala in the late sixteenth century when the work of the present gopuram was introduced in the Sri Padmanabha temple at Trivandrum. It is a change which symbolically represents the introduction of a new architectural style.

**Temple Architecture of Kerala**

In the words of R.V. Poduval: “The early works of art in Kerala, executed in inpermanent materials have perished utterly beyond all doubt. They existed in large numbers in various parts of the country from Kaniyakumari to Kasargod, and were the foundation of more enduring works. Among these, the temples are the most important
ones, and were designed by artists who brought to bear their skill on them, acquired by
generations of practice. Their edifices were artistically conceived and delicately modeled
and carved. Though they are not stupendous or magnificent architectural specimens,
they are simple in elegance and beauty of form. Dated structural monuments are rather
rare in Kerala, and those existing now were subjected to extensive modifications, and
alterations from time to time, that it is difficult or impossible to fix their dates with any
accuracy. This is a serious limitation as regards the authenticity of cultural tourism
experience. The structures, sculptures and monuments have undergone revitalization
and restoration and hence to trace the original form is too difficult. What is left now is
outstanding symbols offering certain aesthetic delight. Most of the temples in Kerala
built on the indigenous gable style of architecture were originally constructed entirely of
wood and much of the stone temples in existence are as Dr. Kramrisch has pointed out
close imitations of the wooden ones. “The temples and other structures with the gable
roofs lack both the costliness and grandeur of the Dravidian structures, but they are neat
and simple, with provision for admitting plenty of light and fresh air, and in these repects
are undoubtedly superior to the costly edifices of the Dravidian style. This indigenous
style is peculiar to Kerala and indeed the like of it is not known to exist anywhere else in
India. The chief characteristic of this style is that wood enters largely into its
construction” (Travancore State Manual, Vol. 1).

Kerala is a land of temples, and temples here in a sense, were the pivot of
religious, social, economic and cultural life of the Malayalam people. That Kerala’s
temples show a distinctive style was accepted by one and all from the very beginning. It
is largely the local adaptation of the Dravida or south Indian tradition, considerably
influenced by various geographical factors like the high precipitation, the availability of
laterite formation and dense jungles. It is not easy to lay bare the divergent architectural
strains that converged to give rise to Kerala’s characteristic temple-form. Furthermore,
the nebulous political history of the early phase and some sort of historical isolation have
made the story of its architecture devoid of true perspective. It is often believed that the
architecture of Nepal and other Himalayan regions is similar to that of Kerala. Likewise,
it is compared with the architecture of various Far Eastern countries. But it has to be
borne in mind, before suggesting any common link, that an area of heavy rainfall or snow
will naturally develop sloping roofs, further, there are certain inherent patterns in timber-
constructions which give rise to similar external forms and features. A few images of Buddha come also from places like Karmudi, Mavelikara, Bharanikavu and Pallikkal situated in the Quilon-Alleppey region, once forming part of the Ay territory.

The history of Kerala’s temple-architecture suffers from many a lacunae, for unlike the Chalukya, Pallava, Chola and other traditions, it is hardly represented by any intact monument. Of the various parts of a temple, only the adhishthana, bhatti, and to some extent, prastara escaped the ravages of time. These parts are made of stone, while the superstructure is built mainly of timber, which naturally needs periodical replacement or alteration. Compared to Tamil Nadu, the gopuras of Kerala are insignificant in height and dimensions. Yet they are endowed with grace and nobility, and the architects of Kerala have never allowed them to outshine the temple proper. Like the temples, these are also built of laterite and wood. Roots are made of tiles, and rise to a height of three talas over the gateway. Sometimes, one find the use of reverse eaves here but the commonest use of such wooden eaves is in the balikkal-mandapa of small proportions. Surprisingly, the idea of diminutive shrine fronted by a larger mandapa never reached Kerala. Its greater achievement is the harmonious blend of Dravida temple with the indigenous Kerala idiom in which both the compositions could still maintain their individual entities.

Broadly speaking, the sculptural art of the Kerala tradition may be divided into two: sculptures in the round and bas-reliefs. Under the first group may be included deities, dvara-palas and bhuta-ganas. Not many deities, ascribable to the later phase, could be examined as they are mostly under worship inside the sanctum. An image of four-armed seated Ganesa from the Bhagavati temple at Tiruvalattur, District Palghat, the image of Mahishamardini from the Niramankara temple and a number of vimana-devatas from the Tali temple at Kozhikode may be taken as representatives of this group. In the last-mentioned temple can be seen deities like Ganesa, Subrahmanya, Vishnu, four-armed Siva standing below multi-headed snake, Parvati, Rama, Saraswati and other images in stone fixed on the southern and northern walls of the projecting mukha-mandapa. All the images are sthanaka-murtis and have somewhat stumpy appearance. The modeling is far from ideal and appears to be the combination of the Kerala style with the Nayaka tradition.
In sculptural content, there are only a few shrines, akin to the Kerala style of temples, that can rival the artistic wealth of the Suchindram temple. This tradition of sculptural art must have come into existence during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a period of Kerala’s prosperity, and also of conflict with European ideals. The wood-sculpture in Kerala has somewhat a realistic form in the sense that it has no resemblance to the original shape of the material. Here the draftsman has practically brought his creations so to say, to the level of plastic art. Like the stone-sculpture, the wood-carvings of Kerala followed the tradition of making images in the round as well as in the reliefs. The latter category may be compared with the minute and delicate execution of the goldsmith’s art.

Temple architecture in Kerala is different from that of other regions in India. Largely dictated by the geography of the region that abounds in forests blessed with the bounties of the monsoons, the structure of the temples in Kerala is distinctive. The roofs are steep and pointed, and covered with copper sheets. The Kerala roof resembles those found in the Himalayan regions and those in East Asia. The shape of the roof is in accordance with the plan of the sanctum below. With a circular plan, one sees a conical roof, while with a square plan the roof is pyramidal. The roof is constructed with wood and is covered with copper plates. Most of the temples seen in Kerala today, have undergone several phases of renovation, given the perishable nature of the construction materials. The central sanctum of a Keralite temple is referred to as the Sree Kovil. It is surrounded by a cloistered prakara, pierced at one or more cardinal points with a gopuradwara. The cloistered prakaram has a namaskara mandapam located directly in front of the sanctum. This prakaram also houses subsidiary shrines. The mukha mandapam is integrated with the gopura entrance. The flagstaff or dwaja stambjam is located outside. The balipitham may be located in the mukhamandapam or in the outer courtyard. The outer prakaram or courtyard houses other subshrines, and optionally a temple tank.

Kerala has evolved from very early days its own types of temple architecture each of which can be associated with some area or other in the state. The Kerala temples look very much different from those of Tamil Nadu in so far as the majestic gopuram is generally conspicuous by its absence. The temples are not only square or rectangular but also circular, apsidal, and elliptical too in rare cases. The dominance of the circular
shrines, not seen any where else in India, is a unique feature of temple architecture in Kerala.

It may also be noted that the majority of the Kerla temples have walls made of laterite blocks, but some made entirely on granite, except the superstructures, may be seen in Thiruvnanthapuram and Kollam Districts. In the Kottayam and Alleppey areas many temples have their walls made entirely of wood and they are rich in wood-carvings, representing puranic stories. The sloping roof and the lavish use of wood in superstructures have also invested the Kerala temples with a distinct personality of their own.

Basically, temple architecture tradition of Kerala comes within the mainstream of Indian temple building tradition. Though, in the detailed articulation of its formal structure, Kerala temple follows its own indigenous methods, the basic conceptions are not something different or extraneous from the total cultural developments of the mainland. Temples in Kerala used to be called in earlier times as mukkalvattom. Later they came to be called ambalam or kshetram or sometimes tali. The Kerala temple has srikovil as its main core, which usually stands in east-west axis and the plan may be square, rectangular, circular, elliptical or apsidal ground plan. Compared to the other temple styles in the mainland like Dravida, Nagar and Vasara, Kerala temple tradition has distinct characteristics especially in their formal structure. The architectural style of Kerala temples has an inherent simplicity which becomes very conspicuous when juxtaposed to the exuberance of the Nagar, Vasara and Dravida temple styles. In explaining this, influence of the natural environment upon the temple form has to be recognized along with the socio-historical developments.

This interdependence or the reciprocal relationship between environment and architecture can be further noticed in the construction of superstructures in Kerala temples. The two monsoons a year, and the moisture of Kerala weather has a direct bearing on the use of sloping roofs and the selection of raw materials by which the superstructure is being constructed. The superstructure as a conspicuous example shows an accurate usage of indigenous raw materials like timber and tiles to go with the climate conditions. Vast majority of temples have their bases built of granite, the walls made either of wood, bricks and stucco or laterite: the sloping superstructure made of
wooden planks, tiles or sheet metal on timber frames, are adopted to suit the high rainfall of the region. The roof timbers rest directly on the wall and coverage in gable form to meet at the top. The roofing material covering the timber framework is clinker built. It is made up of wooden planks overlapping one another, and covered over by clinker tiles or tiles highly heated in kilns with a glazy smooth surface that makes them water proof. The details given above substantiate that the raw materials used are meant to withstand the damp weather. Unlike the other architectural traditions in the mainland the design of Kerala temples shows a close similarity with the domestic architecture of the region. The earliest studies of Kerala temples include references to houses, with Stella Kramrisch pointing out the nalukettu and ettukettu houses, with four or eight wings, apartments or rooms, were built according to requirements of the classical Vastusāstra, the architectural treatise. This closeness of layout between the secular and religious architecture are not in fact uncommon when considering other traditions all round the world. In fact, the major architectural traditions like Greek, Japanese, Chinese and Islamic; show the evidences of this inter-relationship. Further, the first mosque in Arabia was designed after the prophet’s house. In Kerala, however, logical hypotheses are needed to identify any sort of relationship between the two. The surviving Nair houses have many structural elements like raised foundations, wall and ceiling carvings, steeply sloping roofs, etc, that are reminiscent of temple architecture. The building materials used in the sacred and domestic architecture, viz. timber, laterite, brick and stucco are also the same, and thus create identical textural surfaces. Most conspicuous similarity between the two is in the presence of the inner courtyard that is open to the sky. The courtyard in both the cases is depressed slightly, but in the case of temple design it encloses the srikovil and provides space for circumambulation while in domestic types, it is entirely an open space except for the presence of a pedestal to grow the sacred tulasi plant. Functionally, space thus constructed within the architecture provides the interior with proper air and light. Here, the light is being enclosed in the architectural form and its rays, streaming forth at predetermined points are compressed, and attenuated and thus creating an air of openness within the architectural complex.

Most of the temples, some with original adisthatna, dating from eighth-ninth centuries of the Christian era, have considerably renovated superstructures, and as a result do not reveal much of their original forms. Moreover, the inscriptions in Kerala
temples are often restricted only to the plinth of the temples. This is so because the very
format of the temples largely using latrine, stucco and timber prevent epigraph from
being engraved on the body of the temple. Inscriptional evidences of the ninth-tenth
centuries, clearly inform us of the beginning of temple building in Kerala. The cave
temples of seventh-eighth centuries in Kerala on hard granite medium imbibe direct
inspiration from Tamil country especially the Pandyas of Madurai through the passes in
the Western Ghats which link Kerala with Tamil plains. Nevertheless, Kerala rock-cut
architecture could evolve certain distinct mannerisms of its own. When one view the
Kerala tradition of rock-cut architecture in the wider context of the mainland, i.e., in
comparison to the rockcut architecture of Mahabalipuram, Ellora or Elephant,
it is seen
that the quantum of its contribution is minimal. This is due to the limitation of the very
granite medium used. The Kerala temple tradition could, however, overcome this
limitation in the subsequent centuries by making use of the indigenous raw materials like
timber, brick and stucco, laterite etc, which formed more versatile media, functionally as
well as structurally.

From the central Kerala group, the one at Kaviyur (later half of eighth century) is a
well finished example, the reliefs of which shows a mature plastic tradition. This saivite
cave comprises of a shrine with a linga, an ardhamandapam and a pillared façade, all
arranged axially facing the west. The floor of the cave is a few feet above the natural
ground level and is approached by a flight of steps. The pillars in the façade divide the
breadth of the cave into three openings of an almost equal distance from one another.
Walls of this spacious ardhamandapam contain reliefs of the donor or chieftain, a
bearded rishi, a seated four armed Ganesa, and the dwarapalas. The style of these
sculptures clearly shows an indubitable Pandyan influence. Sarkar points out the close
resemblance between the dwarapala figure at Kaviyur and the one noticed at Sevelpati
and Tirumalapura, both in the Pandyan territory. Soundara Rajan also has the same
opinion, and goes further to say that: “The examples of the central Kerala groups have
strong Pandyan influence, except for two factors: the lingam is often of the arsha type
with a tapering top and the pitha is of multiple cut stone masonry blocks and these
distinctive features link them closely and directly with Pandyan country. There are the
carving of ascetic like figures on the side walls of the mandapam, the provision of a
separate pedestal for the niche carving is however, original to Kaviyur, The majority of
the cave temples of both southern and central Kerala are inspired by the saivite movement like those of the Pandyan country. But there is at least one cave dedicated to Vishnu at Alagiapandipuram (Kanyakumari district).”

Unlike in other parts of the country, the origin of rock-cut architectural tradition and that of the structural temple tradition are more or less coeval in Kerala. Even from the very early stage, that is from eighth century, evidence is there of not only square and rectangular temples, but also circular, apsidal, and rarely elliptical temples. Nowhere else in India do the circular shrine constitute such a dominant type of ground plan as in Kerala. The original source of the circular temple in Kerala is still a controversial issue among scholars. A number of scholars, like Sarkar holds the view of the Buddhist origin of the circular plan. He provides the evidence that the southern part of Kerala where Buddhism had a strong hold shows comparatively large number of circular temples. Another viewpoint in this regard is that circular temples with a garbhagriha surrounded by one or two rows of columns bear some similarity to the circular Buddhist temples of Sri Lanka, known as Vatadaga. There is a strong tradition in Kerala about the migration of Ezhavas from Sri Lanka and these people might have popularized this type of architecture which in course of time got mingled with the Brahmanical tradition. Kramrisch on the other hand, holds the view of an indigenous origin. She mentions that the prototype of the circular temples has to be seen in the circular huts set up by some of the primitive people of Kerala. She points out two instances in this regard. The tribe known as Malampandaram lives in circular or conical huts and the tribe known as Ullatas set up circular structures for ritual occasions.

Both Soundara Rajan and Sarkar hold the view that Kerala temples are local adaptations of the south Indian temple architectural tradition, and the divergences in the structural form were introduced primarily to counteract the heavy rainfall of the region. Bernier Alos endorses the same possibility. Sarkar moreover goes to the extent of saying that similarities with the Himalayan architectural tradition is a superficial one due to the use of sloping roofs on wooden frame. In the North Kerala, on the other hand, a building tradition existed truly at home. As observed by Kramrisch, the origins of indigenous architecture may be in the tribal forms.
Tradition associates Kulasekhara Alwar with the construction of the Krishna temple at Tirukulasekhara puram near Tiruvanhikulam. An inscription found at the courtyard of the present temple there records some gifts offered in the 195th year of the construction of the shrine. This gives roughly ninth century as the date of the first construction of the temple. A still clearer evidence comes from the Siva temple at Trikkandiyur. An inscription from this temple is stated to have been dated in the 123rd year of the God at Trikkandiyur which is equivalent to 823 A.D. Further Kizhtali Siva temple at Tirukulasekhara puram, Siva temple at Tali, Lakshminarayana shrine in the Ayyappan temple complex at Kazhakuttam, ruined Vishnu temple at Eramam, Rajarajeswara temple at Tiruchambaram are associated with inscriptions or sculptures ascribably to the ninth or tenth century A.D. The original forms of all these temples cannot be visualized due to subsequent renovations done thereon. The characteristics of the present structure of most of these temples are, two storeyed vimanas consisting of a square garbhagriha with a circumambulatory path all around, an ardha-mandapa and a narrower maha-mandapa.

According to the inscriptive evidence, the apsidal temples were also built during this phase. The Siva temple at Trikkandiyur and Kalasamharamurthi temple at Triprangod and Ayyappan shrine in the Karikkad kshetram at Maneri have retained their adhishtama which are now being used as their upapithas. Apart from the Kerala style temple, there are a few temples built in the Dravida style also of this phase. Dravida temples of this phase are being preserved as small shrines, consisting of a cell having a superstructure and sometimes with a porch. The temples at Vizhinjam of ninth century are based on a square plan built in brick and stone. Their original form unlike the indigenous Kerala temples of this phase are preserved and thus facilitate a study of its structure.

In Vizhinjam, the base, the pilasters and pillars in the corners, the porch as well as the entablature and roll cornices are of stone. The walls are of brick masonry and also the superstructure. The superstructure has a square dome shape together with its dormer windows and finial like portion, all of which are solid. The superstructures have projected niche in the centre. They are overshadowed by a deep and long roll cornice and this has a lowering effect on the superstructure. All these structures are set up on a very wide terrace. Temple at Parthivasekhara puram of tenth century A.D. has to be
taken as a development from the vizhinjam type of temples. Because of its flat ceiling, the three stroyed pyramidal superstructure becomes invisible from inside. The three storeys consist on each level of an interior prism of stone masonry to which is attached a parapet composed of small shrines. The square stone kuts on the top without enrichment is similar to those of Vizhinjam. Interesting developments occurred in the layout of the structural temple patterns during this period. Kerala temples of this phase represent the synthesis of the two styles-Dravida and Kerala styled temple with sloping roofs. Thus, the inner garbhagriha or the core temple has become completely a separate entity with its own characteristics and sometimes with exclusive flight of steps. Invariably, it is an example of miniature Dravida vimanas, either circular or apsidal in plan with an independent griva and sikhara, and occasionally it has its own adisthana and other components peculiar to a south Indian temple.

Kerala style temples ascribed to the middle phase, as in the early period, continued to be built variously on four sided, circular and apsidal ground plan. The Subramanya shrine at Manjeri with an inscription of the twelfth century on the stone adhisthana, is a circular double storeyed vimana of the Sravatobhadra type having four functional doors. The pradakshinapatha around the square garbhagriha inside has a row of twelve columns. Of the same period is the Siva temple of the Tirunelli.

The middle phase witnessed spectacular growth in the temple architecture of Kerala. Many new temples were built, and quite a good number as various temple inscriptions show, underwent renovations. Many an important shrines of today had their beginnings in this phase. For example, the Vadakkumnatha shrine in the Vadakkumnatha temple complex of Thrissur, and the Irattayappan temple at Peruvannam had their beginnings in the middle phase. Both are circular shrines (enclosing a square Dravida vimana as the garbhagriha) with two and three functional doors respectively.

By the end of thirteenth century and beginning of fourteenth century A.D. several dvitala temples also came into existence. The Siva temple at Tiruvanjikulam is one of the most ornate specimens, and retains many of its older features despite the subsequent renovations. Along side the Kerala style of temples, few south Indian temple types were also built during this phase. On the whole, the Dravida temples in Kerala of
this phase do not show much development from the previous phase. The Parasurama temple at Tiruvallam, with an inscription of thirteenth century consists of a circular shrine combined with a rectangular mandapa. This temple of granite has renovated superstructure of a later period. Another example of the Dravida vimana of this phase is the Kattilmadam at Chalapuram. It is a square nirandhara temple built in Dravida style with octagonal sikhara, made of one piece of stone. The Niramankara temple of eleventh century A.D. is raised on a circular paved disc which forms the outer path of circumambulation. This sandharaprasada has an inner covered ambulatory in addition to the one outside. The inner wall of the inner shrine is of square plan and is surmounted by an octagonal sikhara.

In thirteenth-fourteenth centuries, when the state underwent a political revival, rising out of which, a technical indigenization of its art idioms was consciously adapted in such a way that it did not violate either the earlier architectural tradition or the essential character and symbolism of the cult traditions of Kerala. And thus, the developments which took place in the earlier periods has got further elaboration and enrichment. The conception of panchaprakara scheme of temple building with the antaramandalam (called in Malayalam as akatte balivattam), antahara (chuttambalam or nalambalam) mahdyahara (vilakkumadam) bahyahara (seevelipura) and marvada (puramadil) led the temples into greater complexity in structure and layout. In architectural layout of such an evolved Kerala temple, the srikovil forms the nucleus while the other components like the open air pradakshinapatha, the nalambalam, the vilakkumadam, the paved outer pradakshinavazhy, koothambalam and prakaras are aligned in orderly succession centering the main shrine. In some temple, especially in south Kerala, there is another pillared structure, the balikkalmandapam in front of the valiyambalam providing the main entrance into the temple proper. In front of the balikkalmandapam in some cases the dwajastambham and deepastambjam also can be seen. The large edifice the koothambalam meant for the performance of visual arts also can be seen in some large temple complexes.

The last phase also witnesses the concept of composite shrine, as well as the practice of dedicating one complex to more than one God. The number of sub-shrines in some examples increased to no less than ten as in the case of the Siva temple at Trikkandiyur. Along with the elaboration in the temple layout, other arts like mural
painting and wood carving also got much attention in this phase. The earlier tradition of having functional doors on all the four sides was eliminated in this final phase.

Due to various reasons, one of the most important of temple complexes of this period is the Vadakkumnatha temple at Thrissur. As one of the most unique ancient temples of Kerala, Vadakkumnatha temple has all the features attributable to a temple which has all the elements of the panichaprakara scheme. Moreover, this temple complex is a clear testimony of the synthesis and co-existence of various Brahmanical cults, as evinced from the cult images and ritual practices seen there. The temple complex stands on a hillock in the centre of the Thrissur town. According to the inscriptions, the temple is known to have been in existence from A.D. twelfth century, though its foundation could have been much older. This complex is a clear evidence to the ever-expanding structural vistas in accordance to the evolving functional needs. In the Vadakkumnatha complex the three independent srikovils in north-south axis, are being dedicated respectively to Siva, Sankaranarayana and Rama. These are enclosed by a common enclosure (nalambalam). The circular srikovil of Siva northern most of the row has its garbhagriha divided by a transverse diagonal wall. The western half dedicated to Siva has its own door opening and flight of steps in front with a detached namaskara mandapam. The eastern half is dedicated to Parvati, with the door opening on the east. The northern and southern cardinal points have ghanadwaras. On the stone adisthana, the outer sanctum wall and the prastara shows the characteristic reliefs of pilasters, and miniature shrines of the kuta, sala and panjara models. The slopy conical roof of metal sheet covers these by its over hanging caves supported by brackets sprung from the walls at intervals. The inner wall, rising further above the outer wall, carries the immense conical roof or sikhara with a single metal stupid on the top. The southern most of the group is the temple dedicated to Rama, square in plan, with its adhisthana, walls and prastara reliefs on the side and the rear faces corresponding to the door opening on the west, have ghanadwaras inset between the pilasters carrying the sala motif on top. The Sankaranarayana shrine which stands between the Siva and Rama temple, is a two storeyed circular shrine. Its adisthana and wall are likewise relieved, the larger bays in the middle of the north-east and south sides being sala pattern with a false door inside a stambha torana, front with makara arch on the top. Like Kerala temples, Dravida temples of this phase also developed into greater
complexity and elaboration which was directly following the mainland developments. Belonging to this period are the Sthanunathaswamy temple at Suchindram of sixteenth century.

In its stylistic development, the temple architecture of Kerala can be divided into three phases. The first phase is that of rock-cut temples. This earliest form is contemporary to Buddhist cave temples. Rock-cut temples are mainly located in southern Kerala- at Vizhinam and Ayirurpara near Thiruvannathapuram, Kottukal near Kollam and Kaviyoor cave temple according to Balagopal Prabhu, comprises of a shrine room and a spacious ardhamandapa arranged axially as well as on the walls inside the ardhamandapa are sculptured reliefs of the donor, a beared rishi, a seated four armed Ganesh and dwarapalas. The other cave temples also have this general pattern of a shrine and an ante-room and they are associated with Siva worship. In the north, similar rock-cut temples of Saiva cult are seen at Trikkur and Irunilamkode in Thrissur district. The rock-cut temples are dated prior to the eighth century AD.

"The meeting of the Kerala and Tamil idioms sometimes resulted in abrupt architectural juxta positions" states George Michell (1995). The focal shrine of the Vaikkathappan temple at Vaikom, a town of some 40 kilometres South of Cochin, is a traditional exercise in the Kerala style; an elliptical masonry sanctuary with a conical roof and a square wooden mandapa with a pyramidal roof stand in the middle of the inner enclosure. But they are approached through a portico and mandapa with granite columns covered with sculpted figures in the typical, 17th century Tamil manner. That attempts were made elsewhere to harmonise the Kerala and Tamil traditions is evident in the imposing Padmanabha Swamy temple at Thiruvananthapuram. “The monument is laid out as a perfect square, with entrances in the middle of each side. The gateway on the east is a squatly proportioned gopura in the late Nayaka manner. Its pilastered storeys are crowned with a very long shala roof. Other Tamil features of the temple include the colonnaded corridor that surrounds the inner most enclosure on four sides. Its piers have attached pilasters carved with women holding lamps; lotus and yali brackets are positioned above. Small detached mandapas, each with sixteen columns are built at the end of each arm of the corridor. Further links with Nayaka practice are obvious in the mandapa that stands immediately outside the eastern doorway to the inner enclosure. The outer piers of this hall have multi-faceted circular shafts with
female attendants, the inner piers, which are raised on a second set of basement mouldings, are adorned with sculptures of diverse divinities framed by cutout colonettes" (George Michell, 1995).

The Padmanabha sanctuary itself is rectangular in plan, so as to accommodate the reclining form of Vishnu who is viewed through three door ways. This Kerala-style structure is roofed with tiers of wooden gables covered with copper sheets; paintings in a regional style cover the outside walls. In contrast, the granite piers that surround the sanctuary in quadrangular array are clearly Tamil in style. The Krishna shrine to the north-west of the main sanctuary is set within its compound walls with timber screens and gabled wooden roofs in the characteristic Kerala manner.

Also, in the Sthanumalaya temple at Suchindram, 6 kilometres from Kanyakumari, there is evidence of mixed sponsorship. Other than the twin Slinga shrines and Vishnu sanctuary that form the core of the temple, all of which are earlier foundations, the remainder of this somewhat labyrinth complex dates from the 17th and early 18th centuries. The piers in the Alankara Mandapa have groups of colonettes framing sculptures of the Venad Kings, including Marthanda Varma; attendant women holding lamps are positioned at the periphery.

According to Shivaji Panicker (1999), construction of the structural temples which began in the 8th century A.D was patronized by Chera, Ay and Mushaka King. The rulers and the leading chiefs and landholders vied with one another in liberal endowments for the construction and maintenance of the temples. Apart from this, the inflow of wealth into the country arising from Kerala’s prosperous overseas trade had brought into existence, an affluent mercantile community during this period. Various types of temple structures like square, circular and apsidal originated during this period. The presence of Sapta Matrika images datable to this period also proves the prevalence of rectangular shrines.

A variety of the South Indian temple is represented by the temple of Parthivashekharapuram, a palimpsest, of which the socle goes back to the ninth century. The interior of a temple of this kind is on the ground floor only, a flat ceiling makes invisible from the inside the entire superstructure.
The structural temples appear in the second phase spanning the eighth to tenth centuries, and patronized by the Chera, Ay and Mushika chieftain. The earliest temples had a unitary shrine or a srikovil. In rare cases a porch or ardhamandapa is seen attached to the shrine. A detached namaskara mandapa is generally built in front of the srikovil. A quadrangular building – nalambalam –encloses the srikovil and the namaskara mandapa. At the entrance to the nalambalam is located the altar stone-balikal. This basic plan composition of the Kerala temple is seen emerging in this phase.

The srikovil may be built in different plan shapes-square, rectangular, circular or apsidal. Of these the square plan shows an even distribution throughout kerala state. The square shape is basically the form of the vedic fire altar and strongly suggest the vedic mooring. It is categorized as the nagara style of temple in the architectural texts. The rectangular plan is favoured for the Ananthasai Vishnu and the Sapta matrikas. The circular plan and the apsidal plan are rare in other parts of India and unknown even in the civil architecture of Kerala, but they constitute an important group of temples. The circular plan shows a greater preponderance in the southern part of Kerala, in regions once under the influence of Buddhism. The apsidal plan is a combination of the semi-circle and the square and it is seen distributed sporadically all over the coastal region. The circular temples belong to the vasara category. A variation of circle-elipse is also seen as an exception in the Siva shrine at Vaikkom. Polygonal shapes belonging to the Dravida category are also adopted rarely in temple plans but they find use as a feature of shikhara.

In the last phase (1300-1800 A.D) the stylistic development reached its apogee with greater complexity in the temple layout and elaboration of detail. The vilakkumadam, the palisade structure fixed with rows of oil lamps is added beyond the nalambalam as an outer ring. The Altar stone is also housed in a pillared structure – balikkal mandapam- in front of the agrasala (valiyambalam). A deepastambam and dwajastambham (the lamp post and flag mast) are added in front of the balikkal mandapam. The temple is now fully enclosed in a massive wall (prakara) pierced with gate houses or gopuras. The gopuram is usually two storeyed which served two purposes. The ground floor was an open space generally used as a platform for temple dances such as Kurathy dance or Ottan Thullal during festivals. The upper floor with wooden trails covering the sides functioned as a kottupura – ( a hall for drum beating).
Within the prakara but beyong the vilakkumadam, stood the secondary shrines of parivara devathas in their assigned positions. These were unitary cells, in general, though in a few cases each became a full fledged shrine as in the case of Krishna shrine in the Siva temple at Tali, Kozhikode. The last phase culminated in the concept of the composite shrines. Herein two or three shrines of equal importance are seen cloistered inside a common nalambalam. The typical example of this is the Vadakkumnatha temple at Thrissur, where in three shrines dedicated to Siva, Rama and Sankaranarayana are located inside the nalambalam. The prakara may also contain temple tanks, vedapadhasalas and dining halls. Paradoxically some shrines have not a single secondary shrine- the unique example being the Bharatha shrine at Irinjalakuda.

A significant feature of big temple complexes is the presence of a theatre hall-koothambalam- meant for dance, musical performance and religious recitals. This is a unique edifice of Kerala architecture, distinct from the natyasabha or natyamandir seen in north Indian temples of this period. Koothambalam is a large pillared hall with a high roof. Inside the hall is a stage structure – rangamandapam- for the performances. The stage as well as the pillars are ornately decorated. Visual and acoustic considerations are incorporated in the layout of the pillars and construction details so that the performances can be enjoyed by the spectators without discomfort and distortion. The koothambalam design seems to have been based on the canons given in the Natyasastra of Bharata Muni.

In southernmost Kerala, the temple architecture was also influenced by the developments in Tamil Nadu. At Sucheendram and Thiruvananthapuram this influence is clearly seen. Herein lofty enclosures, sculptured corridors and ornate mandapas all in granite stone practically conceal the view of the original main shrine in typical Kerala style. The entrance tower-gopuram- also rises to lofty heights in a style distinct from that of the humble two storeyed structure seen elsewhere.

Technically, the most important feature of the temple architecture of Kerala is the construction technique using a dimensional standardization. The nucleus of the temple plan is the shrine containing the garbhagriha cell. The canonical rules of the proportionate system are given in the treatises and preserved by the skilled craftsmen.
The proportionate system has ensured uniformity in architectural style irrespective of the geographical distribution and scale of construction.

Temple architecture is a synthesis of engineering and decorative arts. The decorative elements of the Kerala temples are of three types – mouldings, sculptures and painting. The moulding is typically seen in the plinth where in horizontal hands of circular and rectangular projections and recesses in varying proportions help to emphasize the form of the adisthana. Occasionally this plinth is raised over a secondary platform-upapeedam-with similar treatment. Mouldings are also seen in the mandapam, the hand rails of the steps (sopanam) and even in the drain channel (pranala) or the shrine cell.

The sculptural work is of two types. One category is the low relief done on the outer walls of the shrine with masonry set in lime mortar and finished with plaster and painting. The second is the sculpturing of the timber elements – the rafter ends, the brackets, the timber columns and their capitals, door frames, wall plates and beams. Decorative sculpture work is seen best in the ceiling panels of the mandapas. Exquisite lacquer work in brick red and black colour was adopted for turned columns of timber. Metal craft was also used in sculpturing idols, motifs, cladding and fenials. All sculptural works were done strictly according to the cannons of proportions (ashtathala, navathala and dasathala system) applicable to different figures of men gods and goddesses, prescribed in texts. The painting was executed in organic pigments on walls when the plaster was still wet- in soft subdued colours, making them into a class designated as Kerala murals. The theme of these paintings is invariably mythological and the epic stories unfold as one goes around the temple in circumambulations. The moulding, sculpture and painting are also taken in vertical compositions to emphasize the different storey heights, projecting dormer windows which break the sloping roof and the crowning finial. But in all cases the decoration is secondary to the structural form. The sculptured walls are protected by the projecting caves which keep them in shade in sharp contrast with the bright sunlit exterior. This helps to impart the overall perceptual experience of light and shade, revealing details only gradually to a keen observer.

In point of size and the effect arising from it, the temples in the indigenous gable style of architecture are not in the same category as the lofty structures of the Dravidian style.
They are low in elevation but some of them are of great extent. The pediment is generally of laterite, but woodwork with singular neatness enters largely into their composition. The Shiva temples at Vaikom, Trichur and Ettumanur are the finest examples of this style of architecture.

The share of the indigenous tradition of the architecture of Malabar, the ancient Kerala, in the temples of Travancore may be gauged by comparing a temple in Dravida style with one built in the Kerala manner. The walls of the Niramankara Temple built in the fourteenth century and those of the Srikoil (sanctuary) at Vaikom belong to the same family. The difference lies in their roofs (although the Niramankara temple apparently had a pitched roof of timber, its garbhagriha, the innermost sanctuary, is domed). The indigenous temples are four-sided or circular; the latter shape is possibly the more ancient the garbhagraha, however, is always square.

In their plan the indigenous temples in Travancore are complete to this day. The extant buildings, however, do not seem to be more ancient than the thirteenth century. Many a Srikoil is raised above steps which are inscribed and whose carvings together with the inscriptions prove them to be earlier by centuries than the present shrine which is a reconstruction identical in plan with the original building. Similarly, the entire site plan of these temples of the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries is to be thought of as faithfully following the prescriptions and practices of earlier centuries.

In Malabar, on the other hand, a building tradition existed truly at home in that country. Its origins lie far back, and in this sense Kerala architecture is aboriginal. The Dravida school of architecture had its style already formed in the sixth century A.D. No buildings of this age stand today in Dravidadesh; they have survived in the Kanarese districts. It is to be assumed that this potent school had more than one centre, and most probably that of South Travancore was formed more or less at the same time as the others, so that the extant temples have their past in their own country, South Travancore, and also further to the north, in Travancore. Unaffected in its integrity, though not aloof, the ‘aboriginal’ school of architecture continued, equally productive. The carved gable porch, for example, of the entrance to the Padmanabhapuram Palace though it is free of any Western motif and delicate in the carvings of the barge board, yet lacks in harmony between the gable and the pillars.
Temples, palaces, and houses built in the indigenous truly original manner of Malabar are intimate structures. They hold their wealth within, protected against the outside by not only walls, roofs and their overhanging eaves, but also by the cloister of the temples. This reticence of displaying to the outside what is so richly held within, preserves to temple and palace alike the humility of the work of man. It is embraced by the natural beauty of the country, is close to its own earth and water, and cannot be alienated from them. Inwardness and intimacy distinguish Kerala buildings at all times from the Dravida temples, heavy structures, rich in display. Both found their local builders. Travancore not only contributed its own version to Dravida architecture in its buildings; its clearest survey is given in Vastu-Shastra in the Shilparatna, a compilation by Shri Kumara of Kerala.

According to R.V. Puduvall, “In the Dravidian type of temples, the main shrine is in the centre, and other accessory buildings stand inside a long rectangular or square enclosure divided by a high cross wall into courts which, according to their importance, may account as many as seven. The court inside each Prakara (wall) is entered on each side by lofty and massive gopuras, large or small according to the importance of the temples. The lower portion of these gopuras is generally of cut stone ornamented with pilasters and niches or projections. Massive wooden gates with paneled work and studded with ornamental nail-heads are placed at about a third of the depth of the passage from the front. The super structure of these Gopuras consists of several storeys, and they are generally of brick-work equipped with niches and projections corresponding to the cut stone basements and ornamented with plaster figures, often illustrating stories from the Puranas. The upper portion of these gopuras is pyramidal in shape with a “stupi” or a series of “stupis” (pinnacles). The principal shrine of the temple stands near the innermost or central court.

According to the shape of the ‘dome’ of the High Temple, the Dravida school of architecture classified its temples as Nagara, Dravida, and Vesara; the shapes are square, octagonal and round, respectively. The incorporation of a Dravida temple within a Kerala temple, is not the only complex shape of the temple in which the builders of Malabar showed their proficiency. A more productive welcome home was given to the circular prasada when it was brought back to type by becoming fused with the indigenous Srikoil. The shrine of Vallyandayeshwaram of the sixteenth century, is a
perfect solution, and its architectural quality rests on those very features by which the
temple of Parthivashekarapuram had turned out a failure. The secret of the proper
mixture of the Dravida and the Kerala form lies in the proportionate measuring of the
building, the architectural shapes going back in both the schools to similar or identical
origins.

The principles have, from ancient times, been embodied with special distinction in
the numerous temples of Kerala, in a succession of eras from the rare but striking cave
temple of the ninth century A.D. Dr. Kramrisch has made a scholarly comparision of the
two main styles, the Dravidian and the Kerala. Building and carving in wood were the
contribution of the Kerala architects to the art of Travancore; to their Dravida temples the
Kerala craftsmen have contributed the living practice of their country, which, it has been
shown, has also modified the form itself of Dravida architecture in Travancore.

The component parts of a temple in Kerala are, from the foundation upwards (i)
the upapita (pedestal) (ii) the adhisthana (base), (iii) the sthamba (pilaster), (iv) the
prastara (entablature), (v) the griva (neck of the dome) (vi) the sikhara (cupota), and (vii)
the stupa (pinnacle). Up to the prastara, there is no structural difference between the
temples of Kerala and those of the Dravidiand style of the south-east. The difference that
strikes the eye is in the upper portion above. In the Kerala style temples, the wooden
roof is covered with copper sheets or tiles, and ornamental with perpendicular or tilted
triangular gables. The heavy and almost continuous rainfall on the Kerala coast
necessitated some deviations from the Dravidiand style in the construction and angles of
the roofs, though without completely eradicating or transmuting the designs prescribed
by the Shastras (ancient canons of art).

Generally, all the old and important temples in old Kerala have been built on
prominent sites, as laid down in the Sastras; at the top of a hill as at Chitaral, or at the
foot as in Tirunandikkara or by the side of a river like the temples of Aranmula,
Mulikulam, Tirunavay and Triprayar or on an eminence like the Janardhana temple at
Varkala and the Vadakkumnatha temple at Trichur or by the side of the sea, like the
temple of Kanyakumari. Most of the temples face east-ward; but some are turned west-
ward, and a few to the south.
In Kerala, there survive a few examples of Kuttambalam (natyamandapa of the Sanskrit tradition), important among which are the natyamandapa of the Tirumuzhikulam Vishnu temple, parur and the Vadakkumnatha temple theatre, Thrissur. The architectural style of the Kuttambalam shares the features of the square and circular temples of Kerala.

Every temple has a well, situated generally on the north-east corner, which supplies the water required for bathing the image and for preparing food offerings to the deity. A portion of the corridor round the central shrine is used as a kitchen, called the ‘madapalli’ another for feeding Brahmans and a third of storing rice, oil, ghee and other articles required for use. Smaller shrines dedicated to Shasta, Parvati, Ganesha or other deities are also found generally in each temple. Image of Nagas (Serpents) set up around a banyan tree for worship are also a feature of Kerala temples, where in many cases a Kavu (sacred grove) of tangled moss or shrub, meant to be the resort of serpent gods and goddesses, occupies a place on the north-west corner.

Almost to the same period of the cave temple at Kaviyur belongs the rock-cut Shiva temple at Tirunandikkara. This temple is excavated on the southern slope of a hill which lies eastwards. At the southern extremity of the cave is a cell facing east containing a Linga.

Judging from architectural style, a temple which could be assigned to the thirteenth century, is the Parasurama shrine at Thiruvallam near Trivandrum built entirely of granite from the foundation to the ceiling with a rectangular mandapa in its front. Within the spacious compound of this temple enclosed on all sides by two Prakara walls of stone are shrines dedicated to Brahma and Shiva. The central shrine of the ruined Shiva temple at Neeramankara near Trivandrum is presumed to belong to the fourteenth century. In the centre of an open ground, a circular stone wall encloses a rectangular shrine containing a Linga.

The Shiva temple at Ettumanur is a good specimen of the indigenous style of temple architecture of the sixteenth century. Its central shrine is circular in shape, surmounted by a conical roof covered with copper plates with a “stupi” of copper gilt at the top.
The Vishnu temple in Varkala is a fine example of Kerala art and architecture. The circular sanctum surmounted by a conical dome of copper sheets, the square mandapam with beautiful wooden carvings of navagrahas on the ceiling, the mukha mandapam of wooden roof covered with tiles are all characteristic features of Kerala style.

A famous temple, which has a close resemblance to the one at Ettumanur and which belongs almost to the same period of probably a little earlier, is that of Vaikom, which has the same architectural features and is bigger in size.

From the three inscriptions found in the temple of Vadakkumnathan at Trichur, it is presumed that this temple has been in existence from the 12th century and that its present edifices are of later construction.

But architecturally the most notable of the temples in Kerala is the Sri Padmanabhaswami shrine at Trivandrum, in the construction of which both the indigenous style and the features of Dravidian architecture are harmoniously blended. From an engraved inscription in Sanskrit and Malayalam characters on the base of the mandapa inside, it is seen that the temple was reconstructed from the Vimana down; and the work was started in 1729 A.D. Unfortunately a part of the temple (i.e. Vilakkumadam – northern side) caught fire in the year, 1934, but was rebuilt exactly in the manner of the old. It is a splendid monument, showing at its best the fusion of the Dravida and Kerala features of architecture referred to by Dr. Kramrisch.

The Travancore State Manual has a detailed description of the temple which is summarized as follows: This temple stands in an elevated part of the town. The area covered by its enclosures is 570 X 510 feet or 25,700 sq. feet or about 7 acres. It faces east and is surrounded by massive fort walls. A handsome flight of stone steps on the eastern side shows the gentle eminence of the temple site, the front portion of which is covered by a huge gopura, or tower pyramidal in shape and built of granite and brick on the model of the lofty gopuras of the East cost temples. This tower is about 100 ft. in height and has seven storeys with window light-openings in the centre of each of them. The stone basement of the tower is covered with elaborate sculptures, and the masonry above with ornamental work of Puranic figures, the top having seven gold steeples or turrets. Underneath the Gopura is the main gateway leading to the principal temple; well
protected by a number of massive doors and guarded by sentries. The inner shrine is rectangular in shape and consists of two storeys and is ornamented with gables, an essential characteristic of the Kerala style of temple architecture. Outside the inner shrine, but within the enclosures, there are smaller shrines dedicated to Krishna, Kshetrapala, Sastha, Narasimha, Vyasa, Shiva, Ganesha, Rama, Sita and Lakshmana, and others. The outer walls of the central shrine are covered with mural paintings recently renovated depicting various scenes from the Puranas. The central shrine with the halls and mandapas inside, are enclosed by a rectangular structure on the outside of which columns of lamps of brass are fixed."

A structure unique in its shape and conception and also remarkable in construction is the Garuda Mandapa at Tiruvalla, one of the thirteen places sacred to the Sri Vaishnavas and praised by the two saints, Nammalvar and Tirumangai Alvar. It consists of a three-canopied pyramidal floor decorated with triangular gables having widely projecting eaves and built gracefully, tier upon tier, showing prominently the gable roofs covered over with copper sheeting. As a distinct architectural specimen it has a great value, as the like of it is not found anywhere else in India. It is presumed that the structure was built on the model of an older one in the eighteenth century.

The most popular of all the Kerala temples at present is the Krishna shrine at Guruvayur which has sprung into importance from about the sixteenth century. This temple is square in shape and is enclosed on the east and south by a lofty laterite wall; on the west by tiled buildings, where pilgrims are lodged and fed; and on the north by a bathing tank built of laterite steps. The Srikoil or central shrine square in shape and having two Prasadas or storeys, the Nalambalam around it and the Chuttambalam in the outer court-yard where Puranas are recited, are all roofed with copper. A conspicuous feature of this temple is the lofty bell-metal Dwajasthambja, 110 ft. in height (flag-staff) plated with gold.

Some of the noteworthy temples built in places of antiquity in Kerala are ancient structures with vast quadrangular enclosures and have a marvelous intricacy and artistic finish of decoration and workmanship. They have survived as relics of a bygone age which stood the ravages of time showing the extraordinary creative genius of a people who have planned and chiseled elegant edifices of a high aesthetic standard.
The Shiva temples at Thiruvanchikulam, Tali (Calicut), Tiruvannur (Calicut), Taliparamba, Trikkandiyoor, Tripparagode, Sukapuram and Trittala; the Sri Rama temples at Tiruvangad Tiruvallamala and Triprayar; and the Vishnu temples at Tirunavay and Trichchambaram are worthy of mention in this connection as they possess singularly unique Srikoils with multigabled roofs and Prasadas(storeys). The gabled and multiroofed structure of Kerala temples, built of laterite stones, bricks, wood and tiles present different appearance from their architectural counterparts elsewhere in the South and North India. The roofs are by far the conspicuous part in them; the central shrine at Triprayar and Trichur are circular; in the case of the temples of Tali, Tiruvannur (Kozhikode) and Tiruvangad they are quadrangular with double Prasadas or storeys.

Kodungallur, the most ancient place of Kerala, is famous for its temple dedicated to Durga or Bhagavati. The present structures are modern in construction. The main shrine has two Prasadas or storeys. To the left of the main temple is a small shrine dedicated to Shiva. Though recently renovated, the roofs are copper-plated. It attracts an unusually large crowd of pilgrims and worshippers every day and particularly during the Bharani festival in the month of Kumbham (February). One of the attractions of this temple is the presence of an image of Kshetrapala in stone, twelve feet high, which is a rare feature in a Devi temple.

It cannot be denied that the majority of the temples that stand today in different parts of the state belong to the Late phase; it is so not because they were raised for the first time but mostly by virtue of their being fully remodeled, or sometimes even built anew, in this period itself. The number of freshly-built shrines of real architectural value is not many as the endeavour was mainly towards enlarging the already-existent temple-complexes. Sites undoubtedly have their sanctity and so the general tendency is to preserve the site, and not so much the edifice. Naturally, a temple that may exist on an ancient site had to pass through many stages of repairs and alterations. In the circumstances, there is every justification of including them in the Late phase once these are denuded of all their early vestiges.

Church Architecture of Kerala

A good number of churches newly built or old ones renovated in the modern period show traces of the influences of the ecclesiastical churches (St. Thomas church
and the St. Mary’s church) belonging to the Orthodox Syrians. Both the buildings are of the Basilican model and of vaster dimensions than most other church buildings in Kerala. A striking peculiarity of the former is the arch-form employed on the side wall of the hylka (nave). It is a conical arch designed by architects from West Asia. The Mar Thoma Pontifical shrine, Cranganore, consecrated in 1953, with the blessings of the Pope has been built more or less on the pattern of the St. Peter’s Cathedral in Rome. The new Orthodox Syrian church at Kolencherri (the church of St. Peter and St. Paul) built in 1961-63 in the place of an old one is an imposing edifice. It has a length of 124 feet and a breadth of 56 feet and is one of the finest specimens of modern church architecture in Kerala. The Kerala churches are also noted for their beautiful stone sculptures, wood carvings and paintings.

The images in the Church Art of Kerala are orchestrated in multi-levelled symbolic formats, drawn from different religions and cultural traditions. It is indeed a sublime synthesis; which also poses certain interesting theoretical question to the students of culture and art. As a Christian process of image-production and artistic synthesis, the Church Art of Kerala is mainly rooted in two traditions; the Western Christian and the Indian Hindu-Brahmanical. Unlike the Christian Art of Europe, which manifests a unilinear historical trajectory, the Indian Church Art, developed by the indigenous Christianity. Nevertheless, had thrived in a pluralistic milieu. The concept of an ancient Kerala church does not conform to a mere functional building that houses its congregation for the worship alone, but a complex ensemble spread out in a walled-in compound, supposedly a zone of inviolable sanctity, with different architectural symbols, and monuments nestling to the central building. With their flag masts, huge stone-crosses stone-lamps, vadyappura, double-porticos, natakasala and arched entrances (padippura) around the main building, the old churches resembled more of a temple than their giant Gothic or Romanesque counterparts, soaring to the sky, in the west.

The Church Art is a pervasive one spread out into every point and corner of the church-complex. We find many images and figures in its art heavily accented with diverse religious iconographies. Though Hindu influence can be legitimately expected, there are surprising proofs of the influence of Buddhist iconography, Persian Art and even Assyro-Egyptian primitive arts. The inter-cultural and inter-religious exchanges had reached such a positive pitch at one time, that the face of Buddha can be found on the
mounts of the Stone-Crosses of a few Christian churches, while a figure strongly resembling the infant Lord Krishna, surrounded by peacocks, is found in the portals of the Chengannoor church. The Church Architecture of the Syrian Christians, with a lot of autochthonous features had a closer resemblance to the Hindu temples, which were also rooted in the same “Asiatic” spirituality. Images of lions are profuse in the Church Art of Kerala also, but with a characteristic accent of Hindu iconography in most cases. The lion that is painted on the altar of Palai Cathedral does not have even the remote resemblance of the pouncing Irish lion of St. Mark; but with its moustache, eyes, brow and hair like that of a man, is closer to the anthropologized concept of Narasimha of the Hindu pantheon. Whether it is the artisan’s fanciful creative quirk or the deliberate iconographic interpretation of the priest, one is not sure, the lion on the stone cross of Changanacherry church also appears with a human face. The lion on the altar of Palai is counterbalanced by the Ox of St. Luke on the other side; but the humped, fiery, Semitic bull of St. Luke here looks like a sheepish Gangetic Cow with wide eyes.

The evolution of the Church architecture of Kerala springs from two sources the first from the work of Apostle St. Thomas and the Syrian Christians and second from the missionary work of European settlers. The tradition has it that St. Thomas who landed in Musiris in 52 AD has seven churches built in Kerala at Kodungallur, Chayil, Palur, Paravur, Kollam, Niranom and Kothamangalam, but none of these churches are now extant. The Palayam Palli is indeed a repository of Church architecture of Kerala.

But original Surians who had migrated to Kerala had brought with them some of the west Asian conventions in church architecture. Consequently there evolved a distinctive style of church architecture. The peculiar feature of this style was the ornamental gable façade at the nave end, summounted by a cross. An entry porch (shala) in front of the nave was another feature of these early shrines.

The church had a gable roof extending to the chancel, the most sacred part of the church and the sacristy by its side. The tower over the chancel soared higher than the roof of the nave similar to the sikhara over the garbhagriha in a Hindu temple. In their external feature Syrian churches retained some of the indigenous features of the Hindu style. The church and the ancillary buildings were enclosed in a massive laterite wall. There was an open cross in front of the main entrance on a granite basement in the
model of balikkal, the altar stone. A church also had the flag mast, (the dwajastambha) in front. In the Orthodox Syrian church at Chengannur, Peter and Paul occupy the place of dwarapalas, the guarding deities of a Hindu shrine. The oldest Syrian church of Kerala is believed to be the St. Mary’s church at Kuravilangad. Originally built in 335 A.D. it had undergone renovations several times. The church has a rich collection of old relics including an idol of Virgin Mary and a cross carved in granite. The Valiapally of Kaduthuruthy is another old church with the biggest cross formed in a single granite piece. Wood carving and mural paintings, the two decorative media of temples are seen to be adopted in ancient churches also. A famous piece of wooden carving is a large panel depicting the last supper in St. Thomas church, Mulanthuruthy. The All Saints church at Udayamperur has a beam resting on wooden mouldings of heads of elephants and rhinoceros. Floral figures, angels and apostles are the usual motifs of mural paintings. This form of decoration had continued in later churches as well. In St. Sebastian’s church at Kanjoor a mural even depicts the fight between British and Tippu Sultan.

The Portuguese were the first to introduce European styles in the church architecture of Kerala, followed by Dutch and British. The first church of this type in India was built by the Franciscan missionaries in 1510 A.D. at Fort Kochi. It is a small unpretentious building of the medieval Spanish type. The Portuguese had introduced many innovations in the Kerala churches. For the first time, the dominating tower above the altar, which was the adaptation from temple architecture, was discarded. Generally pulpits were erected and altar pieces were ornamented in an impressive manner. Ceilings and walls were painted with religious themes in the style of European masters. Pointed and rounded arches were introduced and stained glass windows were installed.

The subsequent development in church architecture in the British period also saw the introduction of a new church design. In the treatment of the exterior, typical features of European church architecture were introduced – the Gothic arches, the pilasters and buttresses, the rounded openings, the classic mouldings and stained glass windows making the whole composition completely different from the native architecture. Depending on the period of construction, one can also distinguish between the churches done in the simplicity of Gothic style as in the Palayam church, Thiruvananthapuram, and the luxury of renaissance style as in the church of Our Lady of Dolorous at Trissoor.
While the character of church architecture is generally identified with the form evolved in the medieval times, the modernistic trends in adapting new plan shapes and structural forms are visible in the Kerala scene as well. This circular plan shape with domical shell roof has been adopted in the Christ College church at Irinjalakkuda. The Cathedral church of Archbishop of Varapuzha at Ernakulam is a soaring hyperbolic paraboloid in reinforced concrete with a bold expression in sharp contrast with all traditional forms. Perhaps experimentation in religious architecture is mostly manifested in church architecture as compared to that in temples or mosques which more or less adhere to old evolved forms seen on the side of Krishna.

**Mosque Architecture of Kerala**

As in the case of temples and churches, wood has been used extensively in the construction of Kerala mosques. The wooden pulpits (mimbar) in the mosques are among the best specimens of wood carvings associated with Islamic architecture in Kerala and they are a contrast to the mosques themselves which are just simple structures built exclusively from the utilitarian point of view. The mosque at Palayam (Cantonment) in Trivandrum, the new mosque (Puthiya Palli) in Calicut and the Juma Masjid in Tellicherry are among the new mosque built after the Indo-Saracebuc style with the dome and the minarets as their distinguishing marks. The old mosque at cranganore has also been rebuilt in this style.

The Jami Mosque, Kottakal Kerala notes Desai (1971) is a typical specimen of the mosque architecture of Kerala, where in view of the climatic conditions of the south-west coast, the mosques are completely covered and cannot be easily distinguished from residential buildings. It consists, on plan, of a large hall, with an open Verandah on two sides, and is roofed by gabled tile-roofs in more than one tier.

The Arab world, the cradle of Islam also had trade contact with Kerala coast from very early times. The mosque architecture of Kerala exhibit none of the features of the Arabic style nor those of the Indo-Islamic architectures of the imperial or provincial school in north India. The reason for this is not far to seek. The work of mosque construction was done by the local artisans under instructions of the Muslim religious heads who wanted to erect the places of worship. The models for places of worship were only temples or the theatre halls (koothambalam) and these models are to be
adapted for the new situations. The early mosques in Kerala consequently resembles the traditional building of the region. In plan the mosque comprises a large prayer hall with a mihrab on the western wall and covered verandah all around. Generally it has tall basement similar to the adhistana of the Brahmanical temple and often the columnns are treated with square and octagonal section as in mandapa pillars. The walls are made of laterite blocks. At Tanur the Jama Masjid even has a gate built in the manner of temple gopuram, covered with copper sheeting. This mosque itself is a three storeyed building with tiled roof crowned by five fenials. The pulpit in the mosque present the best example of wood carvings associated with Islamic architecture of Kerala. The Jama Masjid at Beypore and Mithqal Mosque at Kozhikode have the pulpit (mimbar) built by the ship masters of the Arab vessels.

The Arabic tradition of simplicity of plan had perhaps combined itself with the indigenous construction techniques giving rise to the unique style of mosque architecture, not found anywhere else in the world. The typical Kerala mosques are seen at Kollampalli, near Kollam, Panthalayani near Koilandy, Kozhikode, Thanur, Ponnani and Kasargod as well as in most old Muslim settlements. The austere architectural features of the old mosques are however in the process of being replaced in recent times. The use of arcuated forms, domes and minar-minarets of the imperial school of Indo-Islamic architecture are being projected as the visible symbols of Islamic culture. The Jama Masjid at Palayam, Thiruvananthapuram is the classic example of this new trend. Similar structures are coming up all over Kerala in the modification of old mosques during the last decades.

Other Architectural Marvels

The most important Jewish settlement is seen at Kochi near the Mattancherry palace. Their residential buildings resemble the Kerala type in their external appearance, nevertheless they are of a different plan concept. The ground floor rooms are used as shops or warehouses and the living rooms are planned on the first floor. The frontage of the building about the streets and the sides are continuous with adjoining buildings in the pattern of the row houses. An important historic monument of the Jew town is the Synagogue. It is a simple tall structure with a sloping tile roof but it has a rich interior with hand painted tiles from Canton, China and ancient chandeliers from Europe.
The architectural development in Kerala was highly influenced by the European style during sixteenth to nineteenth century. The influence of the Portuguese and Dutch was most predominant in the initial stages. A Portuguese architect Thomas Fernandez is credited with the construction of forts, warehouses and bungalows at Kochi, Kozhikode and Kannur. The projecting balconies, Gothic arches and cast iron window grill work are few of the features passed on to Kerala architecture by the Portuguese construction. By eighteenth century, British style was being popularized in the land as a result of a large number of modern constructions directly carried out by the British rulers on the one hand and the fashion for things Western by the princely class and the rich on the other. The architectural work was guided by the officers and engineers whose knowledge of the architectural style was essentially restricted to the classic books on renaissance architects – Virtuvious, Alberti & Palladio and executed by indigenous knowledge of traditional masons and carpenters recruited for the work. In a sense it was a compromise of antique craft and neo-classical construction needs. The adaptations of European styles to the climatic needs and the synthesis with traditional style are best seen in the bungalow architecture. Cast iron fences, stair balustrades and iron grills, made in England, were used to complete the bungalow architecture. Excellent examples of this synthesis are seen in the Napier museum at Thiruvananthapuram, and many government bungalows. In fact many of these features were smoothly adopted by the native builders to the extent that they are considered by most as traditional elements. The works of Public Works Departments have helped to spread this type of construction all over Kerala.

The Indian courtyard house was a remarkable form of residential architecture. The courtyard was this style’s quintessence and its relevance to the home was apparent as well as subtle. It was the structure’s core. The courtyard ordered other spaces by context in an abode where space was not rigidly fixed but could be adaptable depending on the time of day, season and exigency. It obliquely controlled the environment inside and served the needs of its inhabitants. Its moods changed with varying degrees of light and shade. Centrally located, it imprinted the domain of the dwelling like a visual anchor. Around the courtyard space the rest of the structure seemlessly coalesced by the play of peristyles and gallery spaces. It was the spatial, social, and environment control center of the home. This form of architecture met with the requirements of the traditional joint
family system as well as the climate. The courtyard functioned as a convective thermostat and gave protection from extremes of weather.

The courtyard house form in India was not based on blind conformity and there was tremendous innovation in the design of such homes, known variously in different regions – haveli in northern India, where they were prominent, wada in Maharashtra, nalukettu in Kerala, rajbari in Bengal and deori in Hyderabad. All had regional variations in design and craft techniques, using stone, wood, bricks and mortar.

The courtyard house styles in south India are the Nalukettu in Kerala and the huge mansions of the Chettiar in Tamil Nadu. The Kerala courtyard house is a compact structure in a larger compound, next to a kullam, bathing tank. Entry to the Nalukettu is through a raised verandah, poomukham, with built-in benches for visitors to sit on. The court in these houses is smaller than in the typical haveli but often has the classical impluvium, a rain water cistern in the center. The opening to the sky from the courtyard is also small and just enough to admit a moderate amount of light. The space around the courtyard, Nalukettu, is demarcated for activities like food preparation, eating or lounging, and is separated from the court by a low partition. One side corner is the puja area where images of deities are kept, in addition, perhaps, to a small temple in the compound. The structures are of wood or masonry, with carving in geometrical patterns on the wooden members. The sloping roof is tiled and has ornately carved gables. The Nalukettu form of residence is also used by the matrilineal Nair family, and since there is no rigid seclusion of women there is no equivalent of the zenana of the western Indian haveli, though there is a room in the Nalukettu for women during certain periods. Wooden stairs lead to the store rooms above the ground floor. Screens in the gables allow in air for circulation in the store rooms and the rest of the structure, the circuit being completed through the courtyard. A Nalukettu implies a single courtyard (four corners) while an Ettukettu has two courtyards (eight corners) (T.S. Randhawa, 1999).

The evolution of domestic architecture of Kerala followed closely the trend of development in temple architecture. The primitive models were huts made of bamboo frame thatched with leaves in circular, square or rectangular plain shapes. The rectangular shape with a hipped roof appears to have been finally evolved from functional consideration. Structurally, the roof frame was supported on the pillars on
walls erected on a plinth raised from the ground for protection against dampness and insects in the tropical climate.

Basically the domestic architecture of Kerala follows the style of detached building; row houses seen in other parts of India are neither mentioned in Kerala texts nor put up in practice except in settlements (sanketam) occupied by Tamil or Konkini Brahmans. In its most developed form the typical Kerala house is a courtyard type-nalukettu. The central courtyard is an outdoor living space which may house some object of cult worship such as a raised bed for tulsi or jasmine (mullathara). The four halls enclosing the courtyard identical to the nalambalam of the temple may be divided into several rooms for different activities such as, cooking, dinning, sleeping studying, storage of grains etc. Depending on the size and importance of the household, the building may have one or two upper storeys (malika) or further enclosed courtyard by repetition of the nalukettu to form ettukettu (eight halled building) or a cluster of such courtyards.

The nalukettu is the principal structure of a garden compound. The garden may contain cattle sheds, bathing tanks, wells, farm buildings, grain stores etc., as ancillary structures, the whole being protected with a compound wall or fence. An entrance structure (padippura) may also be constructed like the gopuram of a temple. This may contain one or two rooms for guests or occasional visitors who are not entertained in the main house. The position and sizes of various buildings, including the location of trees and paths within the compound wall were to be decided from the analysis of the site according to the prescriptions in the classic texts. This analysis involved the concept of vastupurusha mandala wherein the site (vastu) was divided into a number of grids (padam) occupied by different deities (devatha) and appropriate grids were chosen to house the suspicious structures. The site planning and building design was done by learned stapathis (master builders) who synthesized the technical matters with astrological and mystical sciences.

There are numerous buildings of the nalukettu type in different parts of Kerala though many of them are in a poor state of maintenance. Changing socio-economic conditions have split up the joint-family system centered around the large nalukettu. The Kailasa mandiram at Kottakkal belonging to the Arya Vaidyasala is a standing example
of a three storeyed nalukettu complex. Of the best preserved examples of this type are Mattancherry palace at Kochi and the taikottaram of the Padmanabhapuram palace near Kanyakumari.

The Mattancherry palace standing in the panorama of backwaters on the east was built in 1557 for the use of Kochi Maharajas, originally as a gift from Portuguese. Later it has undergone extensive repair by the Dutch. The double storeyed building follows the nalukettu plan with a courtyard in the centre housing a Bhagavathi temple. The different wings of the palace in the upper storey contain the coronation hall, council halls and bed chambers of kings and ladies. The lower storey has many small rooms apart from the kitchen and the dining hall. An important feature of the palace is the exquisite wood work of the ceiling and fine murals on the walls. The ceiling work include a grid of wooden joints well proportioned and precision moulded with beautifully carved panels. The murals in subdued brownish tints were executed on wet wall plaster depicting themes from Ramayana, Bhagavatham and Kumarasambhavam of Kalidasa.

The Padmanabhapuram palace consists of a complex of buildings including the entrance hall, council chambers, temple and dance halls done in various period. But the earliest structure of this group is the taikottaram- which is a fine example of the old nalukettu. Being of an earlier period, this shows the concept of the courtyard building in its purest traditional form. Nalukettu type buildings are also seen in many villages and towns, occupied by prominent people. Nalukettu is a combination of four halls along four cardinal directions, centered around the courtyard or anganam one may build any one of the four halls (ekasala), a combination of two (dwisala) or a complex of three (thrisals) depending on the needs. The most commonly found type in Kerala is the ekasala facing east or north. Being located on the western and southern sides of the anganam they are referred as western hall (padinjattini) and southern hall (thekkini) respectively.

Vastuvidya texts prescribe the dimensions of different house types suitable for different classes. They also give the proportional system of measurements for different parts of the building all based on the perimeter (chuttu) of the core unit. The scientific basis of this dimensional system is yet to be enquired by modern studies. All over Kerala and specially in villages where the building activity is still carried out under the control of traditional stapathis, the system is still a living practice, though it has started
disappearing under the impact of 'modern architecture'. The architectural scene of Kerala was influenced by many socio-cultural groups and religious thoughts from foreign lands.

Most of the houses in Kerala have, for centuries, been built in enclosed gardens. Ibn Batuta writing in the fourteenth century observes – “Everybody has here a garden and his house is placed in the middle of it, and down the whole of this is a fence of wood upto which the ground of each inhabitant comes.” These houses were the Nalukettus.

The Krishnapuram palace at Kayamkulam was built during the reign of Marthanda Varma and it is a typical example of the Kerala style of architecture. The Kanakakunnu Palace, Thiruvananthapuram, which is now the venue of important conferences and events, the Kowdiar palace of the erstwhile ruler of Travancore and the Hill palace of the erstwhile Cochin ruler at Trippunithura, which now houses an Art Museum are buildings noted for their stateliness and dignity. In the Fort area in Thiruvananthapuram may be seen a series of palaces built by successive rulers. The gabled roof is a common feature of all the palaces.

The palace is situated at the very centre of the Padmanabhapuram Fort with an area of 186 acres of land amidst dales and rivers of the Veli hills. It is set in a picturesque and ideal surroundings which also have contributed largely to the architectural magnificence of the monument. The Padmanabhapuram Palace is actually a Palace Complex. This Complex of fourteen Palaces spread over an area of 6.5 acres is a unique instance which shows all the features of the architecture of ancient Kerala.

The exterior of Padmanabhapuram Palace is simple and unpretentious like other secular and religious architectural specimens of Kerala. The interior is enriched by wood carvings and conspicuous murals. The Epigraphical Gallery, Padmanabhapuram Palace is considered to be the largest gallery in South India. It is informative, and educative to one and all who are interested in studying past history and culture.

A mint, a stable, a barrack and a big cattle shed also were added as part of this Palace Complex. But those buildings were demolished in course of time as part of renovation. The Padipura (main gate) the essential feature of an old Kerala house, with its huge doors, retains the imposing appearance of the Palace even today. The entrance
to the main edifice is controlled by another ornamental gateway with arrangements for
the retainers and the watch and ward. The Poomukham has gabled entrance in
traditional style and ornamentation. The images of horse riders on both sides of the
entrance are examples of exquisite wood carvings. The wooden ceiling and pillars are
profusely ornamented with lotus medallions. There are 90(ninety) flowers carved on the
ceiling and each one is different from the other. The granite cot made up of 7 pieces of
granite, the Chinese model throne and the paintings on ‘Ona Villu’ (wooden bows
presented to the sovereign of festival occasions by local dignitaries) are the main
attractions in the hall.

The first floor of the Poomukham is the ‘Mantrasala’ or the Council Chamber. The
King used to communicate with his ministers in this hall. An ornamental throne was
provided for the king under the magnificent carving of “Gajalekshmi”, and lotuses on the
ceiling.

The Manimalika (clock tower) contains a clock purely of the make and design of a
village mechanic. It is believed to be about 200 years old and after two decades of
inanimate silence it has climbed in to active life again recently. An unusual feature in the
mechanism of the clock is that the motive force is derived from two heavy weights made
up of disc shaped blocks of rock suspended from the escapement wheel by chains of
about 9 meters in length. The movement of the clock is regulated by the weights raised
up every week and by a 1.5 meter pendulum. The Thaikkottaram (Mother Palace) is the
oldest building in the Palace Complex. This is also known as Darpakulangara Koyikkal
(Palace near the Pond)

Homappura is a single storeyed building to the North of Thaikkottaram. This was
mainly used to perform “Homam” (religious offerings to Gods and Goddesses). There is
a small Saraswathy Temple on the Eastern side of the Homappura. The name
‘Uppirikka’ is derived from the word ‘Uparika’ which means a multistoried building. The
building was constructed in 1750 A.D. by Maharaja Marthanda Varma. The building
consists of four storeys. The ground floor was used as the royal treasury. The third floor
is the Mural Pagoda. The murals on the four walls of the topmost storey popularly
known as “Uppirikkamalika” of this magnificent Palace are well preserved and display the
stylistics of 17th and 18th Century architecture. The stories in the Murals at
Padmanabhapuram are based on Vaishnavite and Saivaite puranas. They have been painted with qualities of vividness and realism in order to recollect the mythologies without much hardship. Again the technique adopted in the murals of Padmanabhapuram is the use of light colour against a dark background or a dark tint against some light tone in the distance. The grace and beauty of the figures are mainly due to the art of line and the artist has given effective expression to Thirteen Chinese Jars which were used for preserving pickles, are exhibited in this hall his subject by simply modulating the line in various ways. The chief attractions in the long corridor are the Ambari Mukhappu (Bay window) and the historical paintings.

The marvelously sculptured granite structures of Navarathrimandapam and Saraswathy Temple were constructed by Marthanda Varma in 1744 A.D. The harmoniously grouped monolithic pillars create an illusion of space in a confined area. The ceiling of closely fitted single piece granite cross beams are supported by these pillars. The figure of a woman holding a lamp (salabhanjika) with both hands is carved out from the same block of granite. The inverted floral ends of the capitals of all the pillars form a uniform pattern in the mandapam.

Navarathri Mandapam was used for cultural performances. Music, dance and other entertainments were conducted every year during the Navarathri Festival.

The main building is the domestic apartment in the traditional style of a “Nalukettu” with a ‘Nilavara’. The small balcony facing the tank was probably a rest room in olden days. The other building on the South is the ‘Thekkethu’, a place for common worship attached to a Tharavad.

A Heritage Museum is arranged in this traditional Nalukettu. The house hold articles and utensils which were the part and parcel of day today life of a bygone generation but now extinct due to the development of most modern scientific technology are exhibited in the Nalukettu. The concept of Heritage Museum aims at the presentation of the extinct objects of simple societies highlighting implication of subsistence and patterns of all aspects of Kerala Culture. The visitors can observe how the evolution, has taken place in the life style of people over a period of years.
A museum block at the Southwest corner of Padmanabhapuram Palace was constructed by the Department of Archaeology. The invaluable exhibits within the new museum are examples of the rich and varied collection of the Department of Archaeology from the Southernmost part of the State. This prestigious collection of the Department includes wooden sculptures, stone images, stone inscriptions, copper plates, old coins, ancient arms and ammunitions, swords, copies of mural paintings of the Mural Pagoda of the aforesaid Uppirikka Malika. Padmanabhapuram Palace is an ancient historical monument representing the indigenous architectural features especially in the traditional style of southern Kerala.

A unique Kerala architectural style has emerged due to the availability of building materials and climatic factors. P.V. Ouseph (2005) has attributed the following as special features of Kerala architecture in his work on 'Treatise on Architecture' (Vasthu Vidya)

1. The wide and spacious balcony at the top floor with an all round view
2. Gracious pillars adorning the facade
3. Windows with provision to see outside through the space (Chuttazhi)
4. Excellent Ventillation
5. Balcony on the sides of houses
6. Free flow of air in open kitchens, and
7. Provisions to lessen the intensity of Sun rays and dispel dust particles.

From about the latter half of the 19th century, there has been a marked decline in the construction of houses and palaces in Kerala. Civil architecture as a fine art became almost extinct; and there was a general indifference towards the perpetuation of ancient architectural styles and designs. The result was that buildings after European styles came to be constructed. The residential houses and public buildings which came to be constructed in the early part of the twentieth century are not characterized by any distinct architectural features of style. The residential palaces of the former Rulers of Travancore and Cochin are however good examples of the eastern style of architecture, improved in the light of modern requirements of health and sanitation and also of stateliness and dignity. Though these Palaces have none of the architectural
pretensions of costly edifices elsewhere in India, they are imposing in their simplicity, elegance and neatness.

The Bolghatti palace built by Dutch in 1744 and the Kalikotta palace built by them at Trippunithura for Saktan Tamburan (1790-1805 are impressive structures. In Chennamangalam is another strong palace built by the Dutch for the Paliath Achan. In the Malabar area may be seen the Zamorin’s palace at Meenchanta (Calicut), a palace of the Kottayam Raja at Tamarasseri, the fortified palace of the Kizhakke Kovilakam branch of the Zamorin's family at Kottakkal, the palace of the Ali Raja at Cannanore and that of the Kolathiri at Chirakkal. All these palaces are old structures representing the Kerala style of architecture.

It is also worth mentioning that there are some public buildings other than temples and palaces, which also preserve the indigenous style of Kerala with its characteristic gabled roofs. The Government Museum and the Golf Pavilion at Trivandrum, the Tunchan Memorial building at Trikkandiyur and the newly built Koothambalam in the Kalamandalam at Cheruthuruthi come within this category. The last mentioned edifice formally opened in 1977 in commemoration of Vallathol’s work in the cause of the revival of Kerala arts is a treasure house of all that is best in the architectural and sculptural traditions of Kerala.

The post independence scene in Kerala architecture presents two diverse trends one is derived from the modernistic style with emphasis on concrete as the medium of construction and linear cubical or curvilinear shapes for expressing forms. Perhaps the alternate stream is rooted in an enquiry into the traditional style and the revival of functional architecture. The use of indigenous materials, adoption of traditional techniques and matching of climatic needs are the features of this trend in architecture, ardently propagated by Laury Baker. Architecture in all ages have been an expression of social values. It has been ever changing yet a distinct regional character has evolved in Kerala, decided by the local materials, climate and aesthetic values. What is found in contemporary architectural scene is the pangs of a conflict or perhaps synthesis of evolved architecture and the innovations in technology. Whether the regional character will be still preserved or not depends on the intrinsic worth of the traditional
technology and the inherent strength of the social values of simplicity functional perfection and subtle aesthetics.

6.4 PAINTING IN KERALA

Painting in Kerala assumes significance due to the outstanding works of one of the greatest painters India has ever produced, Raja Ravi Varma. Nandakumar (1999) maintains that it was only with Ravi Varma that, the concept of an individual artist with a professional identity and career consciousness and an extra-social space that he had claimed for himself by virtue of his image and role as artist, has come about in the Kerala cultural context.

The art of painting in Kerala has a tradition which goes back to the immediate post-Ajanta period. The murals of Tirunandikkara (Kanyakumari District) are the earliest specimens of this art in old Kerala. A large sized painting on the Gopuram of the Ettumanur Siva temple which has, for its theme, Siva as Nataraja trampling under foot the spirit of evil represented by a demon, has been described by the art critic Dr. Coomaraswamy as “The only old example of Dravidian painting”.

The earliest specimens of painting in old Kerala belong to the ninth century A.D. if not earlier. These were discovered in the rock cut cave temple of Tirunandikkara. The hall inside the cave seems to have been once richly decorated with paintings; but these unfortunately perished through neglect in course of time. Amongst the few relics of them now visible are outlines of the figures of Shiva and Parvati which have an admirable finish of technique and a delightful expression of grace and benignant peace. Copies of fragments of five out of seven panels are exhibited now in the Sri Chitra Art Gallery at Trivandrum.

There are five types of folk painting in Kerala: kolamezhuthu, kalamezhuthu, chumarchitramezhuthu (murals), mukhamezhuthu, mukhavaranangal (masks) and kireedam (headgear). As in the other folk arts, folk painting is intimately linked to religious rituals. Kolam is celebrated in all homes in Kerala by laying flower designs on the floor. Although flowers of all colours and shapes are arranged in definite patterns, from a distance, they give the impression of a beautiful painting.
Kerala has always had the practice of decorating the walls of temples, churches and palaces with beautiful paintings. Traces of the most ancient mural paintings are believed to be in the cave temples of Thirunandikkara. Mukhamezhuthu of the ritualistic arts shows all the qualities of the painting tradition in Kerala. Colours are applied on the face in different ways for Mudiyettu, Theyyam, Kalikettu, etc. Chutti is a major component of Mudiyettu. Meyyezhuthu is another special feature of the folk arts of Kerala. It is Theyyam that uses different types of meyyezhuthu. Here the chest and stomach of the performers are painted. Of all the folk art forms that employ mukhavaranam (mask), Padayani, Theyyam, Tira, Poothanthira, Mariyattom, etc., are some of the important ones.

A painting which belongs to a period not later than the sixteenth century A.D. is found on the gopura (tower) of the Shiva temple at Ettumanur, which, Dr. Coomaraswamy says in his book, ‘An Introduction to Indian Art.’ Is “the only old example of Dravidian painting.” It is twelve feet in length and three feet in height. There is no possibility of fixing the exact date of this precious work; but an inscription within the temple engraved on the base of the circular Garbhagriha (sanctum sanctorum) shows that the repairs to the temple were begun during the Kollam year 717 (1542 A.D) and the purification ceremony was performed in the year 720 M.E. (1545 A.D.). The painting on the gopura may, therefore, be ascribed to a period not later than the sixteenth century. The theme of the picture is that of Shiva, as Nataraja, trampling under foot the spirit of evil represented by a demon. The dance that is depicted in the mural is supposed to illustrate the mental and physical energy of the Creator. The pose and balance of the figure of Shiva are a marvel of pictorial art. The flying braids of hair and the ends of the cloth which is twisted about the waist and body suggest violent ecstatic movement. On the braids of the hair are a crescent, a small figure of the Goddess Ganga and a serpent. Snakes are seen coiling all round the picture.

The figure of Shiva is smeared with white ash. The figure radiates bliss, glory and peace. It inspires joy in his worship and strikes terror in the mind of the wicked. On the whole, the sixteen-armed picture of Shiva in his mystic dance, symbolizing the rhythmic motion of the Universe is a masterpiece of pictorial art.
A few damaged specimens of a group of paintings, presumed to belong to the same period, are found on the outer walls of the Garbhagruha of the Shiva temple at Vaikom. From the temple chronicles relating to the year 1539 A.D. it is seen that there was a fire between 1529 and 1539 A.D. and that the temple was afterwards rebuilt and consecrated. The paintings may, therefore, be taken to belong roughly to a period between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. There are twenty panels of about forty deific figures which appear to have retained their ancient charm, though in some cases they have been of late interfered with by retouching. This style combines clear-cut line with a singular purity and delicacy of colours. Though many of the panels have been subject to damage, those that have survived have a commanding grandeur and power.

The most important of the paintings of old Kerala are found on the topmost floor of the four-storeyed building in the Palace at Padmanabhapuram, the former capital of Travancore. There are nearly fifty scenes of mythological interest painted on the four walls of the room. They are designed with masterly skill and have remained wonderfully fresh. They are a valuable artistic heritage full of charm and stimulating interest. The faces of many of the figures depicted are elongated. Most of them, though conventional in type, show a fascinating design and draftsmanship, enhanced by the glamorous magic of colours. Every scene has a completeness of spirit and symmetry. The paintings include the major figures of the Hindu Pantheon and some incidents from the Puranas.

The Royal Palace at Mattancherry, built by the Portuguese and presented to Veera Kerala Varma, the Ruling Chief of Cochin about 1555 A.D. is noted for well-preserved mural paintings belonging to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Palace underwent renovation at the hands of the Dutch in 1663 A.D. The Ramayana scenes depicted in the rooms situated in the west of the Coronation Hall are a marvel of pictorial art. Four other chambers in the upper and lower storeys of the Palace are also painted with murals which though of a later period are remarkable specimens of unsophisticated workmanship, representing the contemporary social life of Kerala.

In their technique and mode of decoration, they are almost akin to the mural paintings on the walls of the Sankaranarayana shrine in the Vadakkumnathan temple at Trichur, which according to an inscription recorded was completed on the 23rd of September 1731 A.D. The Krishna Leela scenes are comparatively of a later date. In
spite of the refixing of the plaster on certain portions of the wall and the continued burning of an oil lamp in one corner of the Chamber, these paintings are found in a state of good preservation. At the other end of the Coronation Hall known as the Kovinithalam or staircase room (Room II) are seen on its walls six complete and one incomplete set of pictures representing the three popular Hindu cults viz., the Devi cult, the Vishnu cult and the Shiva cult. The pictures representing the marriage of Parvati with Shiva featuring exactly the story of Kumarasambhava as described by Kalidasa in Room No. 4 though left incomplete, form an ideal of incomparable beauty and represent a study of social life of Kerala. Unfortunately, these paintings are now in a state of deterioration, having suffered from thoughtless whitewashing. Room No. 5 is adorned with five pictures, covering more than 100 square feet. They form two sets, one representing Krishna Leela i.e., dallying of Shiva with Vishnu Maya or Mohini. Panel 26 has suffered considerable deterioration while the rest have been spoiled by recolouring. The figures of Kirathamoorthi, who assumed the form of Kiratha, hunter and presented the weapon of Pasupata to Arjuna for the annihilation of the Kauravas; Vishnu as Yogasanamoorthi, painted in a mixture of black and yellow colours and made to recline on the serpent Adisesha with head directed to the left of the observer; Krishna as Govardhanodharaka, holding a loft the Govardhana in his left hand; Umamaheswaramoorthi, representing Uma and Maheswara; Mahalakshmi and Bhootamatha; Vishnu as Bhogasanamoorthi and Hiranayagarbha, etc., are some of the finest pieces of pictorial achievement in the history of Kerala art.

The frame work of traditional painting in Travancore was strong as long as it was supported by a living realization of the principles that had set it up. As in wood carving so also in painting, each craftsman leaves on it the total of his ability, matured under particular contingencies of inheritance, surroundings and racial memory. These may be polished as urban or rustic.

The scenes represented in the Mattancherry Palace are characterized by vitality and action; and the figures are drawn with admirable skill and painted with a deep understanding of the colour values. The unknown artists who painted these knew well the canons of painting known as Shadanga. These pictures are not frescoes but tempera. All the figures have a rhythmic quality, poise and grace, and they are a finished work of a transient school trained in pictorial art. The faces of all the figures
have a tranquil sense and suavity. They combine saundarya with lavanya or beauty with grace; and the artists who painted them on the walls have displayed great power of intuition, contemplation, meditation and technical skill and draftsmanship. Though the Mattancherry Palace has no architectural beauty, it is a massive building divided into narrow but long chambers decorated with about 1,000 square feet of murals distributed in four chambers belonging to three different periods beginning from the seventeenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century A.D.

In the ancient Shiva temple at Tiruvanchikulam are seen five panels of mural painting covering a space of about 105 square feet, the best of which is one depicting a fighting scene from Mahabharata. These are very badly damaged. A few relics of murals depicting some scenes from Ramayana and Markandeya Purana are also found in the Chemmanthatta shrine, covering an area of 190 square feet; but an excellent vestige of mural art is preserved in the Vadakkumnathan temple at Trichur, particularly on the walls of the Sankaranarayana shrine, which depicts incidents from the battle of Kurukshetra and portraiture of Nataraja, Dakshinamoorthi and Ganesa.

Six damaged panels, presumed to belong to the latter half of the seventeenth century A.D. depicting Shiva, Vishnu, Subramanya, Ardhanareeswara and two female figures have been found recently in a small shrine in the Shiva temple at Tripparangode possessing remarkable skill in artistic workmanship. Mural painting of a much later period roughly of the early half of the nineteenth century are noticed on the walls of the Sri Rama temple at Triprayar. They show a vigorous design, a highly rhythmic compositional sense and rich decorative pattern.

All these belong to a period from the middle of the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries which appear to have been a period of unprecedented activity in pictorial art in Kerala. They are all drawn with power and precision, and display a phenomenal art in drawing, grouping and colouring figures. Dr. Cousins had said that “art in the highest calls for high objective depiction, for the expression of subjective state of mind and emotion and for the recognition of the transcendental all-enfolding life of the cosmos”. These elements are notably present in the pictorial vestiges of mural art in Kerala in which are seen a rich profusion of simple and elegant beauty combined with humanity to be seen and enjoyed. It may not possess the qualities of supreme greatness but it
expresses to the full the soul not only of those who produced it, but of those for whom it was wrought.

Four mural paintings belonging to the same period are found on the walls of the Srikoil of the Vishnu temple at Aranmula. Each of them measures 63 inches in length and 50 inches in height, painted in pairs on either side of the façade of the central shrine. Another wall painting of special interest belonging to this period and depicting a palace scene was noticed in the Karivelapura Malikai attached to the Fort Palace, Thiruvananthapuram.

A mural scene depicting the Puranic story of Gajendramoksham, occupying a wall space of 154 square feet (14 feet horizontal and 11 feet vertical) was brought to light in the Krishnapuram Palace. In execution, posture and composition it is a priceless piece of artistic work and is the largest in the State so far discovered. Specimens of mural painting of a later and decadent period, roughly of the late eighteenth century are found on the walls of the temples at Panayannarkavu near Mannar. There are two temples, one dedicated to Shiva and the other to Bhagavati. Both are decorated with well-preserved mural paintings.

On the walls of Vadakkumnatha temple at Thrissur are found two rare paintings which are about 350 years old – a reclining Shiva and a Nataraja with 20 arms.

Side by side with the great achievements in the pictorial art of the country, there was fostered and kept up a primitive art of the people. A fusion of decorative and representative impulses inherent in the religious cults and beliefs of the people is one of the principal features distinguishing this art. Decorative geometrical designs of a conventional character in the form of Padma (Lotus), Swastika, or Chakra (Wheel) are the necessary concomitants of temple rituals in the State.

The figures of Shasta, Kali and Durga are generally drawn. The materials employed in their painting are –charcoal powder for black, rice powder for white, the powder of turmeric for yellow, the powder of green leaves for green and a mixture of turmeric and chunnam for red. The figures drawn with these colours are lively and vigorous; they have a rude barbaric splendor. The history of painting in Kerala from about the last quarter of the 18th century marks a distinct change through the influence of
foreign schools on local talent. The portraits of Kartika Tirunal Rama Varma Maharaja, Bala Rama Varma Maharaja and of four princesses of the Royal family, now in the Ranga Vilasom Palace at Thiruvananthapuram are specimens of water-colour paintings on the model of the Mughal miniatures, presumably by indigenous artists. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, Kerala seems to have taken a lead in the art of painting and produced several painters of merit.

The performance of religious rites necessitated the development of a special kind of pictorial art in Kerala known as Kalamezhuthu. Decorated geometrical designs of the conventional type like Padma, Swastika and Chakra are indispensable in connection with the observance of temple rites. Moreover, the cult of Durga, Sastha and Kali has been practised in Kerala temples by drawing the figures of those deities on the floor and singing hymns in their praise for 41 days a year during the Mandalam season.

Ravi Varma’s best work was in oil portraiture of which he was one of the most accomplished masters of the art in India. All his portrait studies are remarkable for a thoroughly dignified conception and have the attraction of clear soft and finely toned colours. He brought to light in his portraits all the essential qualities of the objects portrayed. In short, it may be said that he laid the foundations of the art of oil painting in the country. A striking feature of Ravi Varma’s work, moreover, is his knowledge of anatomy.

Painting in oil-colours was little known in Travancore before the time of Raja Ravi Varma. The paintings of Raja Ravi Varma are mostly of scenes and figures of mythological interest. They are remarkable for their richness of tone. Ravi Varma’s best work was in oil portraiture; of which he was one of the most accomplished masters of the art in India.

The dawn of a new era of painting in Kerala has been inaugurated by two eminent artists Sri K. Madhava Menon and Sri K.C.S. Panicker. Many difficulties prevent extensive studies to be conducted on rare and unusual paintings. Most of the paintings are located within temples that are still under worship. Extensive documentation is very difficult. Many of the paintings face conservation problems. They are often covered with soot emanating from ritual lamps. Some of the paintings in places like Thriprayar faces critical problems like Vedi Vazhipadu or bursting of crackers. Frequent blasts create
vibration and produce soot that deposits on the paintings. Lack of mechanisms for regular cleaning of the paintings hinders the efforts of preservation. Temple authorities need to be sensitized to protect the rare paintings rather than erasing or redrawing them.

The subjects for murals were derived from religious texts. Palace and temple murals were glorified with highly stylized pictures of gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon. It was not a fanciful representation but drawn from the descriptions in the invocatory verses or ‘dhyana sloka’. Flora and fauna and other aspects of nature were also pictured as backdrops in highly stylized forms.

The murals of Kanthaloor temple in Thiruvananthapuram district (thirteenth century) and those at Pardhivapuram (Kanyakumari district) and Trivikramapuram in Thiruvananthapuram (fourteenth century) are the oldest extant temple frescoes of Kerala. Representing the prolific period of mural art, viz., the period between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries A.D. are the Ramayana murals of Mattancherry palace and the paintings in the temples like Thrissur Vadakkumnatha temple, Chemmanthitta Siva temple and those at Kudamaloor and Thodeekkalam in Kannur district. They represent a latter phase in the evolution of medieval mural tradition. Likewise the wall paintings at Panayannarkavu, Trichakrapuram, Panjal Kottakkal as well as those in Padmanabhapuram and Krishnapuram palaces and those in the inner chambers and the lower floor of Mattanchery Palace, represent a much later period in the evolution of medieval mural tradition.

A close study of the mural art of Kerala will prove to be valuable in understanding the state’s art and cultural tradition. It was a tradition that was not averse to incorporate the best of the diverse cultural and aesthetic influences that it was open to. But, alongside, it was also able to retain and preserve its own individuality. The state of Kerala holds the second place in having the largest collection of archaeologically important mural sites, the first being Rajasthan. The mural tradition of Kerala evolved as a complement to her unique architectural style. According to scholars the Kerla school of painting represents the final and fading phase of Indian traditional painting. These wall painting are characterized by their linear accuracy the adherence to colour symbolism, elaborate ornamentations and sensitive portrayal of emotions.

The places at Padmanabhapuram, Krishnapuram and Mattanchery are the important sites of Kerala Murals. The temples at Panayannarkavu, Pundareekapuram, Pandavam, Thrissoor, chemmanthitta, Kaliampally and Thodeekkal are equally famous for its frescoes. The church frescoes have paid more attention to more or less realistic representation of human anatomy. The churches at Cheppad, Akapparambu and Ankamali are important for their old wall-paintings.

In the Siva temple at Vaikom are seen twenty paintings of about forty Puranic figures, which have been assigned to the period between the 14th and 16th centuries. Though they have been subsequently retouched, they still retain their original charm. The Subrahmania temple at Udayanapuram has mural paintings noted for their high level of artistic excellence. Ganapathi, Siva and Parvathi with Subrahmania and Ganapathi, Nataraja, Sastha on horse back and Vishnu in Santhanagopalam are the most interesting of the Udayanapuram murals. The Siva temple at Tiruvanchikulam contains five panels of mural painting covering a space of 150 sq.ft. One of these depicts a fighting scene from the Ramayana. The walls of the Sankaranarayana shrine in the Vadakkunnathan temple, Trichur, preserve mural painting which depict incidents from the battle of Kurukshetra and deities like Siva, Ganesa and Dakshinamurthi. The Siva temple, Tripragode, the Sri Rama temple, Triprayar and the Krishna temple at Guruvayur contain mural paintings noted for their remarkable skill in workmanship. All these paintings belong to a period from the middle of the 17th to the 18th centuries when pictorial art in Kerala was in its most active phase.

The Todikalam temple near Kannavam in Tellicherry Taluk has some beautiful mural paintings which represent scenes from Hindu mythology. Another famous painting obtained from a palace in Kerala is that of Gajendramoksham in the Krishnapuram Palace. A priceless treasure of art, it measures 14 feet by11 feet and has been assigned
to the first half of the 18th century. In its features it bears resemblance to the Nataraja panel in the Ettumanur temple. In the words of Dr. Cousins, “It is a masterpiece in size, conception and execution”.

Churches of Kerala also contain some valuable pieces of paintings. The Jacobite Syrian Church, Cheppad, contains some interesting murals. These murals kept in the Holy of Holies depict the great Apostles, scenes from the life of Jesus Christ and a Malankara Metropolitan. They are exquisite specimens of indigenous mural art and have a distinct Kerala touch about them. The Jacobite Syrian church at Mulanthuruthi contains some beautiful fresco paintings by foreign artists depicting biblical scenes. The St. Sebastian’s Church, Kanjur, contains a unique kind of mural painting. On the walls of this church are painted a remarkable action picture of European officers in red uniform of the English East India Company fighting, along with the bare-footed Kerala soldiers.

The spatial distribution of the wall-paintings throughout Kerala is also a significant pointer. Despite differences there exists a basic unity in this vast repertoire of murals not only in form and colour but also in minor motifs. To cite an instance: the Nataraja figure at Ettumanur is enclosed within a circular rim, a motif noticed at Aimanam near Kottayam, as well as at Edacheri Amsam, in Kozhikode. Yet, for the study of variations in styles, the murals of the Mattancheri palace, Cochin, offer the best scope available so far.

The mural paintings of Kerala, states Kapila Vatsyayan (1989), tend to give larger than life size to the characters of miniature paintings on palm leaf. “On a carefully selective basis the Kerala mural painting may be classified into the following themes

i) The Ramayana scenes

ii) Some pauranic episodes such as Shiva and Vishnu as Mohini or Shiva and Ganga

iii) Vishnu as Venugopala or Govardhan giridhari

iv) Shiva performing the Tandava dance

These themes are repeated in many sites which range from the Padmanabhapuram Palace in south Kerala to the Vadakkunnatha temple in the north. Nevertheless, there is a distinct Kerala character which makes them unique among Indian mural paintings.”
Kerala mural paintings are the frescos depicting mythology and legends, which are drawn on the walls of temples and churches in South India, principally in Kerala. Ancient temples, churches and palaces in Kerala, South India, display an abounding tradition of mural paintings mostly dating back between the 9th to 12th centuries, when this form of art enjoyed royal patronage.

The traditional style mural art form, using natural pigments and vegetable colours, is being revived by a new genre of artists, actively involved in researching and teaching mural art. Kerala Kalamandalam, lately renamed as Kalamandalam Deemed University of Art and Culture, is a major centre for learning Indian performing arts, especially those that developed in the southern state of India, with special emphasis on Kerala. Kalamandalam follows the gurukula sampradayam, the ancient Indian education system based on residential tutelage. Kalamandalam was conceived to provide training to its students in the Gurukula Sampradaya, an ancient tradition of residential schooling where students stayed with the teachers, sharing the same atmosphere and learning from them the nuances of the arts.

Kerala on the south-western coast of India has won the admiration of every visitor because of its resplendent greenery and luxuriant vegetation. Every aspect of Kerala art blends into this pervasive greenery with perfect harmony. Nothing loud, nothing discordant. Every work of art maintains a subdued tone.

One can say that the tradition of painting on walls began in Kerala with the prehistoric rock paintings found in the Anjanad valley of Idukki district. Archaeologists presume that these paintings belong to different periods from upper Paleolithic period to early historic period. Rock engravings dating to the Mesolithic period have also been discovered in two regions of Kerala, at Edakkal in Wayanad and at Perumkadavila in Thiruvananthapuram district.

It is not difficult to trace the roots of the Kerala mural styles to the more ancient Dravidian art of kalamezhuthu. This was a much more fully developed art form connected with religious rituals. It was a ritual art of sprinkling and filling up different colour powders inside outlines sketched with the powder.
Some relics of mural paintings, presumed to be of the fourteenth century, have been noticed on the walls of the Tiruvampadi shrine in the Sri Padmanabhaswami temple, Thiruvananthapuram. A painting which belongs to a period not later than the sixteenth century A.C. is found on the gopura (tower) of the Shiva temple at Ettumanur, in North Travancore, which, Dr. Coomaraswamy says, in “An Introduction to Indian Art” is “The only old example of Dravidian painting.”

Bearing a close resemblance to the mural art depicted on the walls of the Sri Padmanabhaswami temple at Thiruvananthapuram are a few paintings on the walls of the central shrine in the Tirumuzhikulam temple dedicated to Lakshmana at Mulakulam, in the vicinity of Vaikom and Ettumanur. Though many of them are damaged, their colours have a crystalline purity.

The roots of the extant mural tradition of Kerala could be traced as far back as the seventh and eighth century A.D. It is not unlikely that the early Kerala murals along with its architecture came heavily under the influence of Pallava art. The oldest murals in Kerala were discovered in the rock-cut cave temple of Thirunandikkara, which is now in the Kanyakumari District of Tamil Nadu.

6.5 SCULPTURE

The genius of the Kerala artist found expression in sculptural arts as well. The materials used by him were mainly stone, metal, ivory and wood. The stone and metal sculptures had their origin in the 7th to the 9th centuries. The earliest specimens of stone carvings can be had from Edakkal Mala, near Sultan Bathery in Wayanad.

The art of sculpture in Kerala is as old as its architecture, and has remained essentially the same throughout the long period of its history, whatever distinctions in the conception and expression of forms may be noticed by connoisseurs and students of art. The arts of representation occupied in Kerala a subordinate place to its architecture. Sculpture in particular was designed only as a decorative element of an architectural setting of a building. Within these boundaries, however, there has been a conscious artistic striving for creative expression in plastic arts in which are reflected the religious enthusiasm of the people and their taste for decoration and embellishment.
Ageless and consistent in the simplicity of their shapes, the Kerala temples of Travancore are the standard by which all its other works of art are to be measured. Composure and amplitude distinguish its Dravida temples. These qualities particularly belong also to the stone carvings of Travancore; although they are but few in number, they are representative of South Indian sculpture from the eighth to the sixteenth centuries.

Most of the earlier sculptors were artists, not merely carvers, who created something new and original in stone, the best material for sculpture as it has the quality of permanence. The earliest specimens of sculpture in stone are the three figures found in the Cave Temple at Kaviyur, which belong to the eighth century A.D., if not earlier. The first is that of a Dwarapala (guardian) in lifesize in the niche to the left of the entrance of the cave.

The sculpture found in temples is an important part of Kerala’s rich folk tradition. The images of Gods in the sanctum sanctorum and other figures on the walls are enduring examples. The carpenters of Kerala have shown their extraordinary finesse in the construction of temples, shrine, palaces and houses. They could develop a unique and distinct style with the construction of nalukettu (house with a quadrangle) and ettukettu (house with two quadrangles) dining halls, bathing ghats in tanks, theatres, etc.

Various types of pottery and metallic vessels were also moulded in Kerala. Large bronze vessels called vattalam were a class in themselves both in beauty and in weight. Their weight was so formidable that they were seldom removed from the stove. Traditional bronze lamps are also unique to Kerala handicraft. Among them, the hanging lamp called lakshmi vilakku had carvings on it. An array of gold and silver ornaments for both men and women- speaks volumes for the expertise of the smiths of Kerala.

Belonging almost to the same period are the rock-cut reliefs at Vizhinjam near Trivandrum, bearing a close resemblance to later Pallava work. Owing to age-long exposure to sea-wind, sun and rain, the figures are considerably weathered. They are tentatively identified as ‘Durga’ on ‘Mahishasura’ on the left side, and a male and female figure on the right. Their pose is clam and meditative.
A small Cave Temple at Irunilakkode about 12 miles from Shoranur is found to have a sculptured figure inside, seated in a ‘Lalithasana’ pose with his left leg placed over the other, with serpents coiling round the body and with an Akshamala and a conch held in the two upper hands. A devotee is seen seated below with hands folded in prayer. It is beautiful though in bad state of preservation. The pose, surface ornaments etc. probably indicate that it is a figure of ‘Dakshinamurthi’. Though not rich in decorative work, it has a superabundance of an impressive expression in design and execution.

The rock-cut temple at Trikkur has the garbha griha and the two-armed Dwarapalas facing northward and the linga pitha facing the east. The Irunilakkode rock-cut cave contains more than a dozen deities engraved on the rock, the most important being Vishnu, Siva and Dakshinamurthi. It is significant that even today there are open air shrines without roofs dedicated to Bhagavathi in Kerala. The Mullackal Bhagavathi temple in Alleppey town and the Bhagavathi shrine at Guruvayur Krishna temple are roofless structures and the deities here are always exposed to sun and rain.

Some of the famous structural temples of Kerala had their origin during the 9th century A.D. itself. The Krishna temple at Trikkulasekharapuram, near Tiruvanchikulam and the Kizhtali Siva temple nearby are dated to this period on the basis of inscriptional and stylistic evidences. The origin of the Kandiyur Siva temple is definitely ascribed to 823 A.D. on the basis of clear inscriptional evidence. Thus, the construction of temples in Kerala some permanent material started early in the 9th century synchronizing with the political revival of the Cheras under the Kulasekharas of Mahodayapuram.

Five stone images of the Buddha discovered in south Kerala are fine examples of ninth century sculpture. All of them are seated images of the Buddha in the ‘Yogasana’ posture. The first is known as ‘Karumadi Kuttan’ from Ambalappuzha in whose figure the ‘Ushnisha’ (top-knot) and ‘Jwala’ (flame) on the head, and traces of the upper cloth passing over the chest, are very prominent. The second is the Buddha image at Mavelikkara. The third is the image at Bharanikkavu. The fourth one is from Maruturkungalara. The fifth image, without its head, was discovered at Pallikkal in the Kunnathur Taluk, and is preserved in the Government museum at Trivandrum. To the
same period belongs a group of Jaina images carved on the overhanging rock of the Bhagavati temple on the Tiruchanattumalai at Chitaral.

The ancient Vishnu temple at Trikkodithanam in Changanacherry Taluk has two Yali panels with sculptures, belonging to the eleventh century, and depicting two distinct types of ancient dances, Kudaikoothu (umbrella dance) and Kudakoothu (pet dance). The Kudaikoothu panel is a good piece of workmanship and represents a dancer exhibiting his skill on the dais of a covered Mandapa (assembly hall), with an attendant standing to his left and holding an umbrella.

Secular stone images are rare in Kerala; and a unique and striking stone image reproduced here was noted in the Thrissur museum

The rock-cut figure of a donor or chieftain, in Kaviyur is closely related to Pallava dwarapalas and other figures of the Dravida country. Its pose in particular has its equal in the figure of a Pallava chieftain in the rock-cut Shiva Temple of Kunnandarkoyil in Pudukkottai.

Specimens of thirteenth century stone sculpture are rare; but a row of Bhutaganas (goblins) and animals such as elephants and lions, and miniature floral scrolls encircling bearded faces of men, carved in convolutions, and an image of Parasurama with four hands, two of which hold the conch and the discus, and the other two the Parasu(axe) and Hala (plough), found in the temple of Tiruvallam, three miles south of Thiruvananthapuram may be taken as typical examples.

The Sri Padmanabhaswami temple, Trivandrum, has preserved the latest relics of the best traditions of stone sculpture in Kerala and is the receptacle of some of the finest examples of the sculptor’s art of the eighteenth century. Both the Siveli Mandapa and the Kulasekhara Mandapa are embellished with a large variety of figures. The top of every pillar is surmounted by the figure of a unicorn; and the roof, the rafters and the beams are studded with designs and images worked with great artistic skill.

The more conspicuous of the sculptures in the Padmanabhaswami temple have vitality, and at the same time possess poise and restraint. They are the latest examples of archaic conventions, half naturalized, and bear testimony not only to native traditions but also to outside influence.
In Ettumanur, the Ramayana scenes, though superimposed, are not confined each in its panel but are divided the one from the other by a representational device only, a roof for example, or by the foliage of a tree, showing thereby that the scene takes place in the palace, or in the jungle; or the several groups of figures are superimposed without any other demarcation, that, what they produce by their composition (the group at the bottom of the panel on the right). Thus the scenes follow one another in the vertical, on one panel, and form in each case one consistent relief composition. In the horizontal, the Sathankulangara carvings of the moulding had resorted to similar devices. None-the-less the competence of the Ettumanur craftsman is on a higher level; he infuses dramatic action into his figures, almost as if theatrical performances of the Ramayana had been his source of inspiration. The relief is very high, some of the figures are almost carved in the round; this can be said also about some of the panels in Sathankulangara.

A stone image of Kshetrapala twelve feet high found in the temple at Kodungalloor with two hands, the left one holding gada (mace) and the right fire, and unique in its form and conception, calls for mention in this connection. It conforms to no iconographical canons. It is a Satvikamurthi standing erect in the Samabhanga pose and is ornamented with different kinds of snakes. Similarly the stone sculptures of a standing Shiva; of Saraswati; Shiva as Bhikshatanamurthi; Durga; Ganesa; Vishnu; Lakshmi; and Sri Rama in the Tali temple at Calicut are also noteworthy though of later workmanship, as they have a fascinating fullness and vivacity of expression with exquisite finish and richness of detail, combined with serene tranquility. Sweetness and grace are their striking characteristics. All of them have an imposing splendor by virtue of their exuberantly rhythmical and at times feverishly delirious glow which have raised the unnamed Kerala sculptors to a realm of undying name and imperishable fame.

The churches of Kerala also have some interesting stone sculptures which deserve mention. The Valiapalli. The Valiapalli, the older of the two Syrian Catholic churches, at Kaduthuruthi, is particularly important in this context. The high granite platform on which the open air Cross is erected contains several interesting carvings of images and scenes which resemble those of Hindu temples in point of style and design. There are scenes of hunting, fighting and dancing which have been vividly depicted in stone on this platform. The figures of Virgin Mary and Infant Jesus have also
been carved beautifully in stone. In the St. Mary’s church at Kuravilangad also there is a granite platform with a Cross which contains some attractive stone sculptures, including a Crucifix. The Orthodox Syrian church, Niranam, has some interesting stone images. The relics of a Natakasala which was attached to the old church building may also be seen here.

6.6 METAL ART WORKS OF KERALA

Image-making appears to have been practiced in Kerala from early times and the art drew its inspiration from the religious faith of the people. The conception of Shiva, Vishnu, Parvati and Lakshmi in several forms, has been given shape in beautiful images in bronze, and sometimes copper, whose iconographical details are modeled on the rules laid down in the Silpasasstras (art-canons). Some of the images are still used in worship in the temples; and a few have become available as museum specimens through the development of defects that rendered them ineligible in ‘Puja’ (worship).

The earliest metal images discovered in the State are two standing images of Vishnu which are preserved in the Government Museum, Thiruvananthapuram. From their technique and iconographical features, it is surmised that they belong to the eighth century A.D., if not earlier, and bear, like the stone sculptures in the cave temples at Kaviyur, Irunilakkode and Vizhinjam, a close resemblance to the Pallava work of that period.

To the same period can be ascribed four figures in bronze of Jaina Tirthankara Parsvanatha and Mahavira come across at Manjeswar. One is a brass image of Parsvanatha Tirthankara covered by a canopy of a five-hooded serpent; another is also of Parsvanatha under a seven-hooded serpent. The third is of Mahavira a standing nude figure with hanging hands and having a halo (prabha) of metal. The fourth is a small standing image of Mahavira surrounded by a Prabha.

Two images, one of Shiva and the other of Shiva and Parvati on the same pedestal, and three rafter shoes with excellent figure sculpture, preserved in the Thiruvananthapuram Museum, afford examples of thirteenth and fourteenth centuries bronzes.
The necessity for both static and portable lamps, ceremonial and domestic, gave the metallic craft-genius of Kerala an opportunity of expression of which it richly availed itself. The use of traditional brass lamps in temple ceremonial, in the indigenous dance drama (Kathakali) and in homes in which the art-instinct remains alive, has happily continued the making of various kinds of lamps, despite the temptations of modern electric and other forms of lighting, though the impulse to ingenuity of design within an indigenous genre is not as marked as it was, and some slackening of finish is observable.

There are many other types of metal lamps in Kerala large and small, simple and ornate, but the above will indicate some of the more important. To these may be added the figure of the small lamp bearer, a miniature of large-size similar figures in stone in the temple, carrying a simple oil receptacle in which a wick is laid.

The recent revival of interest in indigenous art in Kerala brought back the almost lost art of metal-mirror-making. For generations the metal mirrors of Aranmula, the seat of a famous temple, had been popular for religious and domestic use; but cheap glass substitutes ousted them. The proportion of tin and copper in the alloy, and the technique of working it into a reflecting surface, dwindled down to the possession of a couple of families. But a renewed demand for them has brought them again to public ken. An eighteenth century mural in the Sri Padmanabhaswami temple of Thiruvananthapuram shows a semi-celestial lady performing her toilet with aid of an Aranmula mirror.

Kerala can boast of a remarkable achievement in the art of making metal lamps and jewellery which are varied in kind and which combine beauty with rare grace. Different kinds of votive lamps are seen in abundance in the ancient temples. Judged by the purpose they served, some of the most important are 'Archana Deepa' (Lamp for offering), 'Arati Deepa' (Prayer lamp), 'Nendi Deepa' (External lamp) which illumines the inner sanctuary of the temple, 'Deepa Lakshmi,' which adorns the entrance of the sanctuary, shaped in the form of a graceful female and made of brass 'Deepa Stambha' (Pillar light), which adorns temple atmosphere with a radiant splendor. There are also other patterns of lamps, peacock pattern (Mile-vilakku), Swan-type (Hamsa-vilakku), ‘Vimana-vilakku’ (shaped like a tower and connected by the technique of casting known
by the name of ‘Cireperdu’ (clay-wax process) in which the original model is made in wax covered with a coat of clay with opening at the top and bottom.

The speciality of Kerala is a variety of both ornamental and utility lamps made so as to produce a lattice work effect.

The lamps in particular made of brass and sometimes bronze, mark the glory of the ancient art in bell-metal. The innumerable patterns of these are capable of classification in the four groups—hanging, floor, wall and hand lamps. Perhaps, the most well known, probably the simplest in pattern and the most beautiful is the ‘Changalavatta’, known also as the ‘Greek Lamp’. It resembles a peacock in shape, the head portion holding the oil and the wick, the body serving as a reservoir for storing the oil and the tail, the handle to hold the lamp.

Among hanging lamps, one which is both simple and artistic, is the well known horse lamp. This is associated with the knightly atmosphere of the times of the ancient rulers when frequent conflicts between them were a usual feature. There are quite a large number of other types of hanging lamps some of which are much more ornamental than the horse lamp. In some, instead of the horse, the figures of ‘Hamsa’ (Swan), elephants pouring cosmic energy over Goddess Lakshmi, ‘Garuda’, ‘Serpent and other animals are found.

An ornamental lamp with the elephant, its rider on its back, and a retainer sitting behind, is another variety now found in the Thrissur museum, which constitutes an exquisite work of art.

The jewellery of Kerala provides a very fascinating study on account of its elegant finish and variety of designs. Every ornament worn by the women of Kerala is a product of carving, hammering, etching or some process involving ingenuity and individual skill. Being conservative by nature, the artists have clung to the same forms through centuries and perpetuated the art of jewellery, which is generally characterized by an unrivalled workmanship and manipulative elaboration. The art has maintained an unbroken continuity of tradition on account of the profuse use of ornaments by the people as a common element of personal adornment. On the whole, the simplicity, polish and beautiful finish are admirable features of Kerala Jewellery. The skill and subtility of
craftsmanship of the artisans who have displayed great individuality in the variety of their designs and in the excellence of their casts have not failed to receive recognition and encouragement.

The art of the jeweler, like that of the sculptor, has from early times appealed strongly to the genius of the ancient craftsmen of Kerala and some varied and excellent jewellery is preserved in the important temples of the State, such as Thiruvananthapuram, Vaikom and Ettumanur. They are made of gold on which precious stones, such as diamonds, rubies and emeralds, are laid. They throw a flood of light not only on the unbroken continuity of tradition in the art, but also on the skill exhibited in their making. The Travancore craftsmen of old attained high proficiency in the jeweler’s art; and were able to create a variety of items of rich and artistic pattern and workmanship, cleverly adapted for personal and deific adornment. Meticulous care was bestowed on the minute details of work, and highly technical skill was shown in cutting and polishing refractory stones. Jewellery of an elaborate kind was freely used in the biggest temples of the State from early times. A study of Travancore jewellery reveals certain beliefs that have been held from ancient times. For instance, it is said that every one must wear a bit of gold on account of its physiological values.

It was only in the 15th and 16th centuries that bronze images in the typical Kerala style came to be executed. An image of Vishnumaya kept in the Thrissur Museum is typical of this phase. Images of two dwarapalas made of Panchaloha kept in the Thrissur Museum have been assigned to the 17th century. A bronze image of Sastha in a sitting posture available in the Thiruvananthapuram Museum is symbolic of the characteristic features of the Sastha and is assigned to the same period. The Siva temple of Tiruvanchikulam has a group of metal images of the 17th or 18th centuries, and these include figures of Nataraja and his consort as well as of the Saiva saints, Cheraman Perumal Nayanar and Sundaramurthi Nayanar who figure prominently in the traditions connected with the Tiruvanchikulam temple. The ivory throne, once kept in Rangavilasam Palace, Trivandrum, is object of artistic interest.

The metal-works of Kerala are not confined merely to the making of images in the round, for Kerala’s artistic talents and sense of beauty found expressions also through other arts or crafts-to make a clear-cut distinction between the two being really difficult.
Of various kinds of metal crafts prevalent in Kerala, rafter-shoes and lamps have a niche place. Rafter-shoes have been employed widely in Kerala to cover and protect the ends of the wooden beams and rafters, visible from outside. It goes to the credit of the Kerala artists to have transformed the commonplace rafter-shoes into magnificent artistic pieces. Excellent reliefs of deities and other decorative motifs are embossed on thin metal sheets. One such rafter-shoe, exhibited in the Thiruvananthapuram Museum, is inscribed with an inscription of the fourteenth century. It is made of brass and its central attraction is a standing four-armed relief of Vishnu, flanked on either side of Sri-Devi and Bhu-Devi. The piece depicts a lotus-medallion and a running scroll design. Deities shown on rafter-shoes include Gajalakshmi, Antasayi Vishnu, Nataraja, Brahma and so on. Sometimes, the entire length bears carvings narrating some Puranic episode or the other. For example, the Vishnu temple at Parappancod, Thiruvananthapuram, has several rafter-shoes delineating various stories, including a few from the Krishna legend.

6.7 CONCLUSION

N. Ajithkumar (2005) stresses the role of media in portraying the holistic attributes of folk arts of Kerala. According to R. Ramachandran Nair, whatever timely changes that need to take place in folk art forms of Kerala with the passage of time has to happen from within. External modifications would only be like filling water on a pot turned upside down. The fact is that no one can save folk culture by trying to revive a particular form which is heading towards its natural death. But if an art has aesthetic merit, it has to exist and thrive, even if, for the time being, it suffers due to some reason or other. Even if a folk form appears irrational to the so-called modern mind, that should not be the reason for neglecting such art. The acid test for the efficacy of folk art is whether it vibrates or not. If it has the vibration, whatever elements that constitute it or lie appurtenance to it like ritual, myth belief or magic, have no relevance in deciding its life. In some cases, the ritualistic or magical quality may not be a mere appendage but an inevitable corollary to the deeper content of the art. In assessing the folk culture of a country.

Most of the folk arts of Kerala are virtually vanishing. Their existence is greatly threatened by the process of modernization and commercialization of life in the contemporary age and the accompanying changes in social and economic structure. In
this context, it is not easy to find an effective way of preserving folk arts. The problem is more acute in the case of ritualistic arts because preserving them also means preserving the belief that gave birth to them. To preserve the old beliefs would perhaps be an unscientific and obscurantist approach. The total eradication of small pox has made it impossible to revive vassorimala and puthiya bhagavati thaikkolam. Theatre forms like Porattunatakam, Kakkarassinatakam, etc., continue to attract interested audience. Folk art forms that carry elements of social criticism and satire will not find it difficult to exist. However, there appears to be no consensus regarding the mode of preservation of ritualistic art forms. Some expect them to change with the times whereas others want them to be kept in their pristine form. There are still others who demand that such outdated art forms should be discarded totally. It would be a futile exercise to either preserve ritualistic arts in their original form or to improve upon them. Ritual and art are inseparably united and so it would not be feasible to remove the ritual component and preserve the art form alone. If it is done, the result is only pseudo-art. It is therefore preferable to draw inspiration from and to absorb the essence of these ancient forms and create new ones or enliven existing ones.

To the question as to how ritualistic arts continue to exist, E.B. Taylor had a reply penned roughly nine decades ago. He felt that once a ritual or an art takes shape, it will pass on from one generation to the next. Superficial changes that overcome society cannot remove deep-rooted beliefs and the art forms that project them. Time instead will decide their fate. Neither blind acceptance nor outright rejection of tradition is desirable. Only if tradition is understood thoroughly, can the good elements be preserved and the bad discarded.

What is needed is not a complete revival but collection, documentation and objective analysis of ritualistic art forms leading to dissemination of knowledge about them. Further, monographs on extinct and extant art forms should be prepared, they should be recorded in audio and video tapes and preserved in folklore archives as well as museums.

The Art and Architectural resources of Kerala are great embellishments that entice cultural tourists to God’s Own Country. Architecture must be considered as the most social and magnificent of Kerala Arts. It combines utility with beauty and promotes
social communion and unity. At the same time, the beautiful sculptures of Kerala is a source of the purest joy and inspiration. Painting of Kerala is distinguished by the vastness of its scope and range. Music and dances of Kerala act as bonds of social unity. Thus, Kerala has made its enamouring and signature presence in all the subtle and finest aspects of Art and Architecture.

6.8 References

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