Chapter III

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The very word, teyyam can bring forth to the interior of a listener an enchanting and beautiful picture. Nevertheless, in the case of the people of North Malabar, the word has more than one meaning. According to them, teyyam is everything. Truly, they believe, that it is present, past, and future. More than that, teyyam is culture, society, and environment. The people perform teyyam as an indispensable part of their religion, politics, and magic, and observe it as their guide, protector, and preceptor. They believe that teyyam possesses great power, which is at once inhuman and divine. Its rage brings destruction, and its fondness gives prosperity. Hence, they consider it as their creator and destroyer. It also preserves a vivid picture of the bygone past. The myth, ritual, and the whole performance itself, throw some light on the religious, cultural, and the environmental inter-relationships. The once relevant stratigraphic sequence, and service relationships, have been still present and remain ceaselessly in teyyam. This is maintained through observing various customs and practices, worship and performance of deities that are present in various sacred centres.

This indigenous, traditional ritual performance of North Malabar, teyyam, is famous for its colourful and magnificent attire (costumes and wearing), including attractive and amazing headgear, and excellent facial writing. Unlike many other rituals, it has a high socio-political significance in the multicaste village life of Kerala, and it is highly conditioned by myth. This was the one and the only means of worship in this area, linked directly or indirectly with their deities. These are worshipped and performed as teyyam. All
taravādus worship one or more teyyam as their family god. As the symbolic representations of deities, teyyam are worshipped in natural settings, i.e. specially designed sacred centres. The performance is either calendrical or, set according to the desire of the organizers. Various rituals are incorporated with the performance, starting from the beginning to the end. More than this, teyyam is also notable for its deeds. This includes dance, music, literature, eloquence, facial writing, engraving, and carving. It is impossible to see the above said aspects in such a combination anywhere in any field all around the world. Essentially teyyam brings into life a network of social relationship. These networks of relationships necessarily have performer, organizer, spectator, and belief system of people, and sacred centres in inborn surroundings. During the execution of teyyam, these active meshes have their own specific roles to play. According to tradition, the performers perform it, organizers organize it and make arrangements for its performance. The pious spectators who watch and get relief by the force of their customized belief system. The sacred centre or the place of worship, thus, ties together the man with his culture, and the nature.

All the Hindu castes of North Malabar worship and believe in their deities of whose from teyyam takes the form. Although the so-called 'high' and 'low' caste people believe in teyyam, there are nearly ten communities who execute the actual performance of teyyam in this area, the area I have selected for the present study. The castes that perform teyyam include the Malayan, Vannan, Vēlan, Pulayan, Anjutan, Munnutan, Mavilan, Chingathan, Kopalan, and Karimpalan. Surprisingly all these communities belong to Scheduled Castes, according to the caste-classification of the Indian Constitution. Malayan and Vannan are the two important and major castes among these untouchables, and through out North Malabar they are the chief performers of teyyam. All other communities
concentrate in some areas, which are situated mostly in remote places. The Pulayas perform *teyyam* only in their own centres, and for their own sake. Generally speaking, they do not perform for others. The other striking feature of *teyyam* is that the high caste Hindus never perform *teyyam*, but only make arrangements for its performance, and pays their devotion to it.

The people are directly depending on the belief system that is embodied in *teyyam* because, they do not have any other alternative. This is the only tradition of North Malabar, which is neither ‘little’ nor ‘great’. The prevailing Sanskritised temple and gods are recent intrusions. Thereafter, assimilation of *teyyam* into the Hindu culture was prominent. Nowadays, the people of North Malabar worship both the Hindu gods and *teyyam*. According to Robert Redfield,

> In a civilization there is a great tradition of the reflective few, and there is a little tradition of the largely unreflective many. The great tradition is cultivated in schools or temples; the little tradition works itself out and keeps itself going in the lives of the unlettered in their village communities. (1960:41,42,43)

But this is not applicable in the case of North Malabar, and the *teyyam* performance. Here *teyyam* gets primary and foremost attention, and then only follows the worship of Sanskrit gods. This is so because, the people contemplate *teyyam* as a part of their day-to-day life. The universalized worship of Sanskrit gods that is prevalent in India, taken in comparison with localized *teyyam* performance is not linked to the daily life in such a manner as *teyyam* is. *Teyyam* has become the part of a great tradition, and it is rightly called as little tradition because, it is the part of local worship, i.e., *teyyam* is little and great tradition.
It is very difficult to trace the origin and evolution of *teyyam* because of the absence of reliable history of the remote past. Even then, since the establishment, *teyyam* encompasses different stages of illusion. I make an attempt to describe the distinct stages of progress in the following pages, with respect to the centre of worship and attire. *Teyyam* possess the great impressiveness in the multi-caste village setup of North Malabar. It establishes solidarity, peace, harmony and integration among the people. This conceded performance has to do various social, political, cultural, psychological, economic, ceremonial, and religious functions.

By and large, the people extensively exploit local environment. Most of the materials necessary for the performance are directly gathered from the local resources. The richness of flora and the green forest naturally gives this area a green background. To coincide with this natural background, the people consciously give wonderful colour combination to their performance.

The myth, ritual and performance are all symbolic representations of life-experiences of the people. Through the centuries, performance showed greater flexibility and adaptability whenever and wherever changes occurred. This dynamic nature has made *teyyam* to perpetuate in North Malabar. It has great survival value even with the limited technology and knowledge of the primitive people, who believe that the divine power of *teyyam* can get rid of all misfortunes. Having understood its tidy influence over the society, the exploiters subdued *teyyam* for their vested interests. The approach of folklorists further strengthened these exploitations.
What is Teyyam?

According to Kurup,

The Teyyam or Teyyattam is a popular cult in Malabar which has become an inseparable part of the religion of the village folk. As a living cult with centuries-old tradition, ritual and custom it embraces almost all castes, classes and divisions of Hindu community in this region. The term Teyyattam denotes the dance of god and the term Teyyam is a corrupt form of Deivam or god. The ritual aspects and the artistic forms of this folk-dance fulfill the religious aspirations and aesthetic imagination of the common people. (1977:5)

For Pallath teyyam is,

A form of worship consisting of a special combination of symbols, rituals and art forms particularly the dance through which the ghosts, good and the evil spirits, in its manifestation of sub human, animate and inanimate beings, ancestor spirits of legendary figures of great valour, extra ordinary powers, and endowments, and gods and goddesses: Shiva, Sakthi, Vishnu are appeased and honoured. This is done by dressing up in the intended form of their effigy (Kōlam) and performing artistically according to prescribed rites and rituals, developed through folk traditions with the accompaniment of vocal and instrumental music. The dance is incorporated into a ritual offering which is done by another group of ritual experts known as tantri (priests). (1995:60)

Formulation of a fit definition of teyyam is not an easy task. In this regard, various features have to be considered. Primarily a first hand knowledge on the socio-cultural significance of teyyam in the plural
society of North Malabar is necessary. This traditional religious ritual of the Hindu society is a consensual stand between man and environment. As a social etiquette the people ensue *teyyam* as their style of worship, which is observed through unshakeable and patterned symbols. The entire action of *teyyam* has reflected, grappled and palpitated the glister of life of the bygone days. Indeed, because of the trust in the divine power of *teyyam*, the disciples of this performance firmly believe that their survival and existence is conceded on this.

Analyzing the whole movement in the *teyyam* performance is the only dependable method we can adopt to trace its origin and history of evolution. The so-called ‘reliable’ and ‘authentic’ written documents on this topic are absent. It is precisely this absence that gives the construction of the history of *teyyam* a space in the culture of the communities of its performers. It is the same feature that adds to the construction its most notable difficulty.

The first traces of *teyyam* came into existence not as an accident but, as a natural development. It emerged out of day-to-day experience. We can say that it existed through ‘nature-man interaction’, which made possible the very existence of man in the given space, North Malabar.

According to Hudson and Smith,

> Territoriality is a subset of resource-defense strategies and resource defense is in turn an aspect of substance strategies...we have argued that, territoriality in humans is at least in part an adaptive response to environmental factors. (cit. Dyson 1998:110)
This applies even to *teyyam*.

Fear, anxiety and other similar mental states were given importance in those days while facing critical conditions. The then knowledge and science were unable to give proper explanations to the cause and effect of experienced phenomena, and events in the real life. This led the people of those days into a state of helplessness in relation to many of their productive endeavours. The outcome of such a situation was a natural struggle. To escape from these, or, minimize stress and strain, man imputes to them extra-ordinary powers. So, the idea of *teyyam* comes very close to that of *animism*, *manaism*, *fetishism* or, the worship of material objects supposed to have innate power.

Based on such beliefs, in order to overcome difficulties posed before a person, his mind and body also responds in the form of a ‘trance’ produced by the ‘energy’ during the psychic repressions. Consciously or, unconsciously, when the trance was repeated on similar occasions, it got established so that the trance was considered helpful to overcome certain crises. Slowly and steadily, the trance occurring on certain occasions or, during crises, coupled with the ‘beliefs’, it was gradually transformed into ‘dance’, i.e., the performance.

In lieu with the movement of culture, the ‘beliefs’ gave rise to the custom of ‘worship’. The impact of environment and culture laid the foundation for this worship system. Later on, these beliefs, and the custom of worship, being absorbed into a system, turned into an enduring practice, in accordance with man’s aesthetic taste. It then came to be known as, *teyyam*. Or, in other words, the mutual interaction between belief and dance, gave shape to *teyyam*, backed by myth, and rituals. Further, the whole system came to be
organised to stand on ‘nature-man-spirit interaction’. This will be discussed later in this chapter.

A careful study of its movements and action will show that there are three distinct phases in the evolution of teyyam. They can be noticed in a line of simple to complex. In the first phase, teyyam had its first trace. The second phase saw the development of scientific reasoning. The spreading and universalisation of teyyam took place in this phase, along with the serious and noticeable change in the processes of life. Moreover, the teyyam dance was performed in defined rhythms, and according to the notes played in various musical instruments. Attractive attire also came into use. Magical spells, chants, tōttam pāttu, and other rituals were also organized in this phase. In the third and final phase, just after the invasion of the Aryans, the ‘Aryanisation’ of teyyam was done. The whole performance was absorbed into the Hindu religion without any change in its basic structure. The introduction of the Hindu deities into teyyam performance was one of the most important changes of this period.

Even though the basic structure of teyyam remained unchanged, minor changes have occurred. Once the whole population blindly believed in its divine powers, and worshipped it with great dignity. In the past, it was considered truly as a part of life. Recently, after changes have taken place in the belief-system, and the worldview of the people, teyyam came to be elaborately performed, and yet, has slowly started to loosen its hold over the population. This clearly indicates that teyyam had evolved from a primitive base, and does not have a recent origin but, a remote, very remote, origin. A glance at the past activities of the primitive people which present themselves during a performance, at the development of various elements like the teyyam attire, the sacred centers and the manners of worship
compells us to draw this conclusion. This kind of history is accessible only if *teyyam* and its elements are studied as a cultural text, and not an independent one, having a free stand of its own, that makes its presence through constant social interactions.

**Functions of Teyyam**

*Teyyam* has to do certain functions for the common good of the society. Earlier, it had social, psychological and economic significance. Later on after the ‘Hinduisation’, in a multi-caste and pluralistic society, it had more elaborate duties to perform including, political, religious, communicative and ceremonial, in addition to socio-economic and psychological functions.

*Teyyam* is a concrete situation rather than a mental abstraction. It was the primitive man’s reaction to the concrete, qualitative and multidimensional life experiences. It has both conscious and unconscious motivations that are applicable to the individual, community, society or, to the whole humanity, sharing complexes of universal import. *Teyyam* has made all effort to combine every piece of the society together in order to make solidarity and integrity.

**Socio-Cultural Function**

One of the important and relevant functions of *teyyam* is to bring integrity and solidarity among the people. This is obtained through the union of the members of society. Through this opportunity of group interactions, the members get a chance to see each other and share their experiences with relatives and friends, at least once in a year. In this sense, *teyyam* binds together the members of the society, providing a feeling with a belonging and co-operation. The belief in different deities and their joint performance in great
harmony insist on the importance of unity and integration. Thus, *teyyam* exhibits social integration through social relations.

*Teyyam* also serves as a critique of the socio-cultural discriminations of society, and provides instruments for socio-cultural protests and criticism. *Teyyams* like *Pottan*, *Vishnumūrthi*, and *Kuttichatan* directly attack social oppressions and exploitations. The license to criticize discriminations and concessions for breaking social control and norms, in the forms such as, ‘untouchability’ and ‘pollution’ give the oppressed some ‘equality’ that brings social equilibrium. For centuries, this social etiquette, transmitted from generations to generations, not only perpetuates the culture, but maintains its identity too.

**Political Function**

The belief in possession of divine and supernatural power of *teyyam* enforces the people to observe the law and order very strictly, and to accomplish their duties. Consciously, they were not willing to commit any mistake or misconduct, because of the fear of the wrath of their deity. Later on, it has been transformed into a kind of political power over the people’s desires.

*Teyyam* regulates the social life of North Malabar. It helps to maintain rule and norms according to which it guides and establishes a network of relations amongst the society. To make every member of the society follow the rules, standards, and the norms, there must subsist integration, harmony, and solidarity among the members.

The local rulers of North Malabar, *tampurāns* or *nāduvāzhis*, used *teyyam* performance and the sacred centres for implementing their laws and orders among the people. It existed in lieu with the
establishment of 'Hinduization'. The Sanskritised Hindu temple known as, kshetram had been placed on top of the hierarchies of political institutions but, just below the local administration.

**Religious Function**

In the remote past, the religious function of teyyam was very limited. Primarily, it was aimed to bring peace and social equilibrium in the society. It was the symbolic expression of social relations and status, describing the spiritual reality, and values of the community. It was concerned with social welfare and cohesion. Later on, under the process of 'Hinduization', heredity being the criterion for the determination of caste, the society was stratified into different sects. Therefore, teyyam is necessarily designed to carry on stratigraphic sequence among the people. In this sectarian society, everyone is connected with teyyam performance, and has been assigned particular roles. Though it maintains the mutual interaction between various castes, it keeps possession of social hierarchy and segmentary system. However, teyyam binds the people together on one hand, and is also successful in maintaining the superior and inferior feelings of the society on the other hand.

The teyyam provides comfort and reassurance that come from having some way to explain and encounter with the troubles and uncertainties of living. It may be justified and sanctioned as rituals, values, and customs. The residue of the bygone past in the form of ritual and myth, which concerns individual needs and social equilibrium, has been considered as adaptive and adjustive responses to social and physical environment as well. In fact, all societies function adequately only if necessary needs are to be satisfied. This is directly linked with their belief-system. Hence, in
the case of North Malabar, *teyyam* functions adequately, and often satisfies the social drives through worship and performance.

**Psychological Function**

*Teyyam* is obviously represented as a symbol of objects and images of daily life. It comes out of 'collective and personal unconsciousness'. This mechanism also reveals the psychic repression. At the time of blessing, *teyyam* listens to problems and complaints rose by the devotees, and suggest practical and invaluable solutions to overcome their difficulties. Through this traditional kind of guidance and counseling mechanism, *teyyam* re-establishes self-confidence, motivation, and enough courage in the mind of the people to face the life's hazards.

The whole world of performance itself has given relief to the celebrant, their relatives and friends by accomplishing social integration and solidarity. The performance brings healing into psychological discomfort, anxiety, and fear. Moreover, the performers too get satisfaction and recognition while performing *teyyam*.

**Economic Function**

The sacred structure is determined by the economy of every one. In a high-stratified society, all sects possess certain special economic system for their survival. As the result of the impact of the concepts of high and low, the inferior caste has been prompted to engage service-return based economy. *Teyyam* performance too witnesses a service-return based system of economy. The performers serve the society accordingly, and in return, they get economic benefits. A close look at this service-return system essentially reveals the upper caste people's lust to sustain the feelings of the society.
Communicative Function

Teyyam does not exist for any kind of entertainment and aesthetic interest, but as survival value. These symbols have conveyed the people's philosophy and world-view. However, teyyam manifests the hidden past and enables the people for apperception over the bad impact of anti-social and immoral activities. The myths of Pottan teyyam, Vishnumūrthi, and Karimkuttichatan express the message of protest-measures against certain social discriminations.

Ceremonial Function

Ceremonials take diverse forms in different societies. They may be ritual observances, fasting and drinking, singing and dancing, pageantry and fancy dress, and so on. Teyyam is performed over a number of days or months, which gives the people a chance to celebrate and enjoy over a number of days.

Attire of Teyyam

At the very sight of teyyam itself, everyone feels that it is an existing piece of performance. Largely, this is accomplished due to the presence of colourful and beautiful make-up and decorations on the head, face, and all over the body of the performer. The elaborate decoration of teyyam is done mainly above the chest, hands and just below the navel including the legs. The Malayan use cheap and easily obtainable materials in the surroundings for make-up and decoration. This includes kuruthola or olatiri (tender leaves of coconut), muriku (a kind of soft and light wood plant), ari (rice), manjal (turmeric), nuru (lime), mashi or kari (charcoal), adaka (arecanut), odu (bronze - bell-metal), etc. The decorations on various parts of body are distinct.
The performers use the term *aniyalam* to refer attire and wearing. It can be further divided into *mudi* (headgear), *talachamayam* (head decoration), *mughapala* (mask), hand decoration, *kakaru* (bronze ornaments used in legs), and specially designed colourful dressings.

The *aniyalam* is of two types, temporary and permanent. The temporary ones made by tender coconut leaves (*kuruthola*). It is used for a single performance. The re-usable, permanent *aniyalams* are made up of planks of light softwood (*muriku*), cloth (*thunį*), *odu* (bronze), *vellί* (silver), and even *sornam* (gold). Coating coloured glittering papers, mirrors etc., beautify the engraved and designed wood planks.

The Malayans make use of *pelika* or *peliya* (a traditional basket made of cane) to preserve or store, and to transport permanent *aniyalams*. They buy *peliya* from the Vēlans, a *teyyam* performing caste, who make cane and bamboo products like, *kuta* (basket), *muram* (winnoing fan), *totil* (cradle), etc.

**Head Decoration**

*Talachamayam* is the word appropriately used by *teyyam* performers in place of head decoration. Certain performances of *teyyams* use different kinds of *mudi* (headgear) in addition to *talachamayam*. The *mudi* is circular or triangular, and its size ranges from small to very huge. The performers use natural as well as artificial materials to make *mudi* and *talachamayam*. The natural materials includes tender coconut leaves, arecanut stem, bamboo, bough of coconut, planks of light and soft wood and artificial materials like red cloth, coloured glittering papers and mirror. The people simply collect natural materials from the surroundings, and artificial materials are purchased from the market.
The headdresses are of different sizes and shapes, and it must have differently designed pieces. *Kondal* made of cloth, *talapali* made of bronze and silver, *talapu* and *talatanda* of *chekippu* (ixora flower), and different *katu* made of coconut leaves, soft wood, bronze or silver, are included in the important pieces of headdress.

**Kondal**

This is made of cloth and worn on the head. The function of *kondal* helps the other pieces of head decorations to fix firmly on the head. Over this, the performers wear all other pieces of *talachamayam*.

**Talapali**

The most important and essential piece of *aniyalam* is *talapali*. The performers told me that it symbolically represent the 21 *gurukaranavanmars* (ancestors). This piece of *talachamayam* is made off specially designed 21 silver or bronze pieces fixed in cloth. At the time of performance, it was tied around the forehead. The performers must obeisance the holy *talapali* before tying it on the head. A slogan is prevalent among them regarding *talapali* runs like this: “*guruthwamilathvanu talapali urakila*”, which means, *talapali* will not stay in the proper place during performance if the performer lacks good character and behaviour.

**Vellipola**

It is also used along with *talapali*, and made of artificial beeds of silver whitish colour.

**Talapu and Talatanda**

*Talapu* or *talatanda* is made of ixora flowers, arranged in a peculiar fashion by using *vaikol* (straw of paddy), and *vazhanaru* (thread
obtained from plantain). The small sized one is called, *talapu* and the large one is called, *talatanda*. This is fixed just above *talapali*. In most cases, *talapu* or *talatanda* is beautified by *velipu* (artificial silver flower).

**Kathu**

The Malayans use various types of pseudo ears called *kathu* for different *teyyams*. They use *kuttykathu*, *olakathu*, *pekathu*, and *thekan kathu*. The *kuttykathu* is made of plank of softwood (*muriku*) and is beautified by coating *takidu* (glittering paper). *Teyyam Rakthachāmundi* use *kuttykatu*. *Olakathu* is also made of plank of *muriku*, and beautified by glittering papers. Some times, they use *olakatu* with bronze fittings. *Teyyams* like, *Bairavan*, *Kudiveeran*, *Karimkuttichatan*, *Pukuttichatan*, *Uchakuttichatan*, and *Karuval* use *olakathu*. *Pekathu* is made up of tender coconut leaves. Unlike the other forms of *kathu*, *pekathu* is used only for a single performance. *Pottan teyyam*, *Pulamaruthan*, *Pulachamandi*, and *Gulikan* use *pekathu*. *Madayilchāmundi* use *thekan kathu*, which is made up of silver or, bronze.

**Chuyipu**

This piece of *talachamayam* is made up of *muriku*. Glittering papers, and pieces of mirrors beautify it. *Chuyipu* is placed just above the *kathu*. *Vishnumurthi* and *Madayilchāmundi teyyam* use *chuyipu*.

**Chenimalar**

A specially designed bronze or, silver ornament is used for head decoration. It is placed just above the ear of the performer. All *teyyams* use *chenimalar*. 
Facial Decoration

The Malayan uses some traditional mode of techniques and methods, primarily to beautify the face of the performer and secondly, to give identity for their teyyams.

Using of masks, pseudo eyes, fangs, moustache and beards are common. Facial writings also have significance among the facial decoration. Sometimes, the performers use pseudo faces of different creatures on certain occasions during the performance.

Facial writing (*mughathezhuthu*)

The Malayan uses the term *mughathezhuthu* to denote facial writings. They have been using different *mughathezhuthu* for different teyyams. The intention behind the facial writing is to express the meaning of myth. The pictorial and, symbolic representation of the face with coloured designs makes every teyyam distinct from others. Yellow, orange, red, black, and white colours are used as basic colours for facial writing. For making these colours, in olden days, people made use of natural materials like turmeric powder and *manayola* for yellow (*manja*) colour, and *chayiliam* for red (*chopu*), and a mixture of *manayola* and *chayiliam* for orange colour. Rice powder paste is used to depict white (*vella*). Combinations of charcoal (which is obtained from the flame of an oil lamp, in a small earthen pot called, *mayodu* or *mashiyodu*), and coconut oil are used for black colour (*mashi-Kajal*). Nowadays, Malayans buy their colouring materials from the market whenever they are needed.

All designs of *mughathezhuthu* have their own basic structures. The basic forms cannot be changed. But everybody has been given the liberty to change the thickness of lines, length, breadth, area, volume
and other minor areas according to the writer's desire and skill. *Koyipu* or *kozhipushpam*, *thepumkurium*, *sangumvalum*, *badrachotta*, *anchupulli*, *churulezhuthu*, *pullezhuthu*, *anachuvalu*, *nathumkanni*, *prakezhuthu*, *narikurichezhuthu*, *nagamthathezhuthu*, etc. are some of the basic patterns of facial writing. The patterns are mostly borrowed from the features of animals, and plants. The name itself reflects the shape and design of its structure. *Koyipu* is the local term used to denote the comb of the cock. The *koyipu* design of *Vishnumurthi* is patterned after the local name of cock's comb. This pattern of writing is considered as the most refined and complex among *mughathezhuthu*. *Sangumvalum* (*sangu*: shell, *valu*: tail) means shell and tail. *Churulezhuthu* is patterned as spiral shape. *Anachuvadu* is named after elephant feet.

The facial writing is given distinction and identity in each *teyyam*. In the face of *Vishnumurthi*, the Malayan writes *koyipu*. *Thepumkuriyum* is for *Madayilchamundi*, *badrachotta* for *Rakthachamundi*, *anachuvalu* for *Uchakuttichathan*, *sangumvalum* for *Karuval, Panchuruli, Raktheswar*, and *Uchitta*.

Mostly, the facial writings too have expressed high degree of modification. In early days, the Malayan had used simple forms of writings such as, *thepu* (smearing) and *badrachotta* (filled circles) which were totally devoid of refined lines. At this stage, they used natural materials for facial writings such as, *manjal* (turmeric) for yellow colour, *nuru* (quick lime) and turmeric for red colour, *kari* (charcoal) for black colour, and *arichanth* (rice flour paste) for white colour.

The use of strokes and lines indicates the second stage. Most refined forms of *mughathezhuthu* such as, *koyipu* and *sangumvalum* were evolved in this stage. Instead of turmeric and quicklime, the
Malayan used *manela* (for yellow colour) and *chayiliyam* (red colour) for colouring the face in this second stage.

The *Bairavan teyyam* of Payyanur region uses *thepu* design on the face, but the Malayans used *kurangirutham*, another form of *mughathezhuthu*, for the same *teyyam* in the Payangadi region. This is an ideal example that reveals the modification of facial writings.

**Mughapala (Mask)**

Pallath quotes Moore,

> In Malinesia extending from New guinea to the Solomons and out to Fiji people make extensive use of masks...They have also been used for religious experience, as a powerful medium of mediating to the people the over-powering reality of the sacred world. Masks also used as a means of transformation. In the most general sense a mask is a disguise which covers the wearer and there by conceals or transforms his identity. (1995:68)

We find use of masks even in *teyyams*. *Pottan teyyam* and *Gulikan* wear facemask known as, *mughapala* lieu of *mughathzhuthu*. Generally, the masks are made of *pala* (spathe of the areca palm) or, cardboard by drawing certain patterns. Some times *Gulikan teyyam* uses *mugham* (designed bronze masks), instead of *mughapala*. *Madayilchāmundi* and *Vishnumūrthi* use a temporary mask called, *moghompidi* (designed face of pig) during some rituals.

**Chandrakala (half-moon) and Trikannu (third eye)**

Female goddesses and incarnations of Lord Siva use *chandrakala* made of silver, bronze or, gold. Nowadays, all the *teyyams* wear
chandrakala on their forehead. The informants said that *chandrakala* is used as a symbol of moon.

*Trikannu* is used by the incarnation of Siva. It is made of silver, gold or, bronze. It symbolically represents the third eye of Siva. The performer wears it on the forehead.

**Poikannu and Olikannu (pseudo eyes)**

Pseudo eye, *poikannu*, made of silver, bronze or, softwood also is used by *teyyams* like, *Uchakuttichathan, Karimkuttichathan, Pukuttichathan, Bairavan* etc., as their eyes. In southern part of North Malabar, *Karimkuttichathan* and *Kandakarnan* use *olikannu* made of softwood.

**Egiru (fang)**

*Egiru* made of silver or, bronze is also adorned by some female *teyyams*. *Karuval* and *Kalakatu Raktheswary* use *egiru* (fang), as one of their ingredients of facial decoration.

**Tadi (beared) and Meesa (moustach)**

White and black artificial beard and moustache is used for certain *teyyam* performance. The Malayan uses *tadi* in place of beard and *meesa* in place of moustache during performance. The types of beard can be divided into *kuttytadi* and *balantadi* or *thukutadi*. *Balantadi* or *thukutadi* is an elongated one, and *kuttytadi* is short in nature. However, *Pukuttichatan* wears white *kuttytadi* and *meesa*, while *Karimkuttichathan* uses black *balantadi* and *meesa*. The white colour indicates old age, and the black, young age.
Mudi (head gear)

In addition to talachamayam, most of the teyyams use mudi (headgear). It is of different size and shape. The length of mudi ranges from small to very huge. The length of a huge mudi extends up to 10-15 metres. Different teyyams wear different kinds of mudi. The long and huge ones have simple structure, and the shape is almost triangular. Certain teyyams such as, Kandakarnan, Kammadathamma, and Gulikan tira (Thekan Gulikan) wear this kind of mudi. The average ones have circular, semicircular or, triangular shape, and are more refined in form. The mudi of Karuval, Kalakattu Raktheswary, Uchitta, Bairavan, Uchakuttichathan, Pukuttichathan, Kudiveeran etc., comes under this category. The most complicated and refined forms are small, and circular in shape. Vishnumūrti, Madayilchāmundi, and Rakthachāmundi wear this kind of headgear.

Generally, the Malayan uses natural materials such as, areca nut palm, bamboo, bough of coconut palm, red cloth, light and soft wood planks, and tender coconut leaves for making mudi. Except the red cloth, the other materials are cheap, and are easily available in North Malabar. Further, the Malayans largely exploit the local environment for obtaining tiri (tender coconut leaves), muriku (a kind of light and soft wood plant), kāvungu (areca nut palm), etc.

Pottan teyyam and Gulikan wear specially designed koyola as mudi, which is made up of tender coconut leaves. Uchitta and Kuttichāttan in and the adjacent places of Payyanur village of Kannur district also use Topparam and sabari mudi, made of tender coconut leaves. Madayilchāmundi uses thalamalika as its mudi, made of coconut leaves. All these are small and circular in shape.

Usually a single teyyam wears only one mudi. A few exceptions are also seen. Kammadathamma, Neelamkaichāmundi, and
Adurchámundi use temporary headgear known as, yetumudi (additional mudi) in addition to the permanent one during certain stages of the ritual performance. It is removed after a short while.

My study on the headgear decorations of teyyam reveals the fact that it has undergone different stages of development. At first, the Malayan used natural materials, flowers and leaves that were easily and cheaply obtainable from his surroundings. The increased use of clothes has given a new dimension to the headgear. In the third and last stage of development, artificial materials like plastic, decorative papers, paints, etc. are used. Gold is also used.

Table: III.1 Developmental Stages of Headgear

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Devl. Stages</th>
<th>Materials Used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage I</td>
<td>Natural materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ola (Leaves)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poo (Flowers)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maram (Wood), etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage II</td>
<td>Cloths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thuni</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pattu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage III</td>
<td>Materials sold from market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plastics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paint, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This development of teyyam headgear decoration may throw light on the shift, a syndrome, of human being’s culture, ‘self sufficiency to market and independence to dependence’.
Hand Decoration

In each hand, the Malayan adorns two kinds of vala (wooden bangles) namely, tandavala (three in number) on the upper arm and munkaivala (two in number) on the forearm. Kadakam, a wooden ornament is worn on the wrist. Kaithanda, made of ixora flower is worn on either side of thandavala and munkaivala, kadakam and chudam. A bronze ornament called, chudam is worn below kadakam. Sometimes, chudam is also made of silver. Olanagham or nagham, made of kuruthola, is also adorned by some teyyams like, Vishnumūrthi, Pottan, Gulikan etc. Female teyyams such as, Madayilchāmundi, Rakthachāmundi, and Panchuruli never use it. The Malayan uses pseudo fingernails of silver during the performance of Vishnumūrthi teyyam. They use the same term nagham to refer fingernails. All the above said pieces of hand decorations are worn over kaikudu, a cloth covering of hand.

Leg decoration (Kakaru)

On the legs, the Malayan wears three kinds of ornaments namely, patumpadam, chilambu, and manikayla made of bronze. They use the term kakaru to refer these ornaments. Patumpadam, a specially designed ornament is worn just above the jingling anklet, chilambu. Manikayla, an ornament with strings of jingling bells, is adorned above the patumpadam, and below the knee.

Body Decoration

From neck to the waist the Malayan performer uses different forms of body decorations. On the neck, the teyyam of Malayan wears kazhuthilkettu, charattumala, powam, and vanamala. Kazhuthilkettu and carattumala are made up of softwood, and beautified by glittering paper. Powam is a special kind of necklace. The vanamala
(garland) is made by a combination of differently coloured decorative papers, one by one in a peculiar fashion.

All the teyyams, however, do not use the above-mentioned ornaments. Teyyams such as, Vishnumūrthi, and Madayilchāmundi wear all of them. Pottan teyyam, and Gulikan never use powam, charattumala, and garlands. They only use kazhuthilkettu. Instead of other forms of body decoration, Pottan teyyam, Gulikan, Uchakutty and Pukuttichathan, Bairavan etc., smear white coloured arichanthu (rice flour made into a paste with water) all over the exposed body between the neck and the waist. But Bairavan, in southern part of north Malabar, wears aiaram, a specially designed body decoration, which covers the whole body from the neck to the waist. While marum-mulayum is used as the pseudo breast for the performance of Uchitta in the Payyanur region, and aiaram is used in Thalassery area.

Using of psedo breast is also prevalent. Marum-mulayum, molaru or kuthumula, pseudo bosom of woman, made of softwood is used by female teyyams. Uchitta, Karuval, and kalakatu Raktheswary use marum-mulayum, while Madayilchāmundi, Rakthachāmundi, Muvalamkuzhichāmundi, and Panchuruli use molaru. During the performance of Kurathi teyyam the Malayan wears symbolic breasts by using designed coconut shells called, kuthumula. In some big centres of worship the performers used to wear pseudo bosoms made of bronze, which was offered by devotees in return of remedy received by the respective teyyams.

Karimkuttichathan appears with black pulli (dot) on the chest and abdomen. On the chest of Vishnumūrthi, and Gulikan teyyam the Malayan symbolically draws sreevalsam and sulam, respectively with mashi (charcoal).
The wearing in waist and loin region varies from *teyyam* to *teyyam*. These include porathattu, aroda, chatta, arakettu, and aduku. *Porathattu* is big and circular in form, and is worn on the dorsal (back) side of the performer, fixed on the waist. This is basically made of carved tender coconut leaves, and beautified by *pakkam* (made of softwood) and *peelithazha* (made by the feather of peacock). Female *teyyams* such as, *Madayilchāmundī, Rakthachāmundī, Muvalamkuzhichāmundī, Panchuruli* and *kavidiyanganath Raktheswary* have been using *purathattu*. Male *teyyam* never uses *purathattu*. *Arakettu* is made of softwood planks. *Madayilchāmundī, Rakthachāmundī, Muvalamkuzhichāmundī* etc., wear *arakettu*. *Aroda* or *arayuda* is also worn by female *teyyams*. It is made of *kuruthola*. *Raktheswary, Karuval, and Uchitta* wear *aroda*. The male *teyyam, Vishnumūrthī* and its version *Ottakōlam*, wear *aroda*. The informers told me that *Vishnumūrthī* is the only male *teyyam* that wears *aroda*. *Karimkuttichāthan* wears *chatta* on the waist. It is made of soft wood and *chopu pāttu* (red cloth). *Aduku* is another kind of wearing made of specially engraved softwood. *Bairavan, Pukuty, Uchakuttichathan*, and *Kudiveeran teyyam* use this kind of *aniyalam*.

**Dress (uduppu)**

*Kuruthola* (tender coconut leaves) and *chopu pattu* (red cloth) are extensively used in different styles and forms as the dress of *teyyam*. *Oli* made of *kuruthola* is used by *Pottan teyyam, Pulamarutan, Pulachāmundī, Gulikan, Thekan Gulikan, Vishnumūrthī*, and *Ottakōlam*. In the case of *teyyam*, who wears clothes as dress, certain peculiar kind of pattern in wearing is prevalent. *Oli, Chuttum kettum, vithanathara*, and *velimban* are included in this style of wearing. The *tōttam of teyyam* uses *chuttumkettum*. *Muthappan* and *Uchitta* in the northern sides of Kasaragod district use *chuttumkettum*. *Karimkuttichathan* wears *vithanathara*, and others
such as, Muvalamkuzichamundi, Panchuruli, Kavidiyanganath Raktheswary, Kalakattu Raktheswary, Bairavan, Pukutty, and Uchakuttichathan, and Kudiveeran wear velimban as their dress.

Madayilchdmundi and Rakthachdmundi wear either oli or, velimban in accordance with their importance of worship. Uchitta in southern parts uses oli, and that in northern side wears chuttumkettum. The style of wearing, and the materials used to make dress reveals certain stages in the development of teyyam. In the beginning when the people were ‘primitive’ and dependent on nature, they used coconut leaves as their dress. In the next stage of development, the Malayans used plain clothes as their teyyam dress. It was only in the subsequent period folded-clothes were introduced.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Devl. Stages</th>
<th>Materials Used</th>
<th>Pattern or Style of Wearing</th>
<th>Examples of Teyyam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st Stage</td>
<td>Coconut leaves</td>
<td>Oli</td>
<td>Pottan teyyam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vishnumurthi</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gulikan, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Stage</td>
<td>Cloth</td>
<td>Chuttum Kettum</td>
<td>Tottam of teyyams,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Muthappan</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Uchitta, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Stage</td>
<td>Folded Cloth</td>
<td>Velimban</td>
<td>Bairavan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kudiveeran</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Uchakuttichathan</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Pukuttichathan, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Typology of Teyyam**

Teyyam performance is directly linked to the worldview, and the belief-system of the people. More than 300 to 500 different forms of
teyyams are performed all over North Malabar. According to the informants, the number of teyyam is only onnu kuraya nalpathu, meaning one less than 40, i.e., basically the number is 39. A few others believe that there is only onnurunalpathu teyyams, that is 140 different forms. In this context, I would like to add that teyyam is an external manifestation of the inner nature. Durant Drake’s words are meaningful in this context:

This disposition of the heart and will, through which man comes to care for the highest things and to live in gentleness and inward calm above the surface aspects and accidents of life, we call it its inner nature, spiritually; when it is embodied in outward forms and institutions and spread among the whole communities.

(cit. Mahapatra 1985:3,4)

The ultimate aim of teyyam performance is to raise the life of man, and the nature of society to a higher and noble level. Since, teyyam is an ancient form, it also depicts the elements of animism, animatism and nature worship. We can classify teyyam on the symbolic basis of sex, and according to the myth of origin and tottam pattu in particular. We can classify teyyam on the basis of sex into antteyyam (male), and pennteyyam (female). The females, also known as ammateyyam, are the dominant ones, at least in number.

The two general divisions have several classes in terms of myth of origin, and tottam pattu. Accordingly, there are five categories namely, God and Goddess, Ancestors, Hero and Heroine, Spirit and Devils, and Nature and Animals.
Table: III.3 List of Male and Female Teyyams Performed by Malayan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>POTTAN TEYYAM</td>
<td>MADAYILCHÂMUNDI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VISHNUMÜRTHI</td>
<td>RAKTHACHÂMUNDI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OTTAKÔLAM</td>
<td>MUVALAMKUZHICHÂMUNDI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BAIRAVAN</td>
<td>KALAKATTURAKTHESWARY</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>KARIMKUTTICHATHAN</td>
<td>KAVADIYANGANATH-RAKTHESWARY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PUKUTTICHATHAN</td>
<td>KRUVALAMMA</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UCHAKUTTYCHATHAN</td>
<td>UCHITTA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>KANDAKARNAN</td>
<td>PULACHAMUNDI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GULIKAN</td>
<td>KAMMADATHAMMA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>THEKANGULIKAN</td>
<td>ADURCHÂMUNDI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PULAMARUTHAN</td>
<td>VASURIMALA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MUTHAPPAN</td>
<td>ERICHUDALA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>KUDIVEERAN</td>
<td>KURATI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PATTAR</td>
<td>PANCHURULI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>KULI TEYYAM</td>
<td>NEELAMKAICHÂMUNDI</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

God and Goddess

A large number of Malayan’s teyyam falls under this class. Gods and goddesses of the Hindu mythology, as well as local deities, are worshiped through this form. Incarnations of Goddess Parvathi, and Lord Vishnu and Siva are worshiped as teyyam. Madayilchâmundi, Rakthachâmundi, Vishnumûrthi, Pottan teyyam, and Bairavan are some examples.
Ancestors

The people of North Malabar are also practitioners of ancestor worship, and they do believe in soul and immortality. Chakravarthy opines that,

"We mean, not an existence in any form losing the personal point of view, but a personal immortality in which the present focus of consciousness is retained and the existence here gets is a real continuation of the personality which was in the process of being shaped and moulded in a definite manner on this earth." (cit. Mahapatra 1985:33)

This view can be taken to endorse the belief of the people of North Malabar. Among the people of this area, a common belief is prevalent, according to which, "getting success in all actions of man must need the blessing of ancestors." Therefore, ancestor worship in the form of teyyam is not rare. For example, the people of North Malabar worship their dead ancestors' souls by performing Kudiveeran teyyam.

Spirit

The worship of spirits and dead souls of those who had unnatural deaths is familiar in teyyam performance. The invisible and super human powers and evil spirits, and ghosts are also worshiped through teyyam performance. Erichudala is a versification of cemetery ghost. The dead soul of unnatural death is performed by Kuli teyyam. Pattar is performed after the immature death of a pattar (a high caste person) by wrath of a teyyam. Kandakaran and Pulamarthan, who are the versions of the assistants to God Siva, are worshiped as teyyam through performce at many sacred centres.
Nature and Animals

In the past, human beings worshipped the nature and animals. They worshipped stones, hills, trees, forests and animals. People believed that these were the abodes of super-human powers. In this connection, they attributed sacredness to groves, and preserved the kāvu (grove) as sacred. Animal worship is an inevitable part of teyyam performance, and it is indicated by the symbolic representations of tiger, lion, leoperd, pig, snake, etc. Basically teyyams such as, Vishnumūrthi and Madayilchamundi fall under this category, and these teyyams represent the worship of tiger/leopard, and pig, respectively.

Heroes and Heroines

Most of the human societies all round the world practise hero worship. It is an ancient custom. It was one of the important characteristics of the ‘primitive’ culture. Heroes showed extraordinary courage, and power and were honoured through worship and tales. The heroes, who fought against inhuman activities, social injustices and improper behaviour were respected, remembered and worshipped through teyyam. The same is true even at present. Karimkuttichathan, Uchitta, and Muthappan are some examples. Pottan teyyam, and Vishnumūrthi also come under this category. Vishnumūrthi communicates a tale of its rage against feudalism, while Pottan teyyam tells a story of a Pulayan’s brave fight against ‘untouchability’ and ‘pollution’.

We can also classify teyyam into two broad categories namely, local deities and deities of Hindu pantheon, as per the believe-system and religious feelings.
Table: III.4 List of Local Deities and Hindu Deities Performed by Malayans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Deity</th>
<th>Hindu deity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>POTTAN TEYYAM</td>
<td>MADAYILCHÂMUNDI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUVALAMKUZHICHÂMUNDI</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KARIMKUTTICHATHAN</td>
<td>RAKTHACHÂMUNDI</td>
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<tr>
<td>PUKUTTICHATHAN</td>
<td>VISHNUMÛRTHI</td>
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<td>UCHAKUTTYCHATHAN</td>
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<td>PULAMARUTHAN</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEELAMKAICHÂMUNDI</td>
<td>PANCHURULI</td>
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<tr>
<td>ERICHUDALA</td>
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<td>KURATI</td>
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<td>KALAKATTURAKTHESWARY</td>
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<td>KAVADIYANGANATH-RAKTHESWARY</td>
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<td>UCHITTA</td>
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<td>PULACHAMUNDI</td>
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<td>KAMMADATHAMMA</td>
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<td>ADURCHÂMUNDI</td>
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<td>MUTHAPPAN</td>
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<td>KUDIVEERAN</td>
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<td>PATTAR</td>
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<tr>
<td>KULI TEYYAM</td>
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</table>

Kalasam (Dance)

According to Kishore Jadav,

Dance may be very ancient and they may have grown out of creative inspiration, and they continue to sprout from the imagination of individuals and groups, people of all classes who sense the traditions and the aspirations of their environment. In the Indian sub-continent, such forms have survived whose origins can be traced back to pre-historic times and places. The buoyant tenacity with which the dance forms have continued. (1998:11,12)
His view can be taken as a proof for the *teyyam* antiquity as well as the imaginative nature of those, who were responsible of the origin and development of *teyyam*. The people of North Malabar use the term *kalasam* or *āttam* in place of dance. *Kalasam* or *āttam* is an integral part of *teyyam*. The performers still continue old forms of *Kalasam*. Various forms of *teyyam* are performed, executing different foot works, on different occasions of performance. Among them, *vilattam, eduthekalāsam, asurāttam, thekanāttam, and kudiyāttam* are famous. The assistants play specific rhythms (*talam*) on drums. The performance does not allow making changes in these basic rhythms.

**Use of Musical Instruments**

During *teyyam* performance, a variety of musical instruments are employed. *Chenda* (drum), *thudi* (drum), *thakil* (drum), *madhalam* (drum), *cherangalam* (gong), *elathalam* (cymbal), *kombu* (conch), and *cheenikkuzhal* (pipe) are the most frequently used musical instruments. Out of these, the Malayan uses *chenda* (drum), *thakil* (drum), *elathalam* (cymbal), and *cheenikkuzhal* (short pipe).

The *chenda, cheenikkuzhal* and *elathalam* are the most popular instruments. They make use of two kinds of *chenda* namely, *valanthala chenda* and *edanthala chenda*. The steps of dancing are performed in accordance with the beatings on the drum. The drummer plays notes on *valanthala chenda*, and it is accompanied by *edanthala chenda*. It gives these notes certain rhythms. *Thakil* is a large sized *edanthala chenda*. Usually, it is not used everywhere. It is used only in big and important sacred centres. The *elathalam* is used along with *chenda*, and *cheenikkuzhal*, and which is not so essential but, enrich the atmosphere. At least two drums, a *valanthala* and an *edanthala chenda* are very essential for a performance. Sometimes,
in a perumkaliyāttam the number of chendas exceeds ten. Blowing of pipe was also essential in the past but, the lack of blowing experts now limits the use of cheenikužhal only to certain important occasion. The drummer is called chendakkaran or vadyakkaran, and the interesting fact is that even the other musicians who play kuzhal, thakil and elathalam are also called as, vadyakkar/chendakkkar.

In teyyam performance, both instrumental and vocal music are very essential. Different forms of talam (rhythm) are used, during the performance of kalasam, on instruments such as, drum, pipe and cymbal. The music produced by these instruments creates a tempting atmosphere during performance. Tōttam pāttu (chant), the vocal music, also gives teyyam a chanting effect.

**Weapons (Ayudham)**

Commonly the weapons are considered as symbols of protection as well as distinction. The weapons are treated as an integral part of teyyam because, the people believe that they represent their deities who are considered as both the creator and the destroyer. Stones, weapons etc., are not taken as mere symbols of deities. They believe that the deities dwell or, rather are embodied, so that the weapons are regarded as symbols of respective deities.

Various kinds of weapons are used during teyyam performance. Churika (double-edged sword), palliwal (sword), kathi (sickle), sulam (trident), villu (bow), ambu (arrow), chural (cane stick), etc are some examples. Each teyyam has its own principal weapon. Moreover, the weapon indicates the character of teyyam. The war and hunting deities (eg. Vishnumūrthi, and Muthappan) take bow and arrows. The village deities possess swords, as a reflection of their protective function (eg. Madayilchāmundi, and Rakthachāmundi). The agrarian deities (eg. Kurathi and Pottan teyyam) take sickles as their weapons.
Offerings (Muthircha)

The people of North Malabar use the locally available materials as their items of offering. Traditionally, the offering includes ari (rice), nellu (paddy), aval (flakes of rice), malar (fried rice), pazham (ripe plantain fruit), thenga (coconut), elaneer (tender coconut), vellam (water), unaku (dried fish), irachi (meat), and kalesam (toddy and arrack or other liquor).

Various norms and rules are observed in the case of offerings. The arrangement of offerings inside the sanctum sanctorum before the sacred objects is called muthircha. The offerings are placed in two rows on separate kodeela (a piece of plantain leaf). In a row, half kg of rice, 250gm of aval and 50gm of malar are placed on separate kodeelas namely, arikkodeela and malarkodeela. This is repeated in the second row also. A thenga (coconut) is placed on the arikkodeela (leaf with rice), and one elaneer (tender coconut) is placed on each malarkodeela (plantain leaf with aval and malar). A niranazhi (1 kg of paddy and 0.25 kg of rice are arranged in a peculiar fashion in two vessels, one above the other), and cherupazaham (ripe plantain fruit) is also offered. Water is placed in kindi (a vessel). Kalesam (both arrack and toddy), and gurusi (of red or black) are considered as unavoidable offerings in the case of Pottan teyyam. Soon after the completion of thudangal, töttam and teyyam, the second row of offerings along with niranazhi is given to the performers. And it will replace new ones.

The people also arrange offerings on the courtyard on the northern side (vadakken bagham). The offerings are arranged in a splendidly designed structure called, kaliyambally made of vazhapola (stem of plantain) and it is fixed by kothiri (a half-meter long stick with flame at the tip). An arikodeela, malarkodeela and one kodeela each of
naithyachoru (boiled rice) and pancha (mixture of five boiled grain), coconut, tender coconut and ripe fruit of plantain, are offered in kaliyambally. A niranazhi, gurusi (red or black), and kalesam (both arrack and toddy) are offered. Kaliyambally is offered only during teyyam. The performers take all the items placed in kaliyambally after the performance. Fowl is also sacrificed.

The devotees offer cash during the period of kurikodukkal. They give according to their ability. This offering too goes to the performer. If the devotees offer gold or silver, usually it goes to the wealth of the sacred centre. Some times, the devotee offer kallu (toddy) or raku (arrack), pal (milk), karikku (tender coconut), ari (rice), pada or mundu (cloth), kozhi (fowl), ađu (goat), vilakku (lamp) and āyudham (weapon). The people also offer the symbols of thottilum kunjiyum (cradle and child), kannu (eyes) etc.

Sacred Centres

A traveller is able to see various sacred centres (Sthanam) of teyyam throughout North Malabar. Some are similar in appearance, and some vary in size, shape and structure. Among them, kâvu, palliyara, and taravādu have special mention. The primitive people depended on nature, very much, and that healthy relationship between nature and man resulted in the emergence of sacred centres. In that period, man had close contact with local surroundings particularly, with hills, forests and trees. The custom of worshipping Nature, due to their love for it, gave a ground to observe certain natural objects such as the hills and the forests, as the abode of deities. This attitude laid down the foundation for the emergence of symbolic sacred centres in the form of kâvu. The centres are considered to be the centre of the world. In such centres the men/devotees come in direct contact with his sacred deity. The
specially arranged objects like stone or heap of stones, and weapons, symbolically represent the presence of deities. And through performance of teyyam he can pay homage, as well as see the respective deities he worships. The sacred centre, kāvu, has trees in plenty, and the people honour the trees by for offering food, shelter and protection to them. Here, I reminded the following words of Eliade,

The tree can of course, become a symbol of universe, and in that form we find it in more developed civilizations, but to a primitive religious mind, the tree is the universe and it is so because it reproduces and as it were, sums it up as well as 'symbolizing' it. (cit. Pallath 1995:133,134)

In these centres, stones or weapons are supposed to represent the presence of local deities, which are placed in such a manner under certain trees. Usually, the trees like kara (a thorny shrub), kanjiram (Strychnos nux vomica), champakam (Cempakam tree), alu (Ficus bengalensis), arayalu (Ficus religiosa), pala (Alstonia scholaris), puli (Tamarindus indica), pilavu (Artocarpus integrifolia) etc., are considered as holy ones.

Anthropologically speaking, the preservation of sacred groves demonstrates a latent motif, the conservation of nature. It comes through the custom of worshipping deities, who are supposed to be present in the kāvu. The village forests of this area unfold the dimensions of the activities of the 'primitive' people. They understand and interpret the importance of maintaining environmental equilibrium. Therefore, their customs and rituals have, indeed, high degree of survival value. So, the words of Freeman, who studied on the kāvu in Kerala, can be quoted here:
Physically, the kavu is a piece of garden or forestland, but currently what defines it is that it is dedicated for the exclusive use of particular deities. In this capacity, the groves usually adjoin or are a short distance from an associated structural temple or shrine, though sometimes the structure may be within the kavu itself, and in such case there need be no connection with structures beyond the grove’s confines. (cit. Kalam 2001:18)

The people, later on, started to worship in new centres, where the deities were installed under a single tree. Parallel to the emergence of this kind of sacred centres, the sacredness of stones and heap of stones has given way to establish tara (elevated platform) in the form of new kind of centres of worship. Along with these new trends, the people also worshipped their deities in houses, and in taravādus. Such worship-spots or rooms are known as, kottil. Soon after the assimilation of teyyam into the Hindu belief system, many of their worship-spots have been converted into ‘temples’, commonly called as, palliyara (permanent holy chamber of teyyam constructed according to the Sanskritised architectural model). The chamberisation of kāvu, tara, kottil, and other sacred centers to palliyara has been a continuing process.

Table: III.5 Evolution of Sacred Centres

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Phase II</th>
<th>Phase III</th>
<th>Phase IV</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kāvu (Grove)</td>
<td>Maram (Tree)</td>
<td>Kottil (Room)</td>
<td>Palliyara/Ara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kallu (Stone)</td>
<td>Tara (Platform)</td>
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<td>(Holy chamber)</td>
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A close observation and study of the sacred centres reveal the visible difference between various centers. This difference, in fact, shows the
evolutionary phases of progress. As said earlier, people considered the groves, stones, and heap of stones as sacred centres. This reflects cohesion between nature and culture. The planting of a tree, and the construction of \textit{tara}, as sacred centres has taken place in the second phase. This was done during the conversional stage, from that of wandering life to semi-settled one. In the third phase, along with the social stratification by caste and creed, people placed their deities in special rooms (\textit{kottil}). This appeared in tune with their altered life style, the style of settled life. The construction of holy chamber, \textit{palliyara/ara}, as architectural models of Sanskritized temples, had been prevalent in the fourth stage of evolution. The high castes sensibly encouraged the construction of \textit{palliyara} to legitimate their political interests. The general direction of such an activity was believed to take the norms of the Vedic spirits, and ultimately kindle and serve them.

Each sacred centre will have either a single deity or, a chief deity in the group of some sub-deities. A sub-deity of a sacred centre may be the chief deity of another centre. Usually, a sacred place will have only one centre. However, exceptions are also there. Instances are there for sacred places having more than one sacred centre, where the main deity is found at one spot, and the sub-deities at other spots. The \textit{teyyakkazhakam} occupies a high position over other sacred centres. A \textit{kazhakam} has some rights over the lower centres. In connection with a performance at the \textit{kazhakam}, the lower centres have to perform some rituals. \textit{Kalavaraniarakkal} is such a custom, in which small sacred centres supply food items to prepare festive feast.

After the introduction of caste system, the sacred centres were divided. And as the result, each caste has its own sacred place. The sacred centre of the Pulayan is called, \textit{Kottam}. The Vaniya communities conduct and worship their \textit{teyyams} in \textit{Muchilodu}. The
people who belong to the Maniyani caste worship in Kannangadu. Other castes separately worship their own deities at various centres such as, palliyyara, ara, sthanam, k vu, and kottil. The Brahmins have their deities in mantrasala.

![Hierarchy of Sacred Centers](image)

**Figure III.1  Hierarchy of Sacred Centers**

Teyya kazhakam and the big centres of worship are placed under temples. Small centres like, sacred groves (k vu), and all other centres of teyyam, are placed at the lowest level of this political set up. By introducing this system, the high caste people cleverly seize the power and control over the low castes. Under such a favourable situation the upper classes create boundaries around themselves in order to consolidate their sectarian advantages.

**Ecology of Teyyam**

According to Jullian H. Steward,

Not all features of a given habitat, ecology, are relevant to a given socio cultural system, nor all systemic elements, i.e. religion, politics, technology, and kinship, etc are equally affected by man-habitat interaction.

(cit. Upadhyay and Pandey 1955:76)
So also in the case of teyyam, ecology plays a vital role. As said earlier, the interaction network between human beings and environment produces teyyam. The habitat, and culture of the people of North Malabar depended heavily on environment for their survival. The interaction gave shape to new institutions and adaptations that were necessary for different situations. This kind of dependence on environment, at present, has effects on all aspects of socio-cultural sphere. The dependence, in fact, emerges as an interlocking system. In the past, the people looked upon the surroundings as their natural environment, and started depending on it. This enforced the growth of certain features that moulded the society, and culture. Obviously, this dependency syndrome does not allow them to destroy nature but, forces to preserve it. The environment acts as a multifaceted resource, and contributes to the subsistence and survival. This had led to nature-worship, offering the deities a chance to reside and perform in every nook and corner. In this regard, they come forward to preserve kāvu as the traditional sacred centre of teyyam performance. In addition, the stories about practices like hunting, gathering, pastoralism and agriculture definitely reveal the degree of subsistence and survival. For example, the tottam pattu of kuttychathan teyyam runs like this, “ezhala kaliyundalo Kalakaderku, akali maiponae kayariduvonae” (a Brahmin known as Kalakadar have seven cattle-shed full of cattle, and these cattle are grassed by him, Kuttychathan). This lay open the then prevalent pastoralism.

The environment also offers enough materials for teyyam performance. The people exploit their local surroundings for this purpose. All the costumes, attires and other items, including those of offerings, are copious and cheap. Moreover, the greenish atmosphere of North Malabar has given beauty and attraction to the teyyam performance. The increasing influence of the market changed the
traditional set up of environment exploitation. The interaction patterns will remain as much the same but, the scale of dependence on nature diminishes. Thus, the bond between nature and human beings, nature-man interaction, becomes feeble day by day. This alteration in socio-cultural milieu necessarily and essentially shifts the people's perspective on nature in general, and sacred centers (kāvu) in particular.

Looking into the life and culture of North Malabar, the world of spirits is found to have a very close interaction with man, his social structure, and the natural environments. It has long been established that ecology plays a vital role in conditioning the culture of a given area, and that the geographical situation of a locale goes a long way in shaping the needs, customs, behaviour and thoughts of the people. Redfield oppines that,

> Both man and nature are the twin-agents of the perennial revolution that shapes and reshapes the face of the earth. (1955)

Vidyarthi’s concept of ‘nature-man-spirit complex’ (1963), provides a sharp tool in understanding and describing the cultural matrix of North Malabar, particularly teyyam and its allied field. Morab in his essay points out that Vidyarthi develops the ‘nature-man-spirit complex’,

> Precisely, the concept states that Nature, i.e., forest economy, khallu (shifting) cultivation, Man (social system), and Spirit (gossaiyan) all form a complex and are mutually interrelated with each other. (cit. Vidyarthi 1981:127)

Accordingly, the present study discovered that every movement of teyyam performance was profoundly influenced by nature, on the one hand, and spirit, on the other.
North Malabar experiences three main seasons in a year, the cold, rainy, and the hot. The pond, gullies, channels, rivers, and dales act as best reservoirs of water. The Monsoon renders good supply of water. The area consists of hilly uplands, valleys, forests and rivers. Most of the mountainous regions are covered with a thick forest. The forests provide in abundance with food, fuel, materials for building houses, medicines, and so on. Therefore, in past, the economy of the people pivots around the forests.

Inspite of restriction on hunting and gathering, they are still considering the forests to be their own, since they have been living away and around it, and are associated with it for generations. For them, *kadu* (forest) is not only the source of food, drink, house building materials etc., but also the abode of their patron spirits. Such is the attachment of the people towards the forest that they preserve a 'part of the forest', sacred grove, *kavu* in some places, and assign it to be the abode of their local deity, *teyyam*. Under no circumstances is such grove to be cut by any body. In this regard, the following words of Kalam are enlighting:

> The usual refrain is that sacred groves have been preserved on behalf of gods/goddesses/deities and for generations people have restrained themselves from denuding these forest patches. Such restraints have been exercised due to the fear of the wrath of the concerned god/goddess/deity. Hence sacred groves have remained, more often than not, in virgin, climax fronds without human interventions. 

*(2001:12)*

The society of North Malabar is highly organized into family, clan, caste and religion, and though the functioning units have exhibited a close relationship between man and man, and the supernatural, through a set of symbolic actions, and rituals associated with belief.
It is noted that besides its normal social function the family forges a link with the supernatural at every turning point in the life of its individual members, and also during the different phases of socio-economic efforts. Such liaison is established through the performance of *teyyam* or, appropriate rituals. The individual, family, clan, caste and religion or, the whole societies of North Malabar seeks the protection of the spirit world from drought, crop failure, misfortune and epidemic etc., through worship and performance of *teyyam* with a sense of liability and guilty. The people are very god-fearing and every moment of their lives is guided and controlled by supernatural powers; i.e., ‘spirits’, worshiped in the form of *teyyam*.

Demonstrating the close association between nature and man, the movements of the people is strictly controlled. Even though it has lost its significance, the caste people permit only members of the same group or ‘upper caste’ to enter their houses. The members of ‘low castes’ are never permitted to visit the sacred places of the ‘upper caste’. Moreover, the people of the ‘low caste’ are not permitted to touch the ‘upper caste’ people. The society forces the people to obey the ‘purity’ and ‘pollution’ rules. They believe that the violation of these rules and practices will earn the rage of the supernatural. It seems that these spirits play a major role in deciding the life and destiny of the people.

This further helps the cohesion of the caste members through the involvement of the supernatural, and helps to maintain the society its caste feelings. In contrast with this pattern of interaction, the North Malabar society exhibits a high level of interaction within the family, clan and community. In the family there is a close interaction based on blood, mutual affection and respect. The children are loved, nourished and protected by their parents, who consider them to be
supernatural blessings. The relationships are of two ways, usually of consanguinial, and affinal.

Marriages are contracted through different methods. Within the process of contracting the marriage, nature and spirits play a dominant role at different levels. The interaction is observed through the maintenance of social and spiritual discipline, brought through the marriage regulations. The rules and regulations of the marriage contribute for the socio-political, as well as the religious cohesion through a great degree of interaction between the members. Everybody believes that all these interactions are always under the watchful eye of the supernatural, the god (local deities), and ancestral spirits (*guru karanavanmar*), who will take offence as soon as the normative code of conduct is broken, and inflict supernatural punishment. Such involvements of the spirit-supernatural, at the level of the social order have been responsible in stabilizing the society and maintaining its traditions.

As soon as a woman comes to know that she is conceived, she observes certain taboos, which are based on some superstitions. She is not allowed to visit the burial ground, or to come out during evening and night because, the inborn may be harmed by the evil spirits, who would be wandering at such places, and during the late evening. It is believed that pregnant woman should keep an iron or, bamboo piece during thunder and lightening to avoid any harm to the inborn. She also uses sacred threads, *uruku* or *thakidu* to avoid evil eye. Some times, the people perform *kenthronpattu, ennamanthram, thachumantram, pulluvan pattu, and kalathilariyum pattum* to expel evil eye or, other bad things from both the pregnant woman and the child in the womb. At the time of delivery, the local midwife, traditionally the females of Malayan, Mali use few magic and medicine to ease the labour pains and safe delivery.
The children grow freely, and without any inhibition. When they attain the stage of adolescence, sexual awareness develops. At this stage, her elders take care of the girl. Thereafter, the girl has to live and behave according to the norms of the society. There is no approval for pre-marital, as well as extra-marital sex relations, but in practice, these relations exist unhindered in the society. The society considers extra-marital sex relations very seriously, and gives penalty to the offenders.

There is a common belief prevalent among the people that diseases, ailments and death are due to evil spirits or, due to the wrath of deities. But at the same time, the society recognizes the natural death. The death causes pollution. The relative of the deceased person, take ritual bath (purificatory bath) on a fixed day, *thelikal*, and symbolically *balichoru* (food) is given to the dead soul. Afterwards, every year a ritual *chatham* is observed in which they call back the deceased soul, and arrange a ritual feast to the soul. Moreover, they also arrange feast to the deceased soul in four *karuthavavu* or *amavasi* (new moon day) every year.

The belief of the people is that supernatural powers wield profound influence on their lives and, by controlling and directing their day-to-day affairs. They believe that misfortunes, ailments, accidents, diseases, unnatural death, abortion and failure in hunting, gathering, fishing and cultivation or, other socio-economic pursuits are due to some evil spirits or, wrath of the deities. They consider these supernatural powers to be either benevolent or, malevolent. The malevolent spirits cause harm and trouble. These are several in numbers. For example, *mari* (an evil spirit) is responsible for many misfortunes such as, disease, poverty, and low yield. According to the information gathered from the locale people, *mari* is able to spread serious epidemic like, small pox, fever, jaundice etc. The local
deity *Gulikan* is sometimes responsible for fever, temperature and unnatural falls from trees or other objects that lead to fracture. *Karukalaki* and *pillathini* (two evil spirits) harm the foetus and its influence, cause abortion. The people also consider *kooli*, *pretham*, *yekshi*, and other similar souls of unnatural deaths cause evil acts or, disaster.

Benevolent powers are regarded as being useful and kind. The people seek their assistance for welfare, fortune and prosperity in every walk of life. It is believed the worship of deity, *Vishnumurthi*, brings prosperity and fortune, and success in hunting and battle. The *varavili* and *tottampattu* of this *teyyam* expresses its ability:

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Varika venam vishnumurthiyakum paradevathe
anghatinum, padakum, kuttathinum, kurikum, nayyattu
vetakum, narivilikum, aghampadikum, swaroopathinum
munnayudham cholli valathu kayal seshippettu nirupicha
karyangale sadhichukoduppan azhunnalli varikavennam
vishnumurthiyakum paredevatha.
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*(Varavili of Vishnumurthi teyyam)*

The informants told me that the same deity also protects the people in all calamities, especially during the outbreak of epidemic like, small pox. In similar occasions, the people observe and worship their 'protector', *Vishnumurthi*. According to the local tradition, the performance of *Ottakolam* (different form of *Vishnumurthi*) or *Paradevatha* (*Vishnumurthi*), along with a special ritual *marimatal* is considered the only way to drive away the evil spirit such as, *mari*. In the past, *Pottan teyyam* is performed before the sowing of *punam krishi* (shifting cultivation). This is due to the common belief that the performance pleases the deity that leads to a good yield, and gives protection to the field from the destruction of animals or any other disaster.
The people are always conscious to keep the ancestor spirits pleased and favorable by suitable offerings, and sacrifices on several occasions. Otherwise, they know any negligence in the worship may lead to a great danger. Moreover, the people perform certain rituals with suitable offerings to appease the supernaturals to get their favour, and try to please them to attain success at the time of every new activity, in social, economic or, any other field.

The forgoing study of man, nature and spirits of North Malabar clearly tells us that on a number of occasions, humans interact, on one hand with nature, and on the other, with spirits. The sacred performance needs ritual functionaries, who do various performances, and who are considered as, ‘sacred specialists’. The ritual process of contacting and offering in a particular manner has been formulated in respect to each deity or, spirit. Collectively the worship, performance, and offering exercise a complex situation that needed a middleman. The people successfully surmounted operational difficulties of approachability, by assigning certain persons the task of establishing liaison with the spirit through their divine teyyam performance. It may be observed that the life of a person in North Malabar has been traditionally dependent upon the forest for subsistence, developed a belief system in harmony with their ecological settings.

Taken as a whole, all aspects of life and culture reflect in adequate measure the interdependence of man, nature and spirits on one another. Thus ‘Nature-Man-Spirit Complex’, the ‘Sacred Complex’, gets prominently reflected in the life and culture of North Malabar. Here, in the ‘Nature-Man-Spirit Complex’, teyyam plays a dominant role, since, the people believe and worship the supernatural power in the form of teyyam, and its divine performance. Thus, however, the study of the supernatural world, teyyam and its performance, not
only reflects the interaction of man with the spirit, but also shows the interaction of man with nature. This fact gets substantiated when the deities associated with their forest-based, agriculture nourished economic life. The economic system creates specific situations when the people need help and interference of spirits. The forest, hills and sacred grove, kavu are believed to be the abode of spirits and deities, and their sacred performance need certain fruits, nuts, leaves, pulses, flowers etc., which are locally available in plenty. At present, there is evidence to prove that the ‘Sacred Complex’, teyyam and its performance, wields a profound influence in regulating ‘man-nature’ and ‘man-spirit’ relationships. It has been exposed to certain modern forces of change and innovation, which in turn have affected the working of the traditional ‘Sacred Complex’, in the life and culture, and weakened their interrelations, as discussed later in this thesis. But at the same time, on the contrary, teyyam performance also exhibits a high degree of flexibility and dynamism, which gives it an extraordinary capacity to ‘readjust’ with the modern change and get ‘modified’ to cope with day-to-day life situations, the adaptability.

**Symbols in Teyyam**

As a magico-religious performance, teyyam conveys many symbols through its myth and rituals. Whitehead says,

> Symbols and signs are the language of all civilizations. One cannot think without symbols. (cit. Mahapatra 1985)

The same is true even with teyyam. These symbols are sufficient to express the religious feelings and experiences through myths, rituals, and performances.
Teyyam uses symbols in plenty. The symbol in teyyam is the medium to express the mixing of the old cultural values and their present life in the feelings and experience of the people. According to Fawcett,

Symbols are not created but born out of life. They do not come into being as result of man's creative imagination. The symbols of darkness, light and water for example were given to man with his existence in the world. Symbols appear to be built into man's experience. As such man's symbol making capacity is universal and certain symbols too are universal. (cit. Pallath 1995:12)

In teyyam we obseve such a universal nature of symbolism. The people of North Malabar worship their deities symbolically through teyyam performance. Each teyyam represents their respective deity. The mudi (the headgear), facial decoration, body decoration, weapons, offering and sacrifice, and the whole performance of teyyam express symbolic meanings. Usually, the mudi produces an image which is huge and which can therefore show the sense of the divine. Some of the teyyam mudi reflect certain aspects of myth. For example, the long and huge keel-shaped headgear of Kolaswaroopathil thayi has been inspired to remember that she reached North Malabar by ship. The multi-fold, and peculiarly designed headgear of Vayanattu Kulavan symbolically reminds the people of its myth. In general, the headgears and head decorations have been used for exaggeration. Thalapali, the most important aniyalam (attire) comprises of 21 pieces of specially designed silver or, bronze, which represent the forefathers of Malayan.

The facial drawing, mughathezhuthu, contains many symbols. They are mostly borrowed from the features of animals, flowers, etc. The names of facial drawings themselves reveal the nature and shape of
the design. *Kozhipushpam*, a kind of drawing reveals *kozhi* (fowl), and *pushpam* (flower). *Sangum valum* means shell, and tail. *Kurangirutham* indicates the manner in which a *kurangu* (monkey) sits. Facial decoration includes *poikannu* (pseudo eye), *meesa* (moustache), *thadi* (beard) and *egiru* (fang or, tusk). Pseudo eyes are used to increase the frightfulness of *teyyam*. In the case of *Vayanattu Kulavan*, and *Muchilottu Bagavathi*, according to the myth of both *teyyams*, pseudo eyes are used in place of natural eyes, because of the supposed damage of natural eyes. White and black moustaches and beards are used to indicate the age. *Egiru* is the symbol of fang that is used to give dreadfulness and fancy.

The body decoration also communicates certain meanings. The artificial bosoms symbolically represent the feminine character of particular *teyyam*. In some cases, the make-up on chest and abdomen reveals their myth. For example, the body markings of *Karimkuttichathan* represent the scars of bruise that it had received from the beating of his master. *Teyyams* like *Pulikandan*, *Pulimaruthan*, and *Puliyorukannan* use *unnam* (raw cotton) pasted on the body that indicates its animal relation. *Pulurkali* and also *Pullikaringali* use body markings that also indicate the spots of leopards. In the case of *Kandanar Kelan*, the performer paints two winding serpents on the abdomen and chest, which are mentioned in the *tōttam pāttu*. The *teyyam* of *Vishnumūrthi*, *Bali* and *Puliteyyams*, wear silver nails, according to their nature and form.

At the time of performance, *teyyam* handles many types of weapons. This act is of great importance. The importance is assumed because of a common belief that the deities are living through the sign (the sign system of weapons) of the respective weapon. Each weapon, in this sense, conveys the presence of a deity. The devotees find the weapons as the symbol of protection and security.
The important items of offering are coconut, rice and toddy. The offerings such as, coconut, rice, fried paddy, flakes of rice, paddy, ripe banana, betel leaves and ripe areca nut represent the significance of a predominant agrarian life of the past. The offering of toddy reminds the ‘primitive’ culture. Giving cash to teyyam tells something about the money economy. It also reflects the conventional practice, ‘to pay for everything’. Kuri kodukal (giving prasadam) shows the pleasing of god over the devotees, who believe that their desires will be fulfilled soon.

Fowl sacrifice is inevitable. The age-old concept of blood oblation to the god is for pleasing the deity, and to receive blessing. This kind of blood sacrifice is also pointing towards the human sacrifice. This confirms the presence of Thenga Kallu (similar to a sacrificial stone, nowadays this is used to break coconut during the performance). It is situated in front of the sacred centre. The human sacrifice was practised because the ‘primitive’ man thought that the ‘noblest sacrifice’ would surely make their deity happier.

Fire, lamp, and water are also symbolic. Whenever an auspicious occasion arises in the field of teyyam performance, people use a lighted oil lamp. According to the importance the lamp, it symbolizes the clear mind of the deities. It also reflects the clean mind of the devotees. Fire has its importance throughout the history of teyyam performance. Rituals like melerikaikolal, meleri châttam, and theechavittal are associated with respective teyyams. Madayilchâmundi and Kundora Châmundi use chuttu (lighted coconut-leaf torch) while dancing. The teyyam Kandakaman uses fire sticks all over its long headgear and around waist. Pottan teyyam and Ottakólam jumps into meleri (heap of fire) several times. Almost all teyyams kick fire during urachil (possession). All the above said rituals and practices show that the use of fire is essential in teyyam
performance. So the importance of fire in *teyyam* performance indicates its close relationship with human culture. The fire is used for the preparation of food and also for protection. Basically mastery over fire is considered as super human and divine. Hence, the performers are trying to handle fire while performing.

Water is also very essential during *teyyam* performance. It has a purificatory function. The sacred centre is purified with water before the commencement of the performance. The performers take a bath or, wash face, legs, and hands before the performance. Water is offered in a *kindi*, a small bronze vessel with a snout on its side. Usually it is used for washing the hands and legs of the performer during the performance. In *teyyam* performance, water symbolizes purity that expels pollution.

The whole performance is rich in symbols. The manifestation and expression of belief (animism, animatism and nature worship), the economic progress of life from that of a gathering community to that of the settled, the cultural evolution from the 'primitive' to the modernized, and the assimilation of these aspects by Hinduism highlights every side of the development of *teyyam* performance. We can acknowledge many symbols even in a slight movement of *teyyam*.

**Assimilation by Hinduism**

*Teyyam* is 'primitive' in origin and pre-Dravidian in nature. Still it became their religion, life and science. The people worshipped their local deities through the image of *teyyam*. In the course of time, this old belief system had undergone many socio-cultural changes. Among them the important one is the invasion of the Aryans that brought Hinduism into this region. In the light of a 'suitable' and 'proper' understanding of the pulse of the local people, *teyyam*
performance was absorbed into the Hindu tradition without any basic change. The teyyam has been ‘Sanskritised’ one-way or other. As a matter of fact, the assimilation made easy the introduction of tantrik rights into teyyam. With the support of religious power over the subdued, segmented society, the Brahmans placed themselves in between deities and teyyam. With this significant change, the Brahmans controlled the performance, as a super performer. They formulated new rules and regulations. According to this trend, the unsettled, wandering deities were forcefully installed in fixed places by the act of what is called, prathishta. Formerly, teyyam was roaming everywhere. Certain trees, groves, forests etc., were considered as the ideal places for them. The people worshipped their deities in these ideal centres. But later on, especially after the introduction of prathishta thantram, these sacred centres had been automatically transformed into holy chambers called, palliyara, looking similar to that of small Sanskritic temple. The super imposition of myth and the deconstruction of myth and rituals occur in the performance. Vishnumūrthi displays two myths: one draws a sympathetic life story of one Palenthayi Kannan, who met with a tragic end under feudal power. The legendary myth of Lord Vishnu’s incarnation, Narasimham, is super imposed over the first one. According to the common belief, Gulikan teyyam is considered as the local god of death. But after “Hinduisation” the myth of Gulikan was identified as the myth of Kalan, the Hindu god of death. All the female teyyams are redefined and worshipped as different incarnations of Parvathi. In short, from what has been stated so far it is clear that there is an increasing tendency to seek teyyam in the light of the Hindu belief system. It does not matter whether a teyyam has its own independent legend and myth.
The Upper Castes and the Teyyam

All the Hindu castes of North Malabar worship teyyam. The villagers are divided into segments by caste. The whole function of teyyam performance is controlled by the upper castes. They hold all the key positions in the organization level. The low caste performer only performs teyyam according to the rules and norms framed by the upper caste. The local ruler, nāduvazhi or tampuran was considered as the supreme authority. Under him the tantrī (priest) played a significant role by giving orders to the performance. He can either introduce a new ritual or change an earlier one. Through this, nowadays, the tantrī catches the supreme position over teyyam performance and control it.

Table: III.6 Hierarchy of Teyyam Officials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Varna / Caste</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nāduvazhi</td>
<td>Kshatriya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tantri</td>
<td>Brahmin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Köyma</td>
<td>Poduval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uralanmar</td>
<td>Nair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrant/s</td>
<td>Caste/s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalesakaran</td>
<td>Tiyya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performer</td>
<td>Low caste/s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Köyma (representative of the ruler) is placed below tantrī, who looks after the rules and regulations framed by the tantrī with the help of uralanmar (village council). The celebrant makes necessary arrangements and the performer performs teyyam.

Among the celebrants, there are specialists. Velichappadu/komaram, anthithiriyān, thathyakkaran, notirikunon, valyakar, achan, kuttai, kayatukar etc., are to perform certain
duties. The velichapadu or komaram is the oracle, who has to perform rituals on important occasions. The oracle of the communities like Tiyya, Kollan, Asari and Musari are known as velichappadan. And of Vaniya and Maniyani are called komaram. Customarily an oracle is present only in big centers. All teyyams do not have oracles but, only a few important deities have oracles. Anthithiriyan is the man who lights the lamp at the sacred place on every evening. This official of Thiyya caste is thathyakaran, who also hold thatika (holy umbrella), during celebrations. At the time of celebrations only notirikkunnon (one who observes abstinence) is allowed to enter inside the sanctum. He gives the kodeela and weapons to the performer. During the performance, he also arranges the offerings inside the sanctum. In big celebrations the anthithiriyan has this right. The selected eldest persons are called achchanmar. They give pieces of advice whenever the celebrants need during the celebration. The Nairs and Thiyas appoint achchanmar in their sacred centres. Kuttayi is a special group of persons (two to nine), who collect the kalvara (yearly share of families towards their sacred centre). Only Thiya caste has kuttayi. The custom of having kuttayi is related to the worship of Vishnumûrthi. A group of selected young ones, Valiyakar, assist the officials as, volunteers in sacred centres. Some sacred centres of Thiya caste of northern side select a few persons as, kolkar or koyatukar. They are appointed to protect the paddy fields from the cattle.

Another important teyyam official is the performer. The execution of teyyam is a group's effort. As per their skill and aptitude, each performer has to concentrate on different sphere such as, teyyam kettal, tottam pattu, aniyarapani, and vadyam. These specialists among the performers include kolakaran, aniyarapanikaran, and vadyakaran. One who performs and disguises into teyyam is called teyyakaran, kolakaran or koladhari. One who prepares the attires of
teyyam is called aniyarapanikaran (green room expert). The vadyakaran is an expert in drumming. And all performers spell the chant, tottam pattu.

Kalesakaran is unavoidable. By heredity a member of the Tiyya community is appointed as kalesakaran in a particular locality. He brings enough tender coconut leaves, leaf torch and liquor. Like the other officials of teyyam celebrators the kalesakaran is also present throughout the performance.

The caste known as, Kanniyan has an important role. He is serving as a traditional astrologer and umbrella maker. The females of Vanathan served as the washerwoman to the upper caste celebrants. The female of Vannan, Vannathi, extends her service as a washerwoman to Thiyya during celebrations. The Kolan also gives his service by polishing the weapons of teyyam in the sacred center. In short, each and every caste of this area is linked directly or, indirectly with teyyam celebration.

Continuum

Although teyyam is binding together the members of the society in a feeling of belonging and co-operation, it also plays an important role in the cultural life of North Malabar. The myth, rituals and the whole performance itself show some glimpses of the past histories of man and his socio-cultural activities such as, practice of hunting-gathering, nomadism, pastoralism, and agriculture. The perpetuation of old tradition, social etiquette through teyyam performance bridges the gulf between the past and the present, and maintains a cultural continuity of this region between rural and urban areas. The sacred centres of teyyam function as a linking agent that binds the performance, the society and its culture. Teyyam, with its own
characteristics and functions, pursues the local traditions in the face of the fast changing social life. As Kishore Jadav says,

It is not entertainment or of particular aesthetic interest, but is accompaniment to other activities... Though rural in nature, it exists in cultures in which there is technically more sophisticated musical traditions and it is perpetuated and venerated as a spontaneous creation by ethnic, occupational or religious minorities. (1998:10)

**Income and Expenditure**

In the past, families, *taravādu*, clan or communities mostly observed *teyyam* celebration. They did not take any interest to raise income from *teyyam* performance. They celebrated *teyyam* as part of worship and religion. In the course of time, in tune with the increase in expenditure, this system of celebration faced financial problems. To solve the problem, the people began to hand over their responsibility to newly formed public committees. The changed social set up, and the demand for social equality also have strengthened this trend. They gathered income and other materials necessary for the celebration by mass collection of donations that generates the income surplus. The expenditure has also increased. At present, the small centres spend only a few thousands for celebrations, but in the eve of big celebrations such as, *perumkaliyāttam*, lakhs of rupees are spent for a single celebration.

**Threat, Exploitation and Future**

We are in the dawn of a millennium. Since his origin, man has been experiencing and has experimented a lot. The experiences from which he has learned through generations, it is so claimed, ‘civilized’ him from the stages of ‘savagery’ and ‘barbarism’. Throughout the
line of evolution he had faced many hazards and difficult situations in life. It can be seen that these tendencies are prevalent in our society. Therefore, teyyam is not an abuse; it can still face and encounter many a threat and unscrupulous exploitations. The increasing influence of 'Brahmanism' i.e., tantric influence over teyyam, is to be considered as the most dangerous of all exploitations. Ever since the beginning of Hindu assimilation of teyyam, the Brahmins wanted to bring teyyam under their supervision. Naturally, the Dravidian customs and rituals, related to teyyam did not allow any interference, and instead, provided a resistance. But recently, the society has become more and more 'Hinduised', and has loosened the watertight compartments of Dravidian rituals. This slowly leads to a total surrender that gives the brahminical customs an opportunity to impose new tantric rites that are to be ritualized in the field of teyyam. Thus, the 'high' castes have got complete control over performance. Nowadays, the tantris will decide the item and the kinds of offering for teyyam. The people give toddy as a usual offering. Some teyyams like, Pottan, Muthappan and Vayanattu Kulavan must be offered toddy as an inevitable and essential commodity. Some of the tantris, of course, did not allow toddy to be offered to teyyam. This kind of imposition of power from the 'upper' castes has been disturbing the viability of teyyam. Through this active move they have been able to impel the society to accept their tantric rituals. It could ultimately produce an unavoidable series of processes to be mastered by the 'upper' caste people. As a result, the people attempted to 'imprison' the freely roving and unsettled teyyam deities by the act of prathishta (fix in a spot).

As a matter of fact, people accept teyyam as an inevitable and indispensable element of life. Understanding this influential significance of teyyam, the 'high' caste people make use of it to fulfil
their vested interests. They know well the fact that acquiring the control over teyyam will directly give them the power of social control. The performers are often directed to be obedient to the old customs and rituals related to teyyam.

Avoiding shirt, or cloth above waist is treated as an important feature. A teyyam performer is expected to be seen only without shirt wherever he goes. It has almost become a very commonplace expectation that has given currency by the ‘upper’ caste norms. The latter have the political intention of maintaining the performer as looking always ‘not-yet, not-quite’. Moreover, there has been constant protest against the inter-caste marriages of the performers. If this community involves in inter-caste marriages, they cannot be socially maintained as an isolable caste, and can no longer be brought under control. Any group can be controlled only if its limits and boundaries are defined clearly. This applies to the community of teyyam performer, also as far as the dominant norms are concerned. Hence, the society protests against inter-caste marriages. It will eliminate all possible dissents, ranging from the major to the minutest ones, from the side of the performer.

When we turn to think of the future of teyyam, we can see, surprisingly, that it has a bright future. What teyyam did before is still done by it. Although its magico-religious significance is fading, the capability of bringing social solidarity, integration, and harmony among people induces a new dimension to this traditional performance. The living attitude of the people to festivals and celebrations has been accelerating the intensity of performance in this area. With this trend teyyam can enjoy a renaissance. The establishment and reconstruction of sacred centres confirm the future of teyyam. Today, the socio-cultural set up of North Malabar is not favourable for teyyam performance when compared to that of
the old days. As said earlier magico-religious significance of *teyyam* emerges not due to the advancement of education, science and technology. But surprisingly, the increasing frequency of *teyyam* performance, and the emergence of new sacred centres reveal a different reason. Nowadays, its attributed artistic value increases its divinity. Now the artistic skill and beauty seen in the facial writings, costumes and wearing, dance, music and *tōttam pāttu* of *teyyam*, is appreciated as part of aesthetic enjoyment. In the past, the devotees did not give any importance to the sphere of art; they only trained or channelled to look *teyyam* only through 'magico-religious eyes'. This change in the level of appreciation of the people turned the attention from 'institutionalised performance' to 'useful art', and made the people as 'audience', rather than 'devotees'. This is a kind of 'artistic adaptation', by which I mean, that in this changed society, due to the forces of science and technology, *teyyam* has become an institutionalized performance, and it automatically readjusts, accordingly.

According to Brown, an institution has:

> Established norms of conduct of a particular form of social life it is usual to refer to as *institutions*. An institution is an established norm of conduct organised as such by a distinguishable social group or class of which therefore it is an institution. (1952:10)

The shift from 'traditional institutionalised performance', to 'ritual-useful art' has increased the establishment of more sacred centres and the frequency of performance. The political set up of this area is also playing an important role in protecting the performance. Pallath says that another important trend noticed in the *teyyam* ritual is the over-influence of politics (1995:90). The Communist Party is dominant here. Most important agrarian and social revolts, and
rebellions of Kerala had taken place in this area. The impact of these ‘legendary’ movements has brought faith in socialism in the minds of millions. The Congress and the Communist parties led the battle against social discriminations like untouchability and the evils like poverty. The Communist Party of India-Marxist, CPI (M) has been more successful in the grass root activities by virtue of its well-built party set up. Recently, we can notice changes in this political set up. The attempts of the Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP) and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) functionaries to increase their popularity and power in this region have led to rigorous controversies between them and the CPI (M). Under the banner of the ‘Hindutva’, both BJP and RSS, induces their agenda on the sacred centers, teyyam performing centres in particular. As a result of this, they force the people to strictly observe the rituals as before. In reality, this was a conscious move by the BJP, and the RSS to impose the Hindu cultural revivalism that is very essential for their survival and future. The protest from the CPI (M) is directed strongly against this trend. According to them, this kind of a back-walk is not favourable and totally unwanted. The revivalism will harm our present progress.

Meanwhile the conflict is still going on. As a result of this struggle, formerly both the CPI (M), and the BJP and RSS showed great interest in teyyam performance. By playing the Hindutva and nationalist cards the BJP-RSS movement hopes that channalising the thinking and activities of the society in accordance with the worn out elements of the past culture will help them to improve their popularity. While protesting the agenda of the communal and allied forces, the CPI (M) also has encouraged teyyam performance and denied the renaissance motion on the other hand. In this context, what I wish to state is that the political struggle for mastery between the CPI (M), and the BJP and RSS favours teyyam performance, extensively.
Although the future of teyyam has become splendid, it is also experiencing exploitation. The mass media play a vital role in exploiting teyyam, particularly the visual media like TV and the cinema. Teyyam is exploited cleverly in all the modes of popular interactions. As a matter of fact, the symbols of teyyam appear in advertisements, drama, dance, and TV serials, and even in cinema. Recently, a box-office hit in Malayalam, Kaliyāttam, has given one of the best examples. The symbols of teyyam are also used in public processions and public rallies. The Marxist party in particular uses extensively the symbols of teyyam for their public processions. According to Pallath,

For the Cannanore distric convention of the Marxist party, the main gate was designed in the form of the two head-gears of the thekken gulikan. Marxist party and Sastra Sahity Parishad make copious use of the teyyam symbols.

(1995: 90)

Further, the colour red, symbolically represents revolution and struggle. So, the extensive use of red colour in teyyam performance creates a positive attitude towards revolution and struggle in the unconscious minds of the people. The Marxists, especially, the people of the CPI (M) have traditionally taken ‘red’, as their symbol that is very much effective in attracting the people of this area.

Is it an Art?

Notwithstanding its socio-cultural significance, many a people simply say that teyyam is an artistic formation. It is only a wrong view of reality. It is true only in a narrow sense. We can say that man himself is an artistic creation hence, teyyam can also be taken as an artistic form. But it is not the whole thing about teyyam. It can be regarded as having artistic and aesthetic qualities. As a
phenomenon, it is more to do with life. In reality, it is much more than what art is. That is, *teyyam* tells about the most important aspects of human life.

With reference to the people of North Malabar we can say, that they are not given any attention to the aesthetic beauty of *teyyam* but obviously, belief in its divine power, and to see the symbolic representations of their respective deities. A serious and truthful analysis surely clear this doubt and reveals the fact that *teyyam* is not an ‘art’ but, an ‘institution’. It is an institution as similar to any other social institutions like marriage, family, religion and politics. It is true that, *teyyam* possess rich aesthetic and artistic value. Even if the customs and rituals of the Hindu marriage-particularly those like the wearing of garland between the couples, the marriage songs, and the prosperous feast-are of high artistic touch, nobody will state that it is an art or lore. Nowadays, the ‘folklorists’ have an unfair haste to call ‘any incident’ as ‘folklore’ without any reasonable ground behind it. They blindly go after anything to place under their subject. In this manner, they will not hesitate to call in future a ‘hereditary disease’ of some members of a family a ‘folklore’. In their line of thinking, *teyyam* is consciously and purposefully misplaced under folklore. More than an art or lore, *teyyam* is an organised system, which has multiple functions.

Brown explains about organisation as follows:

> The concept is clearly closely related to the concept of social structure, but it is desirable not to treat the two terms as synonymous. A convenient use, which does not depart from common usage in English, is to define social structure as an arrangement of in institutionally controlled or defined relationships...and to use organisation as referring to an arrangement of activities. (1964: 11)
His comments on a system, on the basis of the view of Montesquieu is worth quoting here:

The theory of Montesquieu, however, is what we may call a theory of a social system, according to which all the features of social life are united into a coherent whole... It gives us reason to think that we can advance our understanding of human societies if we systematically the interconnections amongst features of social life.

(Brown 1964:6)

This is also true with teyyam, which is neither a private property nor an asset of any folk. It is the common wealth of this region. Beyond that, it is a well-established system of behaviour and activities. Therefore, we can say, it is an 'organisation'.

Further, since emergence, teyyam has considered as the heart of North Malabar's belief-system. We already had seen that it has systems of belief, and systems of relationship and action. Its soul has cemented in belief and has working on specific rules, values, norms, and manners similar to a well-established 'social organisation'. It naturally reveals the relationship between nature and culture, 'nature-man-spirit interaction'. Hence, we can say teyyam as 'the religion of North Malabar, a belief in intangible-mysterious powers in certain 'nature-objects' and 'dead-souls', that controls every actions of man'.
Photo: III.1 A Few from the Annteyyangal

Pottan teyyam

Vishnumurthi

Ottakolam

Bairanvan

Kandakarnan

Pookuttychathan

Gulikan

Karimkuttichathan
Photo: III. 2 Female Teyyams of Malayan

“What a colour combination..?” Rakthachamundi and Madayilchamundi

“More Chanting than the Nature..!” Uchitta Teyyam
Photo III.3 Sacred Centres of Teyyam

A Tree Centre

“A Pallyara” - Holly Chamber

Teyyam and Devotees in a Kavu-Sacred Centre
Photo III.4 Few patterns of Facial-drawings:
*Mughathezhuthu*

- Kozhipuvu
- Kunnidhalam
- Kuttishangu
- Teppu
Photo: III.5 Teyyams and Head-Gears

Kandakarnan
Bairavan
Pookuttichathan

Rakthachamundi
Karrinkuttichathan

Karrinkuttichathan
Photo: III. 6 Teyyams with Masks

Pottan teyyam with Mughapala

Vishnumurthi with Moghompidi

Gulikan with Mughapala

Madayilchamundi with Moghompidi
Photo III.7  *Teyyam & Tottams with Weapons*
Photo III.8  Tottam & Vellattam

Tottam of Vishnumurthi

Tottams: Madayilchamundi & Vishnumurthi  Vellattam of Kandakaran
"Meleri...touching the sky..?"
The Heap of Fire

Pottan teyyam Dancing with Leaf-torches

"Oh..! Terific..!!" Kandakarnan Teyyam with Fire-Sticks
Photo III.10  *Teyyam* Shapes in *Anniyara*

“How much time it takes..?”  
*Painting on Face*

Performer with  
*Mughathezhuthu*

“Oh..! Tired..!!”  
*Performers taking rest*

“Take care..!”  
*Performer wearing Dress*

The Researcher before a  
*Performance*

“Just a Minute..! We are ready..!!”
Photo III.11 Two Shots from Teyyam Centres

"Music of Chenda". A Team of Drummers

"Waiting for..." Devotees and Drummers