CHAPTER 1
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1.1. The Preamble

I was born and brought up in an area of Northern kerala where kalakam has a dominant role in the life of Tiya community. It is also the place where Teyyam is performed almost all days during the Teyyam season, which starts from the end of October and ends in the middle of June. The rising crescendo of tottam songs, the awe inspiring atmosphere around the shrines, rhythmic beatings of chenda and cymbals, divine words from the mouth of Teyyams in order to reduce ones difficulties etc always inspired me to study deep into this vibrant and unique art form of Kerala. It is also an area of Poorakkali, another folk ritual art of Kerala, where male folk is the dancers. I had an opportunity to be in the part of an organizing committee for conducting a Perumkaliyattam festival which was held after a gap of 25 years during 1999 at Ramavilyam Kalakam. Actually my participation in it made me to select this topic for my research work on the role of Kalakams in Tiya community.

The enquiry is basically about the role of Kalakams among the Tiya community of Northern Kerala which includes the mythologies of the caste, socio-religious activities of Tiya community, The territorial jurisdiction of Kalakams, its functions, its role in the life of Tiya community, its functions as a socio-cultural organization. Conduct of Teyyam festivals and Poorakkkali (another folk art form of Tiya community) are also discussed here. A brief account of the ethnomusic of Poorakkali is also given in the appendix.
Our investigation establishes the dominant role of Kalakams among the Tiya community of Northern Kerala. The democratic system of administration among the community organizations, kalakam’s role in the performing arts of Teyyam and Poorakkali, the Sanskritization of the community setup, role of kalakams to settle the disputes, ‘Aryan’ (or Brahminic) influence in the rituals of kalakams, and changing scenario of the caste system of Kerala, specially the relationship between Tiya and other castes are discussed in the present study.

1.2 The Setting

The locale of the study comprises the northern districts of Kannur and Kasargod of Kerala state. It comprises the villages of, Ramanthali, Ettikulam, South Trikaripur, North Trikaripur, Padanna, Cheruvathur, Valiyaparamba, Nileswaram, Kanhangad, Pallikara, Kottikulam, Uduma, Keetoor and Poinachi.

Flora

Northern Kerala is a beautiful blend of hills and valleys. Rivers, rivulets and salt-lakes, criss-cross this area with paddy fields and coconut groves bordering on the coast of the Arabian Sea. The fields often merge into the back waters which open to the sea through several rivers and whose water level rises and falls with the tide.

The soil is not very fertile, especially on the hill-tops which look barren with hardly any trees or bushes growing on them. The fields on the banks of
rivers and lagoons are very fertile and the entire area looks luxuriantly lush green. The Tiyas are found living in all these places.

**Fauna**

The area is rich with variety of fish found in Arabian seas and rivers. The area is rich with marine life, even today. Crocodiles are known to inhabit the lagoons where they join the river. We find all kinds of domestic animals as we see them in other parts of Kerala.

**1.3 Caste and Communal Composition**

In North Malabar, Hindus and Muslims live side by side, the majority of them being Hindus. The Hindus are divided into endogamous caste groups. Some of the important caste groups or *jatis* in this area are *Havik Brahmins*, *Shivalli Brahmins*, *Gowda Saraswat Brahmins*, *Nairs*, *Maniani*, *Mukkutti*, *Kakkutti*, *Kusavan*, *Chaliya*, *Vania*, *Tiya*, *Malaya*, *Vannan and Pulayas*. Brahmins and Nairs are considered to be high castes (*Savarna Jati*). There was hypergamous relationship between these two groups in the past. Others are low castes (*Avarna Jati*), of which *Pulayas* are considered to be the lowest. They are traditionally ‘untouchables’, to be kept at least 64 feet away, from the caste Hindus.
1.4 Simple vs complex cultures

In the history of confrontation between “Simple” and “Complex” cultures, few are the instances where the former is treated by the latter with the dignity and respect it deserves. The one aspect of the simple culture that has been transformed through cultural contract is its symbolic dimension. Though the attitude of the ‘Civilized’ has undergone considerable change on the discovery that it has absorbed many aspects of simple cultures, the condescending treatment continues even today. Fewer are the attempts, if any, by the high traditions to dialogue on equal terms with simple cultures, though the interaction between the ‘great tradition’ and the ‘little tradition’ has been going on for a long period of time, particularly in the East. Speaking of the ‘primitive’ absorption into the Indian high culture, Kosambi says that, the present day Gondhalis’ professional caste dance was originally the dance of the aboriginal tribes known as Gonds. The absorption must have taken place around A.D. 1100 but the connection is now forgotten (Kosambi 1972:49).

If this was the treatment within the same world view of the East which has incorporated several folk cultures, then the result must have been disastrous when a complex culture with a different world view such as the West broke into the life of a pre-literate culture. When the West ‘discovered’ the tribals in the East, they thought it their duty to ‘civilize’ them. As a result, in many cases, they were compelled to adopt to a great extent the way of life of their masters. The approach was not one of tolerance, but aggressive assimilation through change of religious symbols pejoratively known as conversion. This
non-tolerant attitude of the West reflects very well in the words of Karl Barth. Quoting him Radhakrishnan (1940:341) says: “he brands non-Christian religions as foes of Christendom, which must in no circumstances ‘how! with (those) wolves’. A true Christian’s response to other faiths must be an intolerant No!” Though the theological stance sounds so horrifying, the practice was tempered by human experience coupled with diplomatic wisdom and the centuries long presence of the West in the Indian subcontinent bears witness to this.

Religion and Culture

Religion has a two fold relationship with the rest of culture. In its visible institutional aspects, religion may be viewed as one segment of culture, alongside others, such as the family, the economic order, political organization, aesthetic expression, systems of communication, and the like. Religion has a second and more profound relationship to culture. It is a dimension of each of the other major aspects of culture, whether or not this dimension is institutionally expressed or even acknowledged. Ploughing a field, harvesting a crop, hunting, rearing a family, governing a clan – these are all religious. It is commonplace in studies of ‘primitive’ or pre-literate societies to note how religion pervades all aspects of culture (Mulde in Feaver and Horosz [ed]:1967:468). In different words Paul Tillich (1968:42) also says the same: “Religion as ultimate concern is the meaning-giving substance of culture, and culture is the totality of forms in which the basic concern of religion expresses
itself. In abbreviation: religion is the substance of culture, culture is the form of religion.” (Ibid,p.42)

1.5 Cultural Change Among the Tiyas of North Kerala

The *Tiyas* of North Malabar, were considered to be one of the ‘lowest’ castes in Hindu religion. Myths, symbols, and rituals, the basic units of religion, have played decisive influence in shaping the worldview and social order of the *Tiyas*. The consequent process of change in life styles is an interesting area for anthropological inquiry; particularly since the *Tiyas* are very rich in their religious traditions. Tiyas of North Kerala, under the control of Kalakam organization, got themselves Sanskritised in their life style. Their customs, traditions and their world view have changed. This process must have taken several centuries since they came in contact with Brahminical cultural traditions.

1.6 Previous Studies on Kalakam and Tiyas

There are no Anthropologist studied on Kalakams. There are very few studied conducted on Kalakam and its influences on Tiyas of North Kerala by the scholars. Kurup, a historian, had conducted a study on Perumkaliyattam conductrd in one of the Kalakams and published a book titled ‘Aryan and Dravidian elements in Malabar Folklore’. The works on Teyyam are many. Vishnu Namboodiri has published several books on
Teyyam, Teyyam, Thottam Pattukal Oru Patanam, Vannanum Kenthron Pattum, Kithamoori, Uthatakeralathile Thottam Pattukal are some the few works in Malayalam. Chandera has written a book on Teyyam titled Kaliyattam.

Earlier studies on Tiyas are by Anthropologist Aiyyappan and Kathleen Gough. Revivarma, Ananthram and Kavil Ananthan Malayalam scholars, have also studied Tiyas. Most of the articles by Malayalam writers are published in Souvenirs and Magazines in Malayalam. However, it is important to note that anthropologists Aiyyappan and gough have not studied the Kalakam organization among Tiyas.

1.7 The Problem and Objectives of the study

The central problem of investigation, is to find out to what extent the Kalakams influence the Sanskritization of the rituals and its impact on the lifestyle of Tiya community of Northern Kerala. It also focuses on the people, of pre-literate community and to their world view and behaviour patterns when its symbolic structure undergoes a change on account of Sanskritization. The study of Sanskritic tests is considered to be the practice of Bhramins. When a group of pre-literate people undergoes change into a religion of Sanskritized world view how does their original world view and behaviour patterns change? How do they (the community) integrate new symbols of Hindu religion into their life and work? In order to investigate this central problem it is necessary to inquire into: (1) the uniqueness of the Tiya religious symbol system,
particularly the leading one, the *Teyyam and Poorakkali* (2) the difference between the Tiya symbol system and the Bhramin symbol system. Religious symbol systems can be defined as that religious whole which consists of the basic religious units such as myth, symbols and rituals and their interrelations.

In order to throw light on the query, a comparative analysis of the two religious symbols systems (the Tiyas and the Bhramins) is undertaken. The comparative analysis focuses on: (1) What aspects of religious symbol system underwent changes affecting the culture and the world view of Tiyas, 2) The nature of change of culture and world view, (3) Its effect on the behaviour patterns of the Tiyas as a community.

Another major area of investigation is the motivation of the Tiyas to be in the frame work of Kalakams and embrace the traditions of high castes and at the same time ignoring the some of the traditions of Tiyas.

**Objectives**

The main objectives of the present study are as follows:

1. To study the socio – economic and religious life of Tiyas under the Kalakams.

2. To study the Socio-cultural changes taking place in the Tiya community.

Some of the specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To describe the organization of the Kalakam.

2. To discuss the role of Kalakams in Teyyam performances
3. Role of Kalakam in settling the disputes – inter community and intra – community.

4. To make an assessment of the role of educational institutions under the Kalakam.

5. Gender relations in the affairs of the Kalakams and

6. The role of Kalakams in the post – matrilineal society.

1.8 Justification of the Problem

As we have seen there are several descriptive studies on the socio-political-economic life of the people, but so far, there are no studies, which inquire into the effect of change of religious symbol system on the world view and the consequent change in their behaviour. This study explores the role of religious symbol system in shaping the worldview and Sanskritization due to the importance of kalakam structure among the Tiya community of Northern Kerala.

But, of course, there are many descriptive studies pertaining to the cultural traditions of Tiyas, Teyyam, Poorakkali etc. Kurup (1973, 1977), Chandera (1978), Raghavan Payyanad (1979), Vishnu Namboodiri (1981, 1983), are some of them. But no anthropological study has been undertaken on the symbolic and ritual aspects of Teyyam. Ours is basically an exploratory study on the religious symbol system of the Tiyas of North Kerala belonging to
four Kalakams and the process of Sanskritisation under the test leage of this institution.

In the contemporary society of Kerala, growing communalism divides people into enemy camps and thus peters out the spirit of religious dialogue and the openmess to see common ground for cooperation with mutual respect. Our approach to study the different religious symbol systems through anthropological methods assumes paramount significance in the multi-religious context of India where communal tensions are on the increase today.

**Methodology**

The literature pertaining to the Tiya community and their relationship with their social organisations were collected from the secondary sources like books, Gazetters, Souvenirs, Magazines, Periodicals, manuscripts and reports from newspapers. Intensive field work in the Kalakam jurisdiction was conducted for about three years between 1999 and 2005. Interviews (structured and unstructured) and observations were the major technique used to elicit the data.

The conventional anthropological methods and techniques like observation, participation – Observation, case study, interview, genealogical methods and ethno – historical techniques were employed to gather detailed information on different aspects of the Kalakams and changes that are taking place among them.
Library work was done for the first six months and at the led of fieldwork Preparation of the thesis was done during 2005-2006.

1.9 Method of Data Collection

Ethnographic enquiry requires in-depth treatment of the variables, and accordingly we have chosen (i) Observation and (2) Interview as the major techniques of data collection.

Observation

Both symbol systems have been subjected to three years of observation in three terms of six months duration. Every year the rituals and the festivals are conducted round the year. The life cycle ceremonies which are mostly integrated into the religious rituals of Tiyas were also studied.

We have employed both participant and non-participant observational techniques for the data collection. The observer dressed like one of the crowd, ate and slept on the dusty floor like the people and thus tried to experience fully the process which a participant in the village Teyyam festival goes through. In certain situations, to test the response of the people to a stranger, the observer revealed his identity as a research student and observed the festival as an honoured guest of the organizers. The response of the crowd was quite positive all the time barring one or two incidents where the observer was accused of
collecting material to be sold to the foreigners to make money. All observations were done in uncontrolled natural settings.

**Interview**

The researcher depended very much on non-directive interviews for collection of data especially of the past. Indepth interviews of the older people were the only means to get to the idea of the social structure and cultural system of the past. The researcher was lucky enough to be a part of the Perunkaliyattam festival conducted during 1999 that too after a gap of 25 years.

The data were recorded by writing down what has been observed then and there, and also taking down the interview responses. The simple people by and large felt happy when I recorded what they have spoken. To record some of the Poorakkali songs, a tape recorder was used. Photography was extensively used in recording the Teyyam dance, despite occasional resentment from the crowd.

**1.10 Purposive Selection of the Informants**

The selection of the informants were mostly done with the Kalakam officials and the Acharakkar in mind. For, the knowledgeable people who can speak and communicate, happened to be associated with ritual. When efforts were made to contact other people they shied away, suggesting the name of
either the *tantri* or the *kolakaram*. As the study involved the symbol systems of the community, there was also a natural elimination of the younger persons in favour of the old and the experienced. Thus, the interviewing of the key-informants formed the basis of data collection. It took almost an year to come to know the people who could speak with certain authority on matters like *Teyyam* and other rituals and customs.

### 1.11 Analysis of Data

The data were analyzed to give a descriptive account of the cultural traditions change among the Tiyas. Each of these elements was subjected to the main theoretical framework of structural – functionalism advocated by A.R. Radcliffe-Brown and as illustrated by the study of M.N. Srinivas in his monograph ‘Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of South India”.

The reporting is mainly descriptive in style, supported by photographs and a few charts, sketches and maps. As it is a study of an ancient, well-established subculture and a local specialized art form, the greatest difficulty in reporting was finding English equivalent for many of the vernacular terms. The Malayalam terms are so numerous in the reporting that we have added a glossary at the end of the thesis. As in any ethnographic study, the volume of materials to be condensed in a thesis was so much that for the sake of brevity, we have had to sacrifice many details.
Theoretical Framework

1.12 Culture, Symbol, Myth and Ritual

According to Geertz (1973:89) [culture] “denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life.” Symbols, the interlacing element in both religion and culture, are the store-house of meaning as far as religion is concerned, and for culture, the expression of ‘humanness’ as well as the vehicle of distinguishing traits of humanity. “Meaning can only be “stored” in symbols: a cross, a crescent, or a feathered serpent; such religious symbols, dramatized in rituals or related in myths, are felt somehow to sum up, for those for whom they are resonant, what is known about the ways of the world, the quality of the emotional life it supports, and the way one ought to behave while in it.” Geertz (1973:127). “Religious symbols do exactly the same thing as all symbols do namely, they open up a level of reality, which otherwise is hidden. …Religious symbols open up the experience of the dimension of this depth in the human soul.” (Tillich, 1968:59).

Human beings attach very great importance to symbolic expressions in their day to day life. Even in such situations as untouchability, caste suppression, poverty and misery, men and women celebrate their lives through symbolic expression and reveal in mythological extravaganzas. We are told, that “even in the most desperate of ‘historical situations’ (in the trenches of
Stalingrad, in both Nazi and Soviet concentration camps) men and women have sung ballads and listened to stories, even giving up a part of their meagre rations to obtain them: these stories were but projections of the myths, these ballads were filled with “nostalgia” (Eliade, 1961:19). The ‘untouchable’ agriculturists of Kerala sung ballads and other heroic tales during their agricultural activities.


It was the dream of Paradise that motivated kings to organize military expeditions for power and honour; the Europeans to circumnavigate the earth in search of pearls and spices; the Nazis to attempt to evolve a superior Aryan race; for the Communist revolutions in Russia and China, and the scientific revolutions of the modern world. All through history, the myth and symbols inspired people at all levels of civilization (Eliade, 1952:19).

Rituals have been a veritable storehouse of energy for the human beings to draw at will. The annual festivals in the temples, the pilgrimages to the hallowed centers, the Ramzan fast and penance, Friday ‘Jumma’, the regular attendance of church liturgy, are all expressions of a profound need of humans.
As man is a symbolic animal, a myth making animal, he is also a ritual performing animal.

The present study on Tiyas and their Kalakam organization highlights the social network which exists among several communities in North Kerala. The important role played by the ‘untochable’ communities in the performance of Teyyams illustrates the symbolic relationship between the ‘high’ and ‘low’ castes of Kerala.

1.13 Theory of Structural – Functionalism

A.R. Radcliffe Brown advocated the theory of structural – functionalism. Malinowski had given more emphasis to the concept of function and almost ignored the concept of structure in his theory of functionalism. Radcliffe – Broom’s theory emphasizes both the concepts of structure and function. For Radcliffe – Brown, the function of a custom was the contribution it made to the continued life of the ‘Social organism’ (1952: 178-9). He also recognized the idea of functional unity of a social system where all the parts of the social system work together with a sufficient degree of harmony. Social systems display different degrees of integration depending upon the level of harmony existing in particular societies. Kinship and religious practices are basic to the understanding of functional integration of traditional societies according to Radcliffe – Brown. Various structures based on kinship relationship and religious observances have to be analysed in order to understand the functioning of traditional societies. Descent groups play vital
roles in maintaining the structures of traditional societies as explained by Radcliffe–Brown.

Radcliffe–Brown’s influence also reached India. Indian anthropologist M.N. Srinivas who did post graduate and research work under the guidance of Radcliffe–Brown returned to India and established a strong tradition of structural–functional school of anthropology in India. He had also applied this theoretical concept to his study on Kodavas of Karnataka. Srinivas also developed several concepts such as sanskritization, modernization and dominant caste in his empirical studies on Indian society and culture. The concepts of sanskritization and modernization are applied in this study.

1.14 Organisation of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into 10 chapters. The titles of the chapter are as follows:

1. Introduction
2. Tiyas of North Kerala: A brief ethnographic account
3. Tiyas of North Kerala: Social structure
4. Kuruvantha tha Kalakam
5. Ramavilyam Kalakam
6. Nilamangalam Kalkam
7. Palakunnu Kalakam
8. Some case studies of festivals
9. Sanskritisation in Teyyam cult of Kalakams
10. Conclusions
   Appendices
   References
MAP NO. 1: LOCATION MAP OF THE STUDY AREA
MAP NO. 2: LOCATION MAP OF THE KALAKAM AREA