IV

When a Ritual Enters the Market
Introduction

This chapter tries to trace the nature of transformation of ritual practices in Kerala, especially on the transformation of a ritual dance form, the Theyyam, into a marketable aesthetic performance. We have already mentioned the changes that came into being in its sacred spaces. The perception of the patrons and the dancers have also changed according to the political economic changes. Thus, spatiality, sociality and the subjectivity of the patrons as well as the dancers has also altered. Unlike in the past where Theyyam was enacted under a family's patronage, there is an increasing frequency of Theyyam organised jointly by local people. Now Theyyam could be a figment in the Republic Day Parade in New Delhi jostling with Punjabi Bhangda, an exotica in the Olympics opening grand display besides the Brazilian samba, a ticketed half-hour show accessible to the European tourist at Cochin, or available in a compact disc or in television channel for private viewing in the drawing room. What are the socio-economic processes and what is its nature when Theyyam enters the market are the principal concerns I try to discuss in this chapter.

These transformation or shifting spaces and economies happens slowly. Theyyam has encountered many social processes, discussions and debates that centered on whether it should go out of its traditional spaces. Different ideologies has merged in this debate. In order to put an expounding understanding of the process of its entries in the domain of market, this chapter is
divided into three parts. First part delineate the processes and facts related to the question of changes within the traditional space of Theyyam, explaining the case of Mandamullathil kaavu. The social process that led to the shifting spaces of the ritual has been discussed by looking into the micro politics centered around the kaavu. Second part of the chapter explains how the Theyyam appear in Culture Industry as part of tourism product and bring forth associated tensions and complexities that dancers of Theyyam encounters while engaging with these altered spaces. How market structures are organized and connected to make possible these traditional forms as a performative genre are also a central part of the discussion. Third part narrates an event of Theyyam festival conducted at Thiruvananthapuram as part of Grand Kerala Shopping Festival in 2011. This narrative is constructed through the method of ethnography and participant-observation. Subtilities of participating in a Theyyam festival as a researcher and the practitioner of the Theyyam, though in a different spaces, it unearth situations of mixing mentalities and subjectivities that interfaces between the researcher's subjectivity as an ethnographer and in the process of doing ethnography, the researcher slowly become part of the event in place and slip to the position of an active and complete member of the study group. The state of these conditions should be probed more meticulously as a question of methodology, which is, of course, not a prime concern of this chapter. Thus, varied socio-cultural processes and its changes has been narrated in the perspective of political economy that meet with anthropology of ritual.
Part I

From Ritual to Theatre
Understanding Shifting Spaces of Theyyam

The changes that are manifest in the Theyyam are signs which are the markers of social and cultural changes. The changes do not happen solely to the Theyyam. Social, cultural, economic and political changes or transitions reflect on the Theyyam too. For that reason let us view it through the lens of the Theyyam. Theyyam in this framework then becomes not just the form, but embraces the total spatiality in which the Theyyam is positioned. The form, size and the appearance of the *kaavu* itself has undergone changes, a kind of spatial change. This is evident in the *Mandamullathil kaavu* too. Thus, a time-space aspect is important to explain the phenomena of spatial changes as it is historically conditioned.

In the 1940s a large majority of the *kaavus* used dry grass or woven coconut fronds for its roofing. Only very few of the *palliyaras* of the higher castes had tiled roofs. This was in keeping with the financial standing of the *tharavadu* and the prevalent practice of the time. To elaborate on the point, no one from the lower castes like the *Malayan* or *Thiyyan* enjoyed the right to install an iconic image to propitiate their gods without the permission of the higher caste superiors. Similarly, the feudal lords enjoyed the authority and privilege to pronounce them *ooruvilaku*, preventing services to them by other castes as well as preventing themselves to do their service, an action

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1 Though the spatial changes are very marginal in this context, unlike it happens in urban formations, this is significant as it is a traditional site of worship called *kaavu*. The concept of space has discussed and debated in human geography, a branch of knowledge which is viewed space as one that is socially produced. It gets meaning through human endeavour. Thus it forms a bundles of social-spatial relations. Lefebvre's conception of spatiality explains how space is socially produced as both symbolic and material space. See for the debates centred on the concept called space Henry Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell,1991). For a detailed discussion on the distinctions between place and space, see E.Hirch and M.O. Hahlan, *The Anthropology of Landscape: Perspectives on Place and Space* (Oxford:Clarendon, 1999).
that would cast a shadow on the very existence of the marginalized castes who then could face social ostracism which implied hardships, whose lives were closely knit with the traditional patron-client relations in an agrarian community. For this very reason, the material possession and access to resources had been contained and restricted. The stranglehold of the reigning feudal families (janmis) exerted their social power over the lower castes was excessively stifling.

The Mandamullathil kaavu palliyara had a roofing of dry grass. The home of the owner of the kaavu, who also lived in the vicinity had used the same for its roof. The area around the kaavu was an expansive uninhabited area. Frangipani, castor, jackfruit tree and a plantain grove.

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2 This is an institution in which patrons and clients are linked with social ties with purposes of satisfying certain services. It may be ritual, economic and other services. This is a social system under which the patrons as a group exercise a collective domination over clients as a group. Ritual services of Theyyam dancing castes to upper castes under the social and sacred map called Cherujannam could be considered as a kind of patron-client relation. According to this system each caste group within a specified region are expected to give certain traditional occupation to the families of other castes centered on the authority of a Tharavadu. It was Wiser, in a book entitled The Hindu Jajmani System, that first described in detail how these patron-client relations actually worked in Indian village. His emphasis was on the relationship between caste and economies. See William Henricks Wiser, The Hindu Jajmani System: A Socio-Economic System Interrelating Members of a Hindu Village Community in Services (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1936). This was followed by studies which gave evidence for such a system in many parts of India including parts of Malabar and Cochin. See Eric J Miller, "Village Structure"; Harold A Gould, "The Hindu Jajmani System: A Case of Economic Particularism," Journal of Anthropological Research 42, no.3 (1986): 269-278. Though these relations of castes were tied upon a village system in north Indian context, the north Malabar society was organised in a territory of authority of a janmi Tharavadu.

3 This was maintained through the austere social norms and habits of caste purity and impurity. The upper castes usually selected their dwelling places on a fertile valley or ravine which was covered by bright green fields of rice and trees in front of his compound. This is to prevent sights of others and to keep watch and ward against enemies. Each castes were treated and considered according to the graded inequality based on social rankings. In what manner the lower castes had to address themselves were controlled and norms were set in front of them. For instance, one's house is called differently according to the occupant's caste. The house of a Parayas, a lower caste is cheri, while agrestic slave Cherumans is chala. Thiyyas lives in a pura or kudi and Nairs reside in a veedu. The Raja lives in a kovilakam or kottaram and a Nambuthiri lives in an illam. Lower castes in their lowliness and self abasement, address the other even while talking that they live in dungheaps. See Logan, Malabar, Vol. I, Part I, 82-85. Caste restrictions and the violence was 'so rampant that an upper caste Nayar could cut down a lower caste man if the latter dared to appear on the road at the same time as he'. See this quote in Fawcett, The Nayars of Malabar, Vol. III (3), 264. Also see Menon, "The Moral Community", 209-217. To get a detailed discussion on caste and agrarian economy see Menon, Caste, Nationalism.1-39. To have a broader understanding of social history of Kerala with a focus on the economic conditions with respect to caste and its role in agrarian society, see T.C. Varghese, Agrarian Change and Economic Consequences: Land Tenure in Kerala 1850-1960 (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1970), 37-50. To get a picture of how service castes were socially embedded in the economy of north Malabar, also see M. Kabir, Growth of Service Sector in Kerala: A Comparative Study of Travancore and Malabar, 1901-1951, Unpublished PhD Dissertation (Thiruvananthapuram: Centre for Development Studies, 2002). Also see Rajesh Komath Social and Economic Mobility, 2003).
completed the picture of the ‘kaavu’ as it existed during my father’s youth, but this would make way for tiled roofs for the palliyara and the home in the 60s.

In the post-independence period too the ambient source of light was from the kolthiris flaming palm frond clusters and bronze oil lamps. In the warm glow created by the embers and leaping flames from the oil drenched kolthiris, when the Theyyam appeared it was an awesome, superhuman and otherworldly presence that the visage provided. With the arrival of petro-max lamps to light up the performing spaces the Theyyam appeared in the subdued haze of this new source of light. But, today, the situation has completely altered. By the year 1970 the ambiance of the Theyyam’s dancing or performing arena underwent sea-change with the arrival of electricity in our villages. The potential of the electric light to transform night into day altered the mood derived from the natural eco-friendly spaces that hitherto existed. The komaram who is the priest facilitating the Theyyam is now a subdued presence with the flaming torches in hand, now a mere appendage for the ritual. The palliyara and the makeshift greenroom of the Theyyam is now illuminated with multicoloured bulbs. In the past, the believer travelled the distance to the kaavus, taking the rough mud paths with its natural highs and lows, relying on hand held clusters of flaming palm fronds to have a glimpse of their ‘Gods’ in the kaavu, extinguishing the bunch of fronds which would be placed in a corner only to light up their path when they return home. This is no more the case in present times, the fronds have been replaced by sophisticated imported torches and mobile phones sourced from the Gulf countries where many of the locals are employed. Even the remotest villages now have few coming by foot, most drive in cars, ride their

4 It is made out of the steps of the coconut leaves which cut into small pieces. One point will be rounded with white cloth and put it in the coconut oil. Other point of the stick will be stamped on the laterite platform, thara and lit the wick.

5 Most of the Theyyams have its own komaram, a person who do mediating work for the Theyyam. As the Theyyam dance, he will also dance in trance. He also wear red cloths, anklets and hold arms in his hand. Some scholars argue that komaram is the proto-type of the Theyyam. See C.M.S.Chendera, Theyyathinde Aadi Roopam.
motorbikes or take an autorickshaw. The change is visible not only in the Theyyam and the kaavu, but the change is patent in the mindsets of the believer which necessarily reflects on the person who assumes the form of a Theyyam.

Since Theyyam is god-manifest it is but natural that the presence and action necessarily acquire a superhuman aura. The Theyyam’s movements and voice has to take on an exaggerated level because a simple raising of arms, a scream and the utterances will be closer to the human and less godlike. The Theyyam therefore resorts to a high decibel chant and invocation, orchestrating his voice and tenor at a much higher level—with a bloodcurdling quivering in the voice. The voice must rise higher a pitch higher than the voice of the believer who stands before him and be distinctive too. The immediate atmosphere of the kaavu has a major function in influencing and creating a ‘mood’ of veneration.

In 1950 Theyyam was not held for three years in Mandola. Conflicting opinions within the family regarding the need to continue a practice which did not have an independent source for funding the event had stalled the annual practice⁶. The family has spread into many branches. Each branch of the family has a right and responsibility over the management of the kaavu. And towards this, each segment sets aside a part of the income derived from paddy, coconut plantation and banana groves. The sustainability of such a system was possible because the affairs of the joint family were managed by the karanavar, who was the head of the family. The break up of the joint family system and the land reforms which threw the economic stability off balance, put paid to the contributions made towards the conducting the affairs of the kaavu. Once the land reforms came into effect a large number of landed gentry lost their rights over large

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⁶ This was explained by a senior member of the family in an interview, Gopalettan.10.2.2010.
tracts of land, and a large number of people from the Theyyam dancing communities distanced themselves from their traditional role. In addition, the communist movement which surfaced in the 1930s and acquired influence and power in the 60s-70s became yet another reason for waning faith in the Theyyam ritual. In this phase a large number of kaavus that discontinued practice grew rampant.

**Migration: Changing Spatiality of Kaavu**

The Theyyam which was a secular presence underwent a change in the form of kaavu and the nature of the conduction of the Theyyam festival. Certain kaavus transitioned into temples and ‘Non-Hindus not permitted inside’ began to appear on the exteriors. Such boards shattered the secular cultural legacy of the kaavu and the Theyyam worship. Without altering the structure of a kaavu such pronouncements achieve the transformation of the secular space into a marker for a particular religion. The shifting of the Theyyam from the cultural landscape of the common man and altering some to the status of the ‘Other’ is a manifestation of converting the kaavus as temples as a reflection of sanskritisation and saffronisation. A redeeming feature is that this labelling did not apply to all the kaavus but people were realized that entry to kaavus are not open to all, a realization which is so surfaced in the political context of the region.

*Mandamullathil kaavu* has witnessed lot of changes: at the entrance to the kaavu a large concrete box to receive offerings from devotees (*bhandaram*) has been placed, an arch at the entrance shows a name board “Sri Mandamullathil Kshetram”, and to the left of the entrance is a wedding hall built in concrete with marble flooring. What was once the cowshed is now a venue for

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marriages. Separate rooms for the bride and groom to deck up for the event have also build up. In the earlier chapter I had mentioned about separate rooms having been provided for the Theyyam dancers from different castes. The greenrooms were makeshift arrangements made with woven palm spathes which would be dismantled soon after the event. Those coming for the Theyyam had unrestricted entry and it was a free flowing crowd of believers who moved in and out. From a temporary space for donning costumes and facial make up to a permanent room with iron doors and large padlocks is a significant spatial change. These physical changes become symbols of the process of transformation of a kaavu into a temple. When I visited the place on 5 July 2010 as part of my fieldwork, I noticed the headgears of the Angakaran, Asuralanum makkalum being kept there for reuse.

The courtyard of the palliyara now has been paved with interlocking tiles. Further, provisions for better viewing have been made with convenient seating arrangements put in place, all cemented and clean. The kaavu has a boundary wall with tube lights installed along the wall. To the left, is a newly constructed well which has been covered with metal mesh. Each improvement of modernity has clearly been credited to the donor who has funded the structure, the name written large and readable from a major distance. Sometimes the donor has made this as an offering for favours received.

In the 1980s when members of this Thiyya tharavadu migrated to the Gulf countries and other centres on lucrative jobs, the kaavus also improved financially. Contributions started pouring in as a space to assert their social positions which was otherwise not possible in earlier times. The transfer of land from Nairs to Thiyyas has created an incentive to conduct their Theyyam festivals annually and revived some others in decay. Migration to gulf countries in 80’s also contributed materially in this process. Large number of men were

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8 The impact of socio-economic changes on the Thiyyas, especially after land reforms opened up a space for them to revive their kaavu. Certain kaavus came to their land as a consequences of transfer of land. This has made use of as a space to assert their social positions which was otherwise not possible in earlier times. The transfer of land from Nairs to Thiyyas has created an incentive to conduct their Theyyam festivals annually and revived some others in decay. Migration to gulf countries in 80’s also contributed materially in this process. Large number of men were
and it became a practice to offer food to those who came to the kaavu during the Theyyam. A large dining hall was built to cater to the large crowds. In 2012 the feast was sponsored by a member of the tharavadu who was now resident in Malaysia. Since he could not be in the village to witness and be part of the Theyyam, he arranged a videographer who would document every ritual processes that took place during the three days of Theyyam. For that reason there was a videographer who was going through the exercise of keeping pace with every happening in the kaavu during the Theyyam in 2012.

When I did the Theyyam in 1998 in the same kaavu, elders here had refused permission to a photographer to click pictures because ‘God must not be photographed’. God’s image would not register on the photograph they explained! Moreover, photographing the Theyyam would invite the wrath of the gods and do harm, they insisted. Even today there are kaavu owners who do not allow photographs to be taken. But, it is common occurrence to see a host of foreigners and locals who indulge in videography and photography at the Theyyam venues. The owners of the kaavu take a fee for granting permission to take photographs or videograph the event. It is not rare that kaavus permit the Theyyam dancer to pose for photographs. Since the photographs are paid for it becomes a duty to provide quality photographs which can only happen when the

migrated to UAE and Saudi Arabia. A case study of Palakunnu Kaavu owned by the Thiyyas substantiate this process and it enables them to work as an agency of sponsors to the Theyyam festival. It is quoted that "The Major Tiyya kazhakam of that area reportedly receives Rs. 10,000 per year from its branch in Dubai”. See Holloman and Ashley, "Caste and Cult", 101. This has created a consciousness among Thiyyas to organize themselves around the centres of their worship. The idea of asserting Thiyya identity through these religious festivities is an on going process for which Thiyya youths are organized under the leadership of Sree Narayana temples built by Guru in the towns as part of the socio-religious reform movement in 1900-30. For a historical background of the establishment of Thiyyas temples and the search for community. See Menon, Caste, Nationalism, 66-71. Ritual religious domain and its link to gulf migrant's strategic move to attain economic capital, prestige and status has also been observed in the social context of South Kerala. The case of kuthiyottam, a ritualistic representation of human ball (sacrifice), performed mostly in Devi temples are also become a site for gulf migrants to negotiate, and assert their social position. This has accelerated the on going process of commoditisation of ritual. See Filippo Osella and Caroline Osella, "Migration and the Commoditisation of Ritual: Sacrifice, Spectacle and Contestations in Kerala, India," Contributions to Indian Sociology 37, no.1 & 2, (2003):109-137.
Theyyam poses for it and not when the Theyyam is in action. There may be a few who don Theyyam that are averse to posing for pictures and I have personally witnessed owners insisting that the Theyyam poses with all the aggression that is associated with the form. When members of a tharavadu donate large sums toward the conduct of Theyyam it is less of devotion, but a manner of sending the message of his own improved economic standing within the family and let it be known beyond the household also. In many cases there is a churning of the traditional hierarchy that takes place and creation of social capital also is envisaged in the revivals that such kaavus undergo.

I got to see the Gulikan Theyyam of Mandola through the You-tube on the internet. The Theyyam performs under the glare of the tube-light. They are my close relatives, both the performing Theyyam and those accompanying on the drums. Till around the 1980s the Gulikan Theyyam would appear in the wee hours of the night when the appearance would be frightening. The Gulikan raised on stilts with a headgear 21ft high and donning a mask, set against the glow of the flaming palm fronds and leaping flames from flares, moving to the drumbeats creates a superhuman, arresting presence. In the changed ambiance, under the gaze of the tube-lights the form can be clearly seen and thus a lot of the aura that was earlier created has vanished.

The Theyyam’s spaces have also undergone change, the material state and spatiality of the kaavus have metamorphosed with time. Moving from the perimeter of the kaavu, the Theyyam now moves beyond the traditional boundaries. From the rooted sanctified spaces of the Theyyam when it shifts beyond the gridlock of the traditional worship arena it is aided and abetted by social discourses and the processes that emanate are triggered off, thus revealing how the Theyyam manifests itself in the social life of the people. Such social transactions have over the years,
historically bound the *kaavu* owners and the members of the performing castes and had its impact on the totality of the concept of Theyyam. A consequence of an evolving state of affairs is that the rigour of debarring status that a *kaavu* owner could inflict on the Theyyam, can no more be as harsh, and ceased to be. However, present day outfits and groups have swapped the Theyyam spaces to demonstrate their social power or to demonstrate their party lines in the altering power dynamics in those spaces.

Two social organisations which created major reverberations in the social status quo and questioned the position and validity of the Theyyam, the belief systems, its ritual as it had been scripted in all these years, were the ideas of *Sree Narayana Guru* and the Communist ideology. The Sree Narayana Guru-led movement which emerged at the close of the nineteenth century exhorted the socially underprivileged communities to transcend superstition bound belief systems and move away from traditional practices. He sought to reform and infuse progressive ideas among the communities who were bound to Theyyam as a practice and a belief, because such practices kept them subservient to those on the higher rungs of the social hierarchy, and therefore, was an inhuman practice. *Sree Narayana Guru* was against such practices reinforcing his conviction by declaring that *kaavus* were neither toddy outlets, nor abattoirs. He rejected the animal sacrifice that was practised and was contemptuous of the sacrifice of cocks (goats were given in sacrifice in early times) that was common⁹.

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⁹ Though the *Narayana Guru*’s movement was not successful in north Malabar, *Guru* himself was outspoken in his opposition to Theyyam worship. The offerings like toddy and beheading cocks in the name of god was vehemently criticised by *Guru*. It was his quote at *Palakunnu*, where he did make a visit that "The temple is not a toddy shop. The temple is not a butcher shop". See Holloman, and Ashley, "Caste and Cult", 101.
In the medieval society, the Theyyam was conducted mainly by the leading *Nair tharavadu*. All other castes had their roles marked out because of the caste-based function that they served in the society: the *Malayan, Vannan, Velan* becomes the Theyyam, the *Kollan* (blacksmith), *Asari* (carpenter), *Kusavan* (potter) provide the sword, shield and the copper plate to hold the betel leaves, the wooden pedestal or sacred seat and the earthen pot for the toddy to be offered, each caste carrying out the function assigned to the caste. The *Thiyya* brings the tender coconut fronds for decorating the venue and for use by the Theyyam, the toddy and the coconut as part of the caste obligation. What emerges out of such practice is the manner in which the dominant *Nair* castes conducted the affairs by relying on a caste-based function assigned to every community. That such practices were exploitative of the lower castes and therefore must be rooted out in a manner similar to what happened in the Travancore region where people rejected *maatha, maadan* and *marutha* worship and replaced it with idol worship, began to gain currency among the people of Malabar. Such socio-religious reform ideology and practice began to be embraced by the well-to-do *Thiyya* families of north Kerala. P.N Damodaran, a member of a elite *Thiyya* family describes the Theyyam in these words in the *Mathrubhumi* Weekly dated 15 March 1937:

"Thirayattam or Theyyam is a cult found in North Malabar. In English this can be called Devil Dance...[...] Thirayattam is destructive and is worth to be destroyed. The rowdyisms, inhuman and barbarous behaviours and immoral actions that are in and near the *kaavus* [shrines] and which are prevalent at the time of these festivals are innumerable and beyond description. When we understand that animal sacrifices, immorality and

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drunkenness are indispensable that elements in this cult, this should not be suffered to continue even for a moment”

The missionaries who arrived with their proselytizing zeal during the colonial times relied on the same argument to wean away the people of north Kerala from such practices. In places like Kuthuparamba, Thallassery and Panoor, they went from house-to-house convincing the locals about the inhumaneness and the retrograde character of Theyyam and snake worship. The followers of Sree Narayana Guru’s definition of Theyyam took off on similar lines. The upper crust among the Thiyyas established a society for the awakening of knowledge, Sree Jnanaodaya Yogam which worked against such wrong practices and superstitions. The pagan gods appeared to the position of the gods in the classical Hindu pantheon and idolised. But, this did not strike roots in north Kerala. The rural folk had not attained a liberal outlook which granted them the strength to shun their local deities. Further, as was mentioned earlier, the altered thinking was visible only amongst the economically better sections among the Thiyyas especially centered in specific towns.

Marxists in Action

When Marxist ideology struck roots and took shape as a movement it managed to bridge the gap that was surfacing within the communities because the local communities were drawn to the ideas of the communist movement than the newly arrived progressive ideas of the Sree Narayana movement. The communist party was gaining ground in the 1930s. In the final reckoning, to forge

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11 Quoted from William, Devil Dances, 27-28. It is also observed that in the evening songs put on at Thallassery Jagnath temple, where Sree Narayana Guru himself has instilled the iconic image invokes the great act of guru in removing inhuman worship pattern of the lower castes.
13 Menon, Caste Nationalism, 67.
social progress and achieve an egalitarian society to obliterate the community-caste centred disparity, the party that directed its energies to boost the working classes had to reject the Theyyam. The conviction of the communist ideology that faith in god, the social customs and practices rooted in tradition represent a subjugation and it was beyond god to remove inequality, instead, religion was an opiate for the masses. Such an ideological viewpoint mocked Theyyam and what it represented. Yet, the party had its own uncertainties on this. The Theyyam performing castes belong to the lowest rung in the social ladder, so also the Thiyyas who believe in Theyyam and sorcery. The fears of the Communists hinged on the fact that the Thiyyas were a dominant caste in north Kerala and it would not be a very politically wise approach to treat Theyyam with contempt. The communist party has been able to infuse all sections of people with their ideology but it is a reality that the kottam and kaavu carry caste and community tags. In present times it also reflects the confinement of the Theyyam castes within social-cultural roles. When they don the task of performing Theyyam the performing community is reconstructing ancient customs in the present milieu, and thereby representing caste-oriented priorities which are a continuum of the old practices.

During the phase under the administration of the East India Company the practice in north Kerala was similar to what prevailed in other parts, the equivalent of the present day ‘amsam’ and ‘desam’ were known as ‘thara’ a cluster of the former form the thara. The power centre and overall control in the region was vested in the leading feudal family of the area, be it the general affairs or the ritual practices. The senior most in the feudal landowner’s family were known as ‘kamavars, esshammaan, vazhunnor’ in the tharas. The demarcations within which the subaltern castes could practice their traditional obligations and functions and occupation were very clearly
defined: the spaces which gave the Theyyam castes to accomplish their traditional ritual related practices. To this day difference of opinion remains with regard to the extent of ‘cherujanman’ rights vis-à-vis areas within which these rights were valid and the violations that occur. What if the lesser castes do not practice their ‘kulathozhil’ or caste based occupation within the ‘cherujanmadesam’, what if another family comes into the locality with the ability to perform the same function, the final word rests in the decision as a verdict pronounced by the karanavar of the desam, a geographical limit within which a family wields authority and control. In case of disputes therefore the ultimate power resided in the head of the landowning family, who enjoyed such powers over the whole communities.

Even in the fluidity that is associated with the ever evolving social structure such questions are alive in the domain of the Theyyam communities. Who enjoys the cherujanman rights to perform in the kaavu is a live issue? Apart from the established families who played a role in the affairs of Theyyam, the new players come from local area committees, and groups representing political parties who prop up members from Theyyam groups who are not locals, where the latter call the shots. Interestingly, in the changed power equations and arrival of new players in the Theyyam grid, the remuneration or kollu in Theyyam parlance, they receive remains negligible, pegged to the old levels. The contested claims with regard to the cherujanmam rights validate the rights of the overlords to exploit the Theyyam community.

North Kerala’s socio-economic scenario has undergone an overall change but the attitudinal and transactionional change has not altered for the Theyyam communities, who continue to be the subjects of status that were meant for them as per the set traditions of the earlier era. While some of the Theyyam dancers have overcome the exploitative status by associating with political
parties, the progressive face of the political affiliate relapses to the retrograde practices of rigid caste distinctions and discrimination, especially when it concerns the kaavu and the Theyyam. Thus, what transpires is that the Theyyam in its present state is only a re-enactment or reproduction of entrenched inequitable caste structures.

*Purogamanasahityam* (Progressive Literature) has while describing the social background of north Kerala introduced a new nomenclature for the subaltern by adopting ‘depressed’ and ‘oppressed’ in place of ‘primitive’. The progressive Marxist writers tried to communicate such ideas through their stories and plays. A number of such writings described the Theyyam as ‘peoples’ culture’ and at the same time underlined the fact that the Theyyam and similar traditional practices were integral to the retention of the existing feudal structure in the village community. While it was accepted on the one hand it also was considered reactionary from the other point of view.

"When I’m struck it is the same blood,
When you are hacked it's the same blood,
The kadalipazham (banana) that grows in our dirty groves are required
To serve your god…
Why did you then speak of differences"

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are lines demonstrative of the tone and tenor adopted by the Pottan Theyyam to make social comment, symbolising an awakening regarding the discriminatory practice, became a cultural marker of the imbalances in place. It is interpreted as the call for the social revolution and an embodiment of protest\textsuperscript{15}. Further the accoutrements of the Theyyam, music and dance were identified as signifier of the aesthetic creativity of the masses. It will be worth quoting what Dilip Menon writes:

"Folk arts were harnessed in the cause of anti-Japanese and anti-hoarding propaganda and the ottan thullal, poorakkali, kolkali, teyyattam [various Kerala rituals], all of these found patronage. In the aftermath of the depression, many of the less prosperous tharavadus [aristocratic houses of comparatively high-status castes, like the Nayars] had stopped sponsoring the teyyattam and other shrine performances. The leadership of the KCP [Kerala Communist Party], coming as they did from branches of the larger tharavadus, were in their element as patrons of the rural arts. Later in this decade, victims of police action would be lauded as heroes and martyrs, and many individuals incorporated within the teyyattam tradition of victims of injustice. Among the persons arrested in the fighting at Karivellur in 1946 was a teyyattam performer who 'used to dance Communism'\textsuperscript{16}.

The communists perceived the approach as one that would wean the Theyyam practitioner from relying on destiny but the conflict it faced was that liberation from one automatically led to unemployment, when Theyyams cease to perform in the kaavus. When the practice is questioned then all the folk forms that they are associated with in the lean months including

\textsuperscript{15} For a detailed cultural analysis on the Pottan Theyyam, See Pallath, Theyyam, 96-105
\textsuperscript{16} Menon, Caste, Nationalism.176-177. This same quote has also been given by Gilles Tarabout while discussing the role of Marxists in reinterpreting the meaning of the Theyyam. See Assayag and Fuller, Globalizing India, 193. Similar issues of uses of Theyyam and varied social context of competing claims on Theyyam and its redefining meanings was well portrayed by Ashley in his work. The conficting contexts and debates on the staging of Theyyam in certain local areas of north Malabar that discuss in the work at length is sociologically significant to understand changing structures of Theyyam complex. See Wane Ashley, Recordings: Ritual.
kothamuriattam, vedanattam, witchcraft and black magic also are affected. Within its limited circumstances question remains; is Theyyam to be aligned with the red of the communist party or the red of the ‘gurusi’ (water in red colour) that performers make to ward off evil spirits. The party's intention was to prepare a ‘stage’ and not a ‘kaavu’. The party had taught that social standing, birthright and obligations of janmaavakasham would be removed when its basic structure changes, i.e., economy. When the Left-compatriots who were researching, approached Theyyam from the Cultural Studies angle collecting information and material on the ritual and songs, legends began to be documented, setting in motion folklore studies which embraced Theyyam as a folk art form.

Socio-Religious Reform Discourse at Micro Spaces

A probe into the above mentioned social, cultural and political discourse and how it pans out in my village, in the kaavus where I appear as Theyyam will facilitate an understanding of these processes and the manner of its proliferation at a micro settings around a kaavu.

I cannot recall a time when toddy or arrack was offered in the Mandamullathil kaavu. In a large majority of kaavus in north Malabar the offerings to Kuttichathan was toddy, Chamundi was the cocks sacrifice, Gulikan was given arrack and the giving the cock as kuruthi, a practice that survives to this day. It is with a significant ritual that the ‘kalasam’ is brought into the kaavu during the festival. A ‘kalashathara’ (a raised platform) is prepared demarcated in a kaavu. A earthen pot filled with toddy, wrapped in tender palm fronds is borne by a person who is known as the ‘kalasakaran’. The kalasam is the ‘prasadam’ that is made as an offering to the god or goddess by a single family, specially by Thiyyas or a group of families in the locality. A thanksgiving offering
for granting favours is often practiced. For example, succour from sickness by a parent who promises to bring his son to the *kaavu* and carry a *kalasam* as offering after he is cured. Neither my elder nor I can remember these practices as having been carried out in the *Mandola kaavu*. The rituals are completed in the *kaavu* without fulfilling any of the aforesaid practices—*kalasam*, *kalasamthullal*, and use of meat. Up till 1960 all of these were practices that could not be ignored. The fact that these rituals are very integral to the totality of a Theyyam ritual it continues uninterrupted to this day in a large number of *kaavus*.

The *Mandola* family was one with a reasonably high social standing and this is indicated by the fact that they owned and exercised rights over a *kaavu*. The family had spread to *Thaslasserry*, *Kuthuparamba* and *Kannur* where they had struck roots. In all likelihood it was with the acceptance of *Sree Narayana Guru*’s influences that the family abandoned practices like cock sacrifices, offering of toddy and the rituals in the *kalasathara*. During the Theyyam festival in 2012 this is how a member of the family described the elevation in social status that came to the family:\(^{18}\): Till 1970 the family did not possess much land and they engaged as unskilled hands and agricultural labour, ranked low status assigned to the *Thiyya* in the social strata. When the land reforms were implemented, lands around the *kaavu* were allotted to *Thiyya* families. Members of

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\(^{17}\) Beheading thousands of cocks as offering to a deity in a *kaavu* called *Puthiya kaavu* near *Panoor* has been depicted by PR Kurup in his autobiography. He was a prominent political leader of that locality and elected many times to Kerala legislative assembly and became a minister also. He says that the cock sacrifices was usually performed in the extreme hot of a mid day. The *komaram* will slowly approach the *balithara*, a platform to offer bali and each devotee may bring their cock and it was beheaded by the *komaram*. Subsequently, it will be thrown among the crowd and other offering will be continuously be done. Cock is beheaded one by one. The devotees who appeared in *kaavu* will return home with full of blood sheds in their wearings. In 1947, November 14, the birth day of Jawaharlal Nehru, Kurup and other congress man had a meeting to decide to stop this practices. They had formed a volunteer core that consists of two hundred persons and they stood in front of various entrances of the *kaavu*. They prevented devotees who carry a cock in their hand and sent them back. Now only two or three cocks are offered as a symbolic of earlier grand offering—the blood sacrifice to the goddess. See P.R.Kurup, *Ente Nadinte Katha, Enteyum*, (Kottayam:National Books Stall,1985),143-146. My father and mother also said that in around these periods that people started showing their resentment against practices of this sort. But still it is prevalent and integral part of worship in *kaavus* in our locality too.

\(^{18}\) Interview with Maniyath Ragavan, 31.01.2012
the family received parcels of land from the local janmi (landlord), and thus they too came into ownership of land. This is how they attained the resources.

He continues: "Appa Nambiar as local chief had his own men skilled in use of weapons and it was a prevalent practice for them to come and disrupt the festivals held in this kaavu"\(^\text{19}\).

To counter this threat, the Thiyyas used to line up their sturdy men at the venue trained in weaponry and the present practice of the physical presence of 40 Thiyya strongmen with sticks and swords in kaavu spaces is probably a throwback on the live situation of the past.

The ‘Asuralanum Makalum’ Theyyam in the kaavu has a myth associated with it. A senior member of the family tells me that it did happen. The Asuralanum Makalum denote Sree Rama and Sita of the Ramayana epic. As per the norms laid down in the ancient times, the rigidity of the caste system had denied the Thiyya the permission to worship deities by their own. The powerful men and local leaders were belonged to the Nair and Nambiar tharavadus. For this very reason the Thiyyas was not permitted to participate in the rituals of worship dedicated to the Vaishnavaite gods\(^\text{20}\). If the local Nambiar comes to know of it a fight would take place; the Theyyam would be refused the right to perform in the kaavu, a right that was vested in the feudal lord of the area. The Asuralanum Makalum Theyyam appears in the dead of the night, around 2 a.m and for this reason, even we members of the castes belong to Theyyam dancing also rarely get to see it, because most of us would be catching a few winks on the makeshift mat made by the scattered tender palm fronds in the thatch which functions as the temporary greenroom.

\(^{19}\) This background information had been handed down to this member of the family by his father.

\(^{20}\) This means that a pattern of worship that link to the Sanskrit tradition, a temple oriented genre followed by the upper castes and specifically worshiping a goddess.
Recently when I asked for the photographs of all the Theyyams that appear in the Mandola kaavu, except for the Asuralanum Makalum Theyyam all others were available. When I enquired of a few photographer of the locality, including one belong to the kaavu, they also did not possess any copy of this particular deity. "We do not want the fact that we perform the Asuralanum Makalum Theyyam here should be known outside, hence it is done at a time when only members of the family are present. If it was known outside, upper castes used to prevent it", explains the owners of the kaavu. They continue to practice this as a norm of the past.

The denial of worship rights to the lower castes like the Thiyyas in temples would have been a reason for the subalterns setting up their own spaces of worship – the kaavus, probably a first step towards contesting the norms established by the superior castes and charting their own ways to worship. This in a way became an enabler towards creating social capital and then working towards the transformation of the kaavu into temples. Thus, it culminated in sanskritisation process of the practice. Now what emerges is the assertion that Mandola kaavu falls under ‘our’ (kaavu owners) family’s control. And the pride in such an ownership triggers support from the educated and novel rich members of the family.

It was customary to confirm the date for the Theyyam- Theyyam kurikal- and carry betel leaf and nut as offering to the Nambiar, the local landlord, to seek his permission to conduct the Theyyam. Around 1960 when this practice was stopped by this Thiyya family, Nambiar tharavadu pronounced a ban on families who perform Theyyam in this kaavu. My father’s uncle, Kelu Panikkar vested the cherujanmam or ‘lesser rights’ in the area. The customary right of performing Theyyam, and playing the chenda were hereditarily enjoyed by my family. The Munnootan and Vannan castes were, however, prepared to continue with their traditionally assigned duties but my
father’s uncle Kelu Panikkar did not oblige. When the Mandola family approached the Kottayam Raja with the problem, the ruler sent Kottayam Vaka, a Malayan family to perform Theyyam at Mandola. Thereby, under the orders of the Kottayam Raja, the local Janmi, the Nambiar tharavadu yielded his superior status, held thus far\textsuperscript{21}.

The Mandola family distanced themselves from Kelu Panikkar after the ban, but since he was well versed in sorcery and exorcism and in Theyyam, the cherujanmam rights were restored in the years that followed. The rights have now been conveyed to my father and my elder brother as successors to Kelu Panikkar. The elders of the Thiyya family here have continued to maintain a distance from Malayan family and give expression to their unhappiness of the Malayan castes by insulting, mocking and making derogatory remarks in the occasions when they perform their duties at their kaavu itself. Occasions when such comments was directed towards my family are alive in my memory. The irritants in the relationship must be a shadow of the old decision of ban by Nambiar not to perform his duties at Mandola. This could be the ever present hostility that rises when the suppressed subaltern challenges the dominant caste overlord.

**Sanskritising Effects**

If one look at the spatial features in the Mandola kaavu, and deities instilled spaces, the sthaanam of Theyyams performed by the Malayans are outside the courtyard of the palliyara\textsuperscript{22}.

\textsuperscript{21} This information was given by Gopalettan, a senior member of the kaavu and the same matter used to tell by my father.

\textsuperscript{22} Locating the Theyyam outside the palliyara space is however not limited to the Mandola kaavu premises only. In north Kerala there are Theyyam sthanams which are within the precincts of the kaavu, before the palliyara and other. Theyyam-tharas which fall outside the periphery of the Theyyam kaavu. Such a lay out is visible in southern Kerala also. The ‘classical’ gods within the boundaries of the temple and the spaces for snake worship, and Maadan marutha worship are situated outside the temple wall or boundary. This in all probability was the outcome of the arrival of Brahmanic practices. Under the pretext of conducting Swarnaprashnam, a temple is built inside a Theyyam grounds and a Vaishnava god is propitiated here. This is a continuing process in almost all kaavus.
This outside the compound treatment is also visible in the attitudes towards the Theyyams too. The *Theyya-thara* gets segregated when a boundary wall is constructed. What happens within the walls is a purer and higher form of worship, while the practices in the *Theyya-thara* are akin to occult worship and primitive magic practices. This become a notion within the folk as it is defined by the *tantris*. The placing of a cult form and its practices within the Brahamanical context of ritual practices, the social processes of sanskritisation becomes a standard practice and it gets much adoration and acceptance. The processes of lower caste practices and its assimilation to Sanskritist tradition becomes a speedy process around Theyyam worship centers.

It is said that the early *sthanams* in Mandola were those of *Gulikan*, *Vishnumurthi*, *Pothi*, and *Karanavar* Theyyams. It is also said that the *Angakaran* later appears as a Theyyam. The *Angakaran* is placed within the *palliyyara*, and the *Karanavar* and *Pothi* Theyyams are place in the room to the right inside the house. When one analysis the myths behind the Theyyam it becomes known that except for *Chamundi* and *Gulikan*, all other Theyyams are representatives of members of the *Thiyya family* who met with their deaths. Thus, situating such Theyyams within the structure of ancestral spirit worship. The *Karanavar* signifies the head of the family and are revered as integral to ancestral worship and therefore become Theyyams. The *Angakaran* acquires the status of a *Thiyya* fighter and becomes a testimony of the character who fought against the upper caste's social supremacy23.

*Mandamullatil kaavu* has now become a temple or it is conceived by the members of the *kaavu* in such a way. Large *hundis* (collection boxes) in concrete have replaced the small containers that

23 This is one possible propositions that could be read through the local saying which is alive among the members of the family as well as people associated with the *kaavu*. 
received cash offerings. Astrological consultations and subsequent rituals known as Swarnaprashnam has been practiced by Nambuthiris who have proclaimed that this was once a temple and therefore daily worship was unavoidable under such circumstances. This indicates how far the situation has altered. What the place requires is not the dark and retrograde form of worship but purer forms of worship was the finding of a Swarnaprashnam. Thus the whole process which lasted for many days came to the conclusion that no more would donning the Theyyam suffice as a form of worship, instead worship of the higher kind associated with the higher order including idol worship needs to be introduced. The owners of the kaavu view this as a means of attracting more believers and an increase in the income of the kaavus from pujas would pave the way for economic prosperity. It also reflects a process of the lower caste's inclination towards temple worship. But, when some members of the kaavu were asked if the place could not be transformed to adopt the daily puja format, the response was:

“When the Theyyam which has been performed over the years is suddenly discontinued, the elders in the family are likely to be unhappy. Besides, people from all over transcending caste-class differences congregate here for the three-day Theyyam festival. If we shift to the daily puja/worship format, it is not necessary that people will turn up. For time being, the owners are firm on the decision to continue with the Theyyam worship”

Two points can be put out here. The first is that when people speak of going to the temple it indicates going to the Thiruvangad temple in Thalassery where Sri Raman and Lord Shiva are

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24 A special ritual practices done under the suggestion by the astrologer to find out what wrong with the existing practices and find its past misconducts and suggesting for future approach to solve the problem.  
25 Theses are part of conversations kaavu members had on the question of changing modes of worship in the context of Swarnaprashnam. The days of the Swarnaprashnam and what discussed there was always part of evening discussions in the precincts of the kaavu centred on tea shops and local reading rooms. Some of these discussions would also lead up to toddy shops etc., as it is a major concerns of the local people and especially people who have clear political stand over it.
worshiped. When a kaavu takes on the temple mode of worship there is the lurking fear that the alternative now available will reduce the numbers who frequent the temple. Second is that the ownership of the temple is status of a social capital created by the Nair-Brahmin castes. The owners of the kaavu also nurse a strong desire for such rights when the metamorphosis of the ritual space takes place, thus raising a complex situation whereby they are unable to exclude or include the Theyyam.

Such ideas of alterations change the belief patterns of the people. Offering toddy, killing of hens are considered lowly mode of worship. Gods with a tradition would not receive such offerings, it is only the lowly gods who would receive such offerings and those making such offerings therefore belong to the lower rungs of the social ladder. When the Thiyyas acquired economic prosperity they started accessing the gods of the higher rungs, found in temples. The Sankrit-Brahmanic approach to worship has also been cultivated by the Theyyam dancing castes too. Instead of the thottam which they chanted earlier, they learn by rote slokas or verses from the Bhagavatham or the Upanishads, translations of these texts are available in the local libraries and from various publications intended to serve these sorts of purposes. The slokas which are a mix of Tamil and Malayalam, the varavilli-invocation, chants have all gone sanskritised. Such a delivery is well-received from the devotees too and thus prompts the Theyyam performer to take it forward. The transition of the kaavus of earlier times into present day temples incorporate the shifts that have been a concern of this chapter.

26 In one of my interview and continuous conversations with a Theyyam dancer, he asked me to bring him a book called devistuthi. He said that he was in search of the book near Mattanoor Devi shops but it was not available there. He himself found that it is a publication from Kodungallor. Because of his continuous inquisition, I managed to find a book, from Trivandrum road side book markets and sent to him. The book was not exactly the one he searched for. But he was happy and later informed me that it is useful for his ritual practices.
Koorara, Attupuram, Mokkeri, Paaremmel, Kunnummel, Kunnothmukku are areas with a major presence of the Marxist party. The areas which fall under the cherujanmam rights of my family. The Manamullathil kaavu and the Kunnummel Sri Raktachamundeswari kaavu located in these area. Pothiullathil was a Theyyam kaavu that had gone to seed. This was a kaavu where 39 Theyyams would appear. By 1930 the practice had ceased to function. But in 2011 it has had a rebirth as ‘Sri Porkali Bhagavati kshetram’. ‘Pothiullathil’ implies ‘the place where Pothi/Bhagavati is resided. Some Theyyam sthanams and tharas remain there. A committee of local people was constituted to revive the kaavu. Members of all political parties were included in the committee, giving priority to the devotee. The revival of the kaavu was initiated because some homes in the locality had a spate of misfortune experiences. Some alleged that the Marxist party sympathisers had tried to put stumbling blocks in this effort. A restored Theyyam thara was demolished under cover of darkness. Vandalising the ritual spaces by urinating on it, uprooting the tharas, etc were attempts made to stop the formation of the temple which was facing impediments from various forces. The kaavu is located in an area which has a major presence of Nambiars, and Vilakithala Nairs. An independent unbiased committee had sought to get predictions done through occult practices, and I was a keen observer of these events.

The ‘prashnam’ revealed that this was an old temple where daily pujas were conducted and therefore a temple had to be constructed and the old practices revived. Devotees were generous with contributions, offerings in cash towards raising funds for the edifice, which was commissioned in April 2011. Idols of worship here are Porkali Bhagawati, Sasthappan and Devi. At present on the first of every month as per the Malayalam calendar and once a week pujas are

\[27\text{ In the Theyyam parlance, people would no not count Theyyams in odd numbers. To say that there are 39 Theyyams in a kaavu, people chooses to say that there are one minus forty Theyyams.}\]
conducted by a Nambuthiri priest. The temple committee has taken no decision regarding the Theyyam ritual but the occult predicted that Theyyam could be performed outside the temple’s perimeter.

The revival of erstwhile Theyya-kaavu are a daily occurrence in north Kerala. Any area where stone platforms and a large number of frangipani trees, the village committees are organised and steps are initiated for the revival of the kaavu. The BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party] and the RSS [Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh] use such clusters of people to spread their ideology among the local people, a fact that is very well known to Marxist Party [Communist Party of India (Marxist)] cadres. The BJP and RSS recognize that the Theyyakaavu and the Theyyam itself provide a fertile space to implant their ideas and it is the outcome of this understanding that they work towards the revival of kaavus and its management in areas where they have a significant presence and base. The Marxist party has discerned the growing presence of the BJP–RSS combine. Therefore they also have moved away from the earlier stand of disowning the Theyyam and its immediate cultural spaces and the practice per se in the name of beliefs, instead have adopted an inclusiveness towards the ritual and the community, resulting in the formation of kaavu committees by the party itself. The contest between the political parties have now spread over into the traditional ritual spaces of the kaavu. Although I would not claim that this is a universal phenomenon in North Kerala, this is pronounced in the Thalasserry, Panoor and Kuthuparamba areas. These are the places which are known for political contests and political murders28. When there is proliferation of political activity in the Theyyam’s spaces it unravels a historical evolution and change. The Theyyam ritual and its associated customary practices, the

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extent of *cherujanmam/lesser rights*, which rested in the dominant ruling class transits into spheres controlled by the *kaavu* committees. Thus, creating a situation where the political background of the performer acquires importance. The *cherujanmam* rights which defined the dancer’s inalienable right to carry out all associated functions, has moved away from the old terms. Now the committee has redefined this to imply that an outsider can be brought into perform Theyyam if he is a party sympathizer or a loyalist.

The *Mandamullathil* family, mostly, are followers of the Congress party. Yet, if the Theyyam performer with the same political loyalty asks for an increase in the compensation, the action is not well-received. This will be attacked by members of the family without political loyalty. Here, the family’s identity and the identity of caste become important. Here one could observe the distinctions between the family owned *kaavus* and the local committee managed *kaavus*. In the case of the former, all considerations rests on the caste identity but in later cases, they act beyond the category of the caste but loyalty is much more a stringent consideration. The *Koorara Kunnummel Sri Rakhta Chamundieswari kaavu*, is under the control of the Marxist party. When the *kalasam* (toddy pot) is carried into the *kaavu* it has a portrait of Che Guevera appended. This *kaavu* which was under the control of Appa Nambiar’s family had ceased to carry out its Theyyams in the sixties and was recently resurrected. The changes that had come over their local control, the altered political climate, the rising influence of the *Thiyya* caste and the overwhelming presence of the Communists must have been reasons for putting a stop to Theyyam. I had indicated earlier the circumstances under which the caste-related contributions towards the *kaavu’s* resources and functioning had ceased, and in such a situation the Theyyam practice was discontinued.
When plans were laid out to revive the Theyyam in the *Kunnummal kaavu*, by the *kaavu* committee, there rose disputes on the Theyyam space and the control over the *kaavu* between the local committee on one side and *Appa Nambiar*’s family on the other. One does not know if it was the reluctance to go against the ritual or unwillingness to get into a contest which would achieve nothing that led to this decision, the *kaavu* committee seized control through minor litigation. Since my father was the ‘*janmari*’ of the *kaavu*, he too had to appear in court. Since reviving his god was a good act, he spoke in favour of a revival of the *kaavu* in the court. The *kaavu* now has the annual Theyyam in a very elaborate manner.

The realisation that resuscitated Theyyam-kaavus would become fertile soil for revivalist Hindu influence drew the Communist Party *Kaavu* Committees to play an active role in the management of the affairs of the *kaavu*. They very smartly checked the interference of some RSS elements. But, once Theyyam became a regular feature, some of the Communist *kaavu* committee members became more active in the *kaavu*, than in the party’s activities. Such individuals who came with the intention of liberating the Theyyam from entrenched religious beliefs, themselves became committed believers of the Theyyam worship. The worker are unable to attend to party work and meetings but are sticklers when it comes to the *vellattam* ritual on *sankramam* and the *pujas* conducted on Friday and Sunday. What stood for the political ideology is diametrically opposite to the ideas behind the Theyyam and a large majority is drawn to this, while a minuscule minority remains rooted in ideology.

On one occasion two young men of the *Kunnumal kaavu*, now as *Kshetra* Committee were on a fund collection spree and I happened be back home on a visit and was approached with, ‘the

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29. Means elder male member who hold the *cherujanmam*. 

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The Theyyam festival will have *kaavadiyattam* and *chingari melam*, so we seek your contribution. Since I belong to the family which perform Theyyam and related rites, normally none ask us to contribute to the offers. I responded that if it was for any other sort of collection I’d cooperate. When I went to the *kaavu* these boys reappeared, this time with a receipt book and sought contributions for the new building of the youth wing of the party. I obliged with a tenner rupee note.

The Theyyya-*kaavu* has become a conglomeration of rituals, belief, and rural politics. When religious renewal and political processes impact the Theyyam, the impact is multilayered: the Theyyam which had firm standing as a cult or a worship morphs into an ‘art form’, its ‘sociality’ and ‘spatiality’ is altered, and the ‘subjectivity’ of the performer, converting Theyyam into a form of entertainment. The new ‘Theyyam’ incarnate is now ready for any spaces to incarnate as the artiste and thus move to the domain of a product.

Schechner’s description of his efficacy/entertainment model\(^30\) help us to explain the differences on the question of what happens a ritual when it enters to stage as an aesthetic expression. The Theyyam is getting transplanted from its traditional spaces, something that is also akin to the experiences by other folk rituals and practices.

When the Theyyam is performed in the *kaavu*, the adherence to *thottam*, *uriyadal*, *attam* have a desired beneficial end. For instance, a Theyyam called *Vettekkuorumakan* is performed for begetting progeny. *Vasurimala* is for protection from diseases and a happy marriage. Breaking a coconut is to remove obstructions and for prosperity, but outside the *kaavu*’s frontiers this reveals

itself as a dramatic performance and superficial. Theyyam does not endorse the concept of the ‘Other’. As far as Theyyam is concerned all those who come to the kaavu are in no way lesser to the Theyyam. In the movements of the Theyyam and the scheme of performing rituals the devotee, the komaram, those will promises to fulfill move with the Theyyam, a fluidity of the spaces both use, and giving the Theyyam all the inputs and support that is necessary. But when the Theyyam appears as a performance genre it is in the presence of an invited gathering or those who have paid to witness the performance. A performance that has shrunk to a ticketed audience. Within the kaavu, the Theyyam revives memories of a hoary past, stirs our dormant memories and takes us into the Theyyam’s spaces. A re-enactment of the matrilineal set-up, the caste-based obligatory responsibilities of the owner-landlord are revived through an imagined reconstruction of a structure from the past. Therefore, at the specified moment, the Theyyam puts thrust on that particular period. Now, it has altered into bodies spruced up to appear as Theyyams. This could be conceptualized as the ‘ritual body’ as it presents only body and costumes without the ritually energized mind of the dancer. But, ritually sanctioned lines and painted parts of bodies are presented. It invokes a ritualized presence through its costuming.

In the Theyyam’s true spaces it assimilates ‘others’ by inviting them to join in. The Theyyam can call for any one who stands apart from the crowd and include him within the justified spaces. Or, even go to the extent of talking up to the individual and as a matter of right draw him into the allowed spaces and bless him, speak to him. In the formal performance space it is as only a ‘viewer’, there they appear as the ‘other’

Quite often in a performance it is not uncommon to find that the Theyyam is complimented for the performance and even go to the extant of going up to the Theyyam to shake hands and add
‘Good. Keep it up.’ In the kaavu, the Theyyam is God. The viewer is the believer. But it would not be wrong to say that such a situation does not exist in present times. In Mandola I had concluded with the Chamundi performing on the elevated sacred seat, when a person walks up to congratulate me for my ‘performance’ with, ‘Good, It was well done.’ Since it came quite unexpectedly, I just sat with my head bowed. It indicates that even the viewers who come to kaavu view Theyyam not only as a manifestation of deity, but people changed to view it as an element of drama or performance. Since I may be a young Theyyam dancer that he, an elder one done the complimenting part. Even then, it was no unusual in the practices of a kaavu.

In the kaavu the Theyyam enjoys the freedom to criticize the kaavu owners, the devotees and the komaram. An individual who has risen to the state of a God has the right to criticize. But the contrary cannot be done. But, the organizers and spectators who witness the Theyyam perform in a formal venue enjoys the privilege of criticizing the Theyyam. In olden times, during the childhood years of Kannan Peruvannan the kaavu owners would admonish and beat up the Theyyam, after he had shed his accoutrements, if they were unhappy with his performance. The Peruvannan had vivid memories of such occasions. He discouraged me from asking too many questions on this practice, in an interview with him in his residence at Kodakkat, Kasaragod district31.

When Theyyam is performed in a kaavu it reflect the creativity of not just the dancer. The Theyyam does not rely on improvisation, belief or knowledge to perform. It is a coming together or the synergies the man who beats the drum, the person who does the face-painting, the structure of the kaavu, the give and take that is present between the believer and the Theyyam.

31 Interview done in 2002, March-April.
The kolakaran, then is just one unit in this complex grig. But in a proscenium the individual’s creativity takes upper hand, and the form is significant. The crowds watch a performance in a formal set up without even a flutter of the eyelid!

**Summary**

The chapter delineates the social dynamics of the Theyyam when it faces changes over the social transformation in communion with the aspects of time and space. The process of how Theyyam construct and reconstruct itself within the fast effective changes of the time has been a central concern of the discussion. The visuality of the Theyyam and the kaavu as part of electricity is one aspects which signify a historical phase of modernity. Thiyyas assertion to build up their own caste identity and to establish their social status through the mediumship of the ownership and authority over kaavu administration reflects the changing dynamics of the Theyyam and its spatiality towards a process that makes a kaavu into a temple. A family which do not have historically endowed social and economic capital tries to manage the kaavu with the diverse means which has categorized as two types: One is with the obligatory notion of contribution by each family as part of the hereditary practices followed. Second is with mobilising resources with the new possibilities of gulf migration. The emergence of this new economy has led to a process to redefine the spatiality of the kaavu in tremendous way. This has changed the earlier notion of kaavu as a rural festival of the locality, that encompasses all of castes and class, into a process of de-secularization which happens as a silent process. This explains the well accepted process of imitating the life styles and worship pattern of upper castes by the lower castes in Indian rural scenario. The rigidity of social behaviour that was vested with the practice of Theyyam in older times reshapes kaavu members to see that the Theyyam could be a flexible
form, which could be photographed, which was otherwise not allowed by the *kaavu* owners themselves.

The spatial changes of the *kaavu* and consequent idea of sanskritisation imparts less importance to the Theyyam worship, which led the *kaavu* to think of replacing Theyyam worship into a regular *puja* worship with an iconic image. The modern sources of money and newly educated members of the *kaavu* intervene in these matters actively. These micro processes of sanskritisation has been viewed in the background of *Sree Narayana* Movement, though it was not so widely spread in north Malabar. But it has been observed that its presence at certain centers of towns and cities had spillover effects at the micro spaces of the *kaavus*. The Theyyam was a central object of discussion to both movements--the socio-religious reform movements and the communist movement of the late nineteenth century. How Marxist party had intervened the spaces of a *kaavu* and seen the Theyyam itself was also a section in this chapter. These interventions by both the movements has redefined the Theyyam community’s sacred map of *cherujanmam* as a contested space. The authority to settle the contests in this space become an affair of the prominent political party who holds local political base.

In this changing spaces of social relations the Theyyam dancer’s caste and hereditary attachment to the *kaavu* attain less important. Rather the Theyyam and the *kaavu* should be matched with its political affiliation. Who should enact the Theyyam in the *kaavus* become subjects of the *kaavu* committees. Thus, Theyyam and the *kaavu* become part of the ongoing processes of political rivalry between parties in the rural politics. A discussion on the Theyyam in the background of these socio-political process, could argue that the Theyyam as a form of worship has redefined itself to adopt the changing nature of the time and space, which shifts its earlier identity as a static
form of ritual into an object of aesthetic production, as an art form. What happens to the Theyyam when it shifts its position as ritual to theatre has been discussed in the light of Richard Schechner’s efficacy/entertainment model, where the subjectivity of the Theyyam dancer has changed to Theyyam artists.

A discussion of this sort unravels the changing nature of sociality and spatiality of the Theyyam, which is also a marker of social change in contemporary rural society in Kerala. Thus, these discussions throw insights to the perception that rituals are variable and changeable and it itself invent and reinvent the norms suitable to it and social settings according to the time and space.
Part II

Theyyam in Cultural Transactions

The cultural context of Theyyam too undergoes an inevitable change with the time and space it is performed in. With that, the producers and consumers of Theyyam gravitate towards two realms. The production site alters as well as its viewers. They could be any group who consider Theyyam as an art of antiquity or a cultural form part of the heritage of a state or a nation. This makes it necessary for us to look at Theyyam as a cultural form, a cultural product manufactured commercially by the culture industry and thus it is perceived as a cultural commodity available in the market. This transformation separates Theyyam from the traditional milieu and makes it an item of popular individual-centric enjoyment in the modern sense. Thus, Theyyam acquires a unifying feature and become part of a time or period of historical point which standardize forms of mass culture. The collective or a clan based context of Theyyam is being transformed into a context in which individual gratification and perception become a primary concern. Therefore, what constitutes its diverse nature and specificities become less important as it is perceived as a form with a specific costumes and rhythmic modes of performance on a space arranged by event managers of the market professional either under the patronage of the modern state or in a rubric of cultural market.

32 A discussion on problematising culture, Adorno argues that the culture industry commodified and standardized all art. For a discussion on his thoughts on culture see Theodor W Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on the Mass Culture* (London: Routledge, 2010). It illustrates how capitalist relations had invaded the cultural sphere. The ‘culture industry’ as a mechanism manipulating individuals as consumers and hence interrogating the relationships between economy, culture, and technology under modern capitalist relations.
When Theyyam transforms from a folk dance to something that people can enjoy, it is a pointer to the individual-centric taste and unifying nature. As this totally regional and faith-based ritual breaks loose from its moorings in the local public and transforms into one that addresses wide audience of any locality and nation assimilate the cultural process of homogenisation of cultures in times of globalisation\textsuperscript{33}. Thus, traditional approach gives way to several modern ways of ‘seeing’ Theyyam. Theyyam makes its presence like any other art form in the practice of modern theatre and studies of international folk dance forms. Since the modernising society has a uniform behaviour it alters with the priorities of the changing markets. When globalisation and culture combine emerging melding of ‘time’ and ‘space’ make it possible\textsuperscript{34}. It was purely an organic requirement of the people who worship the Theyyam. When it transforms along with the modernising society, it bring forth its potential and reconstruct itself along with the time that reflects on its form, spatiality and sociality.

It is to be observed that the commoditisation of the Theyyam is not something that happens only or entirely in the market. It has certain features not quite germane to the market. The non-market features are the result of the social processes that are subject to the regional environs. People have different perspectives from which they view Theyyam as a ritual in a \textit{kaavu}. Some believe that Theyyam is no more than a festival of the locality and its primitive rituals need to be modernised to

\textsuperscript{33} There are different theories on the understanding of current phase of globalisation, a process that refers to the intensification and expansion of cultural flows across the globe. Some argue that the cultural interactions are constructed with reference to cultural homogenisation on the one hand and cultural heterogenisation on the other. For an understanding of these debates on the varied dimensions of globalisation in cultural terms, see Arjun Appadurai, \textit{Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization} (Oxford University Press, 1997); Marwan M. Kraidy, \textit{Hybridity or the Cultural Logic of Globalization} (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005); Mike Featherstone, \textit{Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalisation and Modernity, A theory, Culture & Society, Special Issue} (London: Sage Publications, 1990); Nikos Kotzias, \textit{Dialectics of the Global and the National in the Sphere of Culture} (Harvard University:Weatherhead Centre for International Affairs, 2002); Cowen Tyler, \textit{Creative Construction: How Globalization is Changing the World's Cultures} (Princeton University Press, 2004); Ohmae Kenichi, \textit{The End of the Nation State} (The Free Press, 1995); Perraton Jonathan, \textit{Global Transformations} (Stanford University Press, 1999); Harish Waters, \textit{Globalization} (London: Routledge, 1995).

\textsuperscript{34} The theoretical background of the space and time combination and its inter-relationships in human life and social structure has been well portrayed and better understood with conceptual apparatus of the dual concept of time and space.
keep pace with the times, which favour deconstruction of the deep-rooted ritualistic elements and subject it to change so that it internalises the artistic and human values. To a certain extent, it also questions the traditions and conventions of the kaavu-centric practices and rituals, as explained in the earlier part of this chapter. When the Theyyamkaavus that had become defunct in the late 60's were renovated in the 80's a rejuvenation of sorts was seen in the kaavus and the tharavadus, as owners of many kaavus. Members working in the country and abroad became a source for the Theyyam. Their engagement in the Theyyam created a situation where the Theyyam came to be perceived differently. An example for this is: the issuing of notices to announce the timings of the Theyyam. The order of appearance of Theyyams, followed by the sequence of rituals, quite like the presentation of a stage show. The newspapers started carried advertisements announcing Theyyam festivals and portray the festivities with the photos of the Theyyam. Major financial institutions, like rural banks etc., became sponsors. The large shops in the town use the venue to announce and promote their wares, thus replacing the sound of the drumbeats and the jingling of the anklets with the announcements over the microphone, converting the venue into a fair ground as it were. At some Theyyam kaavus, while the ritual is being organised on one side, the other area would be holding a ganamela-musical soiree. When I saw the Gulikan Theyyam standing in the wings and enjoying the music, this transformation that was happening to the traditional kaavu grounds was clear as daylight. It is a part of the changing perspective that it is not only a social space symbolising faith and belief, but also a space of entertainment.

These aspects of discontinuation of support of ceremonies in the kaavus has been pointed out by Holloman and Ashley, “Caste and Cult”,100-101. Theyyam performing castes who were affected by the decline of patronage for kaavus, had also pointed out in May 21, 1952 by A C Kannan Nayar. See K.K.N Kurup, A C Kannan Nayar: Oru Patanam (Thiruvananthapuram: State Institute of Languages,1985).
The Theyyam reaches the market as a cultural symbol. Sometimes as an icon for promoting the sale of a product, the Theyyam is used as an expression of any social event in Malabar. As an icon of advertisement it appear on textile shops, wedding invitation cards, as names of vehicles, and as pictures pasted in vehicles. Compact Discs of songs in praise of Muthappan, or stories detailing the legends of Chamundi appear in the market. This is introduced as per the seasons of Theyyam festival. The private bus operators play these chants while plying the buses on their routes. When the Theyyam appears on the calendars of the Malabar Service Cooperative Bank, flex boards mounted at the animal husbandry exhibition held in Thiruvanthapuram, the posters of the Non-Gazetted Officers (NGO) Union conferences, the use of the Theyyam as an icon of Kerala’s culture is portrayed.

Political parties of varying hues get the Theyyam to perform at their conferences. Cut outs of the Theyyam appear as do the larger than life ones of the immortalised political martyrs, and is a very common sight on the roads and public spaces these days. The headgear of the Theyyam provides an awesome presence as arches at the entrance to public gatherings. When traditional symbols get transplanted to such venues as cultural signifiers the traditional ritual is liable to be read within the context of the political ideology which by itself tends to create a cultural politics.

Every singular Theyyam in its colouration, the designs on the face are all closely tied to the local milieu and the myths associated as it was described in earlier chapter. For example, it is read as the lines that the Kuttichathan Theyyam etches with rice paste on his torso are indicators of the tortures and atrocities he has experienced at the hands of a society. In the thottam his soliloquy is—"Am I the personification or Do I embody the inequities plied on my person"?indicates the suffering he has
experienced. The *thottam* also portray the story of his reply to those who did crimes on him. Similarly, each costumes of the Theyyam has its own explanation which circulates among the community of Theyyam.

The mythical explanation for the sixteen peacock plume-like *chatta* (frame) of Kuttichathan is this: The topmost *chatta* symbolic of Brahma, the second Sivan and Shakti, the third is of the trinity/trimurti, the fourth the four Vedas, the fifth the panchabhoota, the sixth the six axes, the seventh the seven mothers, the eighth the ashtadikpalakar (keepers of the directions). Moving away from this association, the sixteen *chattas* are recreated on flex boards displayed on road sides with portraits of Karl Marx, Lenin, Comrades Krishna Pillai, Chadayan Govindan, C.H Kanaran, Patyam Gopalan, E.M.S, E.K. Nayanar and Jyothi Basu lined up on the *chattas*. From the manner in which the *chatta* was used as part of the CPI(M)’s 20th Party Congress, it is clear that the Theyyam’s accessory was also adapted to suit the political practice of the modern times.

Although both these (Marxism and worship-practice of Theyyam) present contradictory ideology, but the clarion call of a liberating ideology is being dexterously adopted for interpreting the life conditions of a Theyyam performer. Many Theyyam dancers have made a success of using such an approach and quite often it is the fellow traveler in the community who has envisaged such a use of the Kuttichathan’s accessory.36 That, members of the community are interpreting the ritual tradition for an image makeover suited for the changing times. The Theyyam’s conversion into a symbolic

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36 There has been a hot discussion among the members of the Theyyam castes on the uses of Theyyams costumes for narrow political affiliation when they gathered for a meeting at Kuthuparambha organized by Uthara Kerala Malaya Samudaya Sangham, a registered organization established in 1952 (Reg. No. 45/78) to intervene in matters of exploitation by the *kaavu* authorities and to prevent atrocities against them. Some were arguing in favour of the flux because it represent their politics and others, a majority section on the view that it is an insult to the form and worship that they do in *kaavus*. 
representation of the culture, the arrival of flex board Theyyams becoming one more example of the
Theyyams’ assimilative potency to the socio-political contexts.

The Theyyam which is once-a-year event in North Kerala has become a permanent fixture in the
southern end of Kerala during the Onam celebration. In present times a large number of the
cultural practices are acquiring novel forms and appearing in newer spaces hitherto unknown. Just
as these are reminders of a heritage, the governments and the markets drive the reorienting of the
same in new venues. Evoking the nostalgia of an age gone by the Onam celebrations also
incorporate the Theyyam as an prominent item on the schedule of activities. The Tourism
Department by organising an elaborate event during the festival season has succeeded in giving the
Theyyam artiste-performer an opportunity to participate.

I was present at the 2012 Onam celebrations held in the capital, both as a spectator and researcher
to interact with the Theyyam dancers. Folk art forms from across the state were showcased at the
event. The Theyyam by the Malayan community, and the ninabali was included. How is the
Theyyam positioned and performed in such events, what are the social relations that take place
when the Theyyam performer arrives for such an event, were aspects I delved into. Further, how do
the performers themselves view such assemblages were the thrust areas of my explorations.

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37 Onam is Kerala’s rice harvest festival which fall on the Malayalam month of Chingam. It is associated with the myth of the Asura King Mahabali’s annual visit from patala, the underworld. Malayali still celebrate this festival with great importance and nostalgia.

38 Ninabali is a folk theatre form performed by the Malayan castes primarily in Thalassery area. It is based on the mythical tale of the battle between Bhadrakali and Dharikan. The death of Dharikan and later the rebirth are portrayed in this genre. It is a performance which behead a cock and blood is spread around the space as a resemblance of kali drinking the blood of Dharikan. This may be a reason that this form is named as ninabali, means blood sacrifice.
On reading the news report in the *Mathrubhumi* newspaper of 26th August 2012 about the presence of Theyyam in the *Onam* celebrations to be held in *Thiruvananthapuram*, I called up my home to enquire if anyone I know was coming to the event. On the 28th August a person was arriving to perform Theyyam I was told. I procured the telephone number of the person—*Ramesh*[^39]. I had thought that once I establish preliminary contact with him, I could organise my field work in a better manner. I tried to contact him over phone:

**Self:** Is it *Ramesh*? I'm *Rajesh*. Are you coming to *Thiruvananthapuram* to perform Theyyam?

*Ramesh:* How did you know I'm coming to *Thiruvananthapuram*? Who are you?

**Self:** I'm a researcher trying to understand the changes that are coming in the performance of Theyyam in present times. Hence, I want to watch your Theyyam.

Although, this is what I tried to communicate, he did not seem inclined to pay attention, nor receive my request in the correct manner.

*Ramesh:* I’m not doing any Theyyam. I do not perform Theyyam outside (indicating outside traditional *kaavu*).

The conviction that it was not right to perform in *Thiruvananthapuram* was creating a conflict within him and that was prompting him to respond in the manner he did. Most performers only desire that they present some *kolam*-form and return home. But, the fact that someone who hails from the same area had identified his presence in the capital may have disturbed him. The person who performs outside the traditional *kaavu* is not likely to be accepted either by the *kaavu* owner, nor his

[^39]: Not real name as it is changed to protect privacy of the person.
own members of the caste. Instead, the owners may debar such persons and groups from performing in the *kaavu*. This is a fear that dominates many Theyyam dancers.

On the morning of 28\textsuperscript{th} August Ramesh called me, ‘I have reached Thiruvananthapuram. Am staying at the Kairali Hotel in Thampanoor. If you come over we can meet.’ I went over, but he had left for the Kerala University’s Senate Hall, I was informed. I reached the senate hall, where besides Ramesh another person from Thallassery was also there. I introduced myself. A Kathakali troupe from Kottayam\(^{40}\) was present. A person who manage stage for performing arts at Greenix, a restaurant com tourist village from Fort Kochi had brought them here\(^{41}\).

I met them in the balcony of the senate hall. The stage had been heavily decorated. ‘MK’ was initialed on the stage. I thought Ramesh had arrived to present Theyyam as part of the *Onam* celebrations. But, it was the inaugural programme of a new News Channel ‘MK’ is what dawned later. A programme which would combine all the art forms was being planned: a ‘fusion’ genre. A choreographed event that would bring the Theyyam, *Kathakali*, *Mohiniyattam*\(^{42}\), and *Kalaripayattu* on stage, for all of three minutes. The event would be shot for the channel.

Which Theyyam are you going to appear as, I asked. A Theyyam like ‘Bali’. *Bali* is not usually performed by the *Malayan* caste. His answer was not very clear either. I asked, what he meant by ‘like *Bali*.’ ‘what else? Can I perform the Theyyam of our community usually takes up?’ since he belonged to the community and was aware of my identity he could respond in such a manner. That

\(^{40}\) A district in the southern part of Kerala.
\(^{41}\) Greenix village is a cultural art centre promoting Kerala's varied arts forms under a single roof. See the link: http://www.greenix.in/
\(^{42}\) A classical dance form of Kerala.
Theyyam was a personification of tradition and it sacredness could not be tainted by performing beyond the sanctioned spaces and therefore, he was doing the ‘Bali’ Theyyam is to be inferred. However, I decided to watch the event on stage. To the rhythmic beats of the drum, organ and triple drum, artistes in Kalaripayattu, Kathakali, Mohiniyattam, and the Theyyam appeared on the stage. In three minutes the show was over.

The form was such that one could not attach a particular nomenclature to the Theyyam that appeared on stage. Like the Bali Theyyam, the Theyyam had a beard and moustache, Pothi’e ear tops in front, the headdress was the Kathakali performance and the face painting was unlike any Theyyam, done free from an authentic design. The drawings on the face have been done in such a way that it should not be close to any Theyyam. It was evident from the form of the Theyyam that presenting it in the exact manner as is seen in a kaavu was something the performer was unwilling to do. The channels termed this artistic presentation ‘cultural fusion’.

Ramesh has appeared in plenty of venues in such roles. He was part of the array of performers—Kalaripayattu, Padayani43, Kathakali, Mohiniyattam and the Theyyam—was arranged to welcome cricket players to ‘God’s Own Country’ on the occasion of welcoming the Indian and Sri Lankan teams on landing in Kochi. An event manager of the Greenix at Fort Kochi was the organiser of the event.

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43 Padayani is a folk dance and a ritual performed widely in central part of Kerala. For more details see Kadammanitta, Vasudevan Pillai, Padeni (Thiruvananthapuram:State Institute of Languages,1993) ; K. K.Gopalakrishnan, Study of Padayani: Choottupadayani, Folklore Study, (Chengalore:Rainbow Book Publishers,2010).
On *Onam* day, it was the *Karakulam* village panchayat\(^{44}\) that presented the Theyyam. While I was moving towards the village, the road was deserted due to heavy rain. Only policemen could be seen and they were positioned at many points. At the bus stop the flex board announcing—‘Tourism Week Celebrations, *Karakulam* Panchayat’ was visible. 29\(^{th}\) August’ 2012 at 7 pm-Theyyam: *Radhakrishnan* and group was written at one corner.

I went to the *Kalagramam*’s auditorium\(^{45}\). The Theyyam performers are from *Kannur* district near a place called *Irverri*. Five of them. They are resting in the greenroom at the rear of the stage. Most of them are fast asleep. I asked for ‘*Ashokan*’\(^{46}\). He has not come. He has entrusted this Theyyam performance to us. The rain outside is unrelenting. One wonders if there will be a crowd waiting to see the Theyyam. The stage has been covered well with tarpaulin. The Theyyam can perform unaffected by the rain. Arrangements have been made to protect the crowds that come to see the Theyyam. They may not know of it so the turnout is likely to be poor. The *Kalagramam* secretary shared his fears with others in the organising team. Those providing light and sound fixtures are busy getting their last minute touches done. Chairs are being laid out. I went back to the greenroom, once again.

I asked the men working on the palm fronds which Theyyam they were getting these things ready for. ‘*Vanadevata*’, he responded. Wherein *Kannur* do you find the *kaavus* presenting this Theyyam, was my next question. ‘This is not performed in *kaavus*. Just a God of the forests. There is a mention of this in our Theyyam texts.’ He looked towards me trying to seek who am I. But, I

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\(^{44}\) It is a village Panchayat in *Nedumangad Taluk* of the *Thiruvananthapuram* district.

\(^{45}\) It is an arts and culture centre of the village panchayat.

\(^{46}\) It was one *Ashokan* and group who was expected to do the Theyyam, which was mentioned in the programme list of the Tourism Directorate, *Thiruvananthapuram*. 
conveyed that I was trying to learn and understand about Theyyam. ‘Which newspaper? Will it be carried in the Kannur edition?’. There was a tension in his voice. ‘No. Not in the Kannur newspapers’. I assured him. He continued working on the palm fronds and allowed me take pictures of the headgear.

'We do not take our Theyyam outside the confines of its traditional space.

Hence, we are presenting a form taking shape from our imagination, that’s all,’ he said.

In the pouring rain people have turned up to watch the Theyyam. Before the Theyyam appears, ten children will present a music programme. This would be followed by a formal inaugural. The Chief secretary of the Kerala state, Sri. K. Jayakumar (IAS), Krishnan Unni (IAS), Karakulam Chandran, and a member of the Nedumangad standing committee have arrived. This information has announced by the secretary of the kalagramam through the micro phone.

The Chief Secretary inaugurated the event, followed by other formalities. Finally, the Theyyam takes the stage. A Theyyam with a circular headdress resembling that of Rakta Chamundi is dancing in the halo of the oil lamp. The high pitched drumbeats have caught the interest of the viewers.

I felt that watching the Theyyam in an alien space was quite repulsive in appeal. Except keeping pace with the drumbeat there was nothing the performer could add from his side to the whole act. For that reason the repetitiveness was creating boredom. When the Theyyam appears on stage the spectators do not know the Theyyam nor the man behind the form. It is just a costumed form in aggressive mood dancing before them. The distance between the Theyyam and the viewer

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47 He thought of I am a journalist.
makes it impossible for the viewer to get a close-up view of the Theyyam’s make up, facial design
details etc. The Theyyam starts suddenly and concludes equally abruptly. When the secretary of
Kalagramam announces that the Theyyam is over, do people know that the event is done. The
secretary also announced that the group of artists are from Kannur and suddenly a voice in the
crowd is heard saying, ‘this is the Kannur lobby”.

The notice had mentioned that on 1st September at the Naattarangu venue on Kanakakunnu grounds. Andi Panikkar and his team would be presenting Theyyam. I decided to be there. I reached in the afternoon and located the members of the Theyyam troupe. I located Andi Panikkar and told him my requirement. He directed me to his son who was standing outside the palace building. I went there and met the son. The Theyyam team has come from Perambra, in Kozhikode district. Quite unlike earlier Theyyam dancers, Sivadasan, Andi Panikkar’s son was very enthusiastic in responding to my queries. He said:

"My father and I go to perform Theyyam these days. Earlier it was my father alone. Now he is not up to it. At 82, his knee and back trouble him, so he cannot stand for too long playing the drum nor can he stand dressed up as a Theyyam for long stretches of time. He is well known as a Theyyam performer since his youth. You can find out. C. K. Andi Panikkar is famous in our areas. When Gandhiji came to Vadakara, my father had welcomed

48 This comment was very contextual going by the news reports on the factionalism of the Communist Party of India Marxist in Kerala. News was highly sensitive towards the issue by dividing groups in to two. One constitute and led by leaders from Kannur district and other was by from south in the leadership of V.S Achuthanandan. Whatever may be its facts, this was continuously a news item in those days.
49 Kanakakunnu is situated about 800 meters north east of the Museum in the heart of Thiruvananthapuram city. There is a palace. It is called as Kanakakunnu palace, which is one of the last architectural vestiges of the colonial era. It was built by the Travancore king Sree Moolam Thirunal (1885-1924). Now it is maintained by the tourism department of the Kerala state and a avenue for conducting cultural meets and programs. The large area surrounding the palace has enough space to hold programmes and festivals.
50 Theyyam might have appeared out side the kaavu premises in these sorts of contexts. The Theyyam and its other varied forms was presented as part of political demonstrations along with other folk forms. It would display some part
the Mahatma in Theyyam costume. K. Karunakaran, (former Chief Minister) has offered him the ponnaada. When E. K. Nayanar was the Chief Minister he performed before him. On Republic Day he appeared on Marina Beach for the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Smt. Jayalalitha. Recently when V.S Achudanandan became Chief Minister, he appeared yet again. Kerala Folklore Academy Award, Kerala Sahitya Akademi Fellowship, are among the recognitions my father has received. The only regret is that he is yet to receive an award from the Central government. We have been coming to Thiruvananthapuram since 2005 to the Kanakakunnu Onam celebrations”.

Not only did he give his replies with utmost sincerity, he was proud and displayed an air of confidence about this role being hereditarily carried out. This made him stand apart from other Theyyam dancers.

When asked if the local community or owners of kaavus have expressed any reservation about moving out of traditional spaces with the Theyyam, he replied:

"Initially, there was resistance. But lot of cultural organisations sprang up in our locality. People like me became very active in all this. These organisation give importance to the changes happening in the present. That is how my daughters became the first girls to don the role of the Theyyam. Newspapers have given due coverage. My father and I get invited to a lot of events. We have done both Theyyam and thottam for Akaashavani (radio) and television. Theyyam, while it is performed in its traditional form in kaavus, my father is of the belief that there is no harm in doing the same beyond the kaavus. I have acted in plays which are set against the

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of costumes of the kolam and walk along the demonstrations. A proper form with its complete rituals and dances are absent in these sorts of public display, which happens later when it shifts from its traditional site to modern art-drama sites. Gandhi arrived at Vadakara in the year 1934 to mobilise money for harijan upliftment.
backdrop of the Theyyam. Some plays was staged at 400 venues and it also had a Theyyam”.

“A team had come from the United States to learn Theyyam, thottam and the drums. They had stayed with father for months to complete the training. The newspapers had carried reports on this. My father had taken sessions in Kavalam Narayana Panikkar’s theatre workshops (kalaris). Today I do it. These are held once a year. So also in the Calicut University’s School of Drama, both of us taught Theyyam. Since 2003 I am doing this. Have performed in many countries abroad—America, Bahrain, Oman—the local Malayala Samajams have organised Theyyam programmes. Since fronds were difficult to get in Oman, 40 bunches of tender palm fronds were airlifted from Kerala. Two years ago the Folklore Akademi gave a grant of a lac of rupees to perform in the Gulf. The then Akademi Secretary, A.K Nambiar accompanied us. As an offering for the Theyyam a small group of people gave an amount of Rs 40,000/-. Non Resident Malayalees are interested in such things”.

Sivadasan has very clear idea about this. While retaining the sanctity of the ritual as per the cherujanmam rights that are vested in them, he is of the confirmed opinion that social and individual bonds can be maintained through excursions beyond the conventional spaces, a point of view that sets Sivadasan apart. Through his close association with organisation at home he is able to extensively network beyond the traditional groups, and while sustaining that right to perform locally, he is able to tie up with theatre groups, study centres and perform without the burden of guilt, this is an approach that is maintained by Sivadasan. The practice is to invite applicants to pitch for opportunities to participate in the Onam celebrations by the tourism directorate. In the bargaining that takes place some secure the selection. This being the case,

51 An Indian dramatist, theatre director, and a poet.
Sivadasan’s team securing the chance for consecutive years is also a telling comment on his cultivating personal relationships which foster a healthy reputation for his group.

Two aspects contribute to create such success stories for a Theyyam dancers. Firstly, the relationship with cultural stars and leaders. They make a conscious effort to maintain the healthy relationship. Secondly, political parties and those local organisations including libraries supported by political parties. Through such art-cultural forums they receive connections that help them keep afloat. This enables the people concerned to keep alive Theyyam as a ritual and also product suited as a commodity for the art-tourism circuit, thus facilitating the Theyyam evolve in a manner closely linked to the contemporary trends. The spaces-venues alter according to the changes in the subjectivity of the dancer that enable him to incorporate with the altering ground situations.

With the entry of Theyyam into a space with a ‘market' air about it, the patronage of the Theyyam shifts from the feudal owner- Tharavadus to event managers and those engaged in transactions of culture. Folk arts centres and visual folk performing art forms become new institutions which take over the guardianship of the Theyyam. Theyyam performers carry out roles like the actors of theatre companies in different centres, based on written contract.

The biographical sketches of Kannan Peruvannan speak about the entry of the Theyyam into the arena and the market. From the ritual spaces to the performance arena he is able to relocate it, he explains the contexts in Chilambitta Ormakal52.

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52 A biography of the life of the Theyyam dancer which in a way become a biography of the Theyyam itself. See A Sreedharan Kuttamathu, Chilambitta Ormakal (Cochin: Kurukshetra Prakasan,1997).
The shift of the Theyyam from the kaavu and the stranglehold of the powerful castes to new spaces in the changed times is possible due to the formations of various arts and cultural centres. Such centres and groups sought to retain the traditional arts and its values and to make use of the socio-historical aspects from it to take the form forward. One such institution was the Kalaniketanam which took shape under the stewardship of one of the early scholars of Theyyam, K.K.N Kurup. Kannan Peruvannan was also active in this organisation, as can be understood from his biography.

Perhaps, the initial step of the Theyyam beyond its traditional space in its full package was taken by Kannan Peruvannan. We can spot portions in the biography which describe this:

“One day in August 1968 Kurup Master came with a piece of news. An invitation to perform at the Kerala Sangeet Natak Akademi in Thrissur has come for the Manual Committee. Theyyam, Poorakali and Kalampaattu have to be organised. The Theyyam Kathivannur Veeran and the performer, Peruvannan. Kurup Master looked at me with an explanation. Move away from the traditional space and perform on the stage! A thought that had not crossed my mind till that day! Unable to give an answer, totally confused, Kurup Master said, ‘with this our traditional belief systems do not get

53 This is an organisation meant to collect historical sources of north Malabar, including the oral literatures of Theyyam, which shed lights on aspects of the pasts. Kurup Master has formed a Manuel Committee for the institute that consists of A. Narayanan Master, Kodakat A. Sreedharan Master, Thimiri and Kurup Master himself. ib id. P.109. They also planned to conduct studies on the Theyyam and therefore, Kannan Peruvannan's role was duly recognised.

54 It was K.K.N Kurup, a historian of cult history who has written on Theyyam, firstly in English with a substantial content. It got wider acceptance and popularity to the form. Subsequently lots of writings on Theyyam start appearing on the news papers and magazines. The department of public relations of the government of Kerala also bring forth books and pamphlets on the form and its varied aspects. See K.K.N Kurup, Theyyam: A Ritual Dance of Kerala (Thiruvananthapuram: Department of Public Relations, Government of Kerala,1985). The text as it is published by the Government, it got a status of authentic legitimacy and became a principal source for others who used these texts to fill their web columns and thus the creation of many websites. To get these aspects of cyber-Teyyam and its digital veneration, see V.Dinesan, Theyyam: The Poises, 201-218.

55 It is an institution established on 26 April 1958, inaugurated by then Indian Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. It was instituted with an aim to develop Kerala specific dance, drama and music.
shattered. We need not perform any of the rituals that imbue the godliness to the Theyyam. The form and its rhythm are all that is intended to be presented”.

Kannan Peruvannan’s initial reluctance was because he was alert to the possible reactions from the local community and his own castes if he was to initiate the change—to take the Theyyam from its hallowed spaces to alien performing prosceniums. Those were times, even after post-independence, when the kaavu owners of the dominant Tharavadus still hold patronage of conducting the Theyyam festivals in its local area could impose a stricture and disallow Kannan Peruvannan from performing the Theyyam. Further his emotional bonding with the Theyyam was also creating a dilemma for him personally. However, Kathivannur Veeran was performed at the Sangeet Natak Akadami’s venue in Thrissur.

The Theyyam performing communities have their own personal conflicts to cope with when they move to appear as Theyyam in areas which do not fall under the jurisdiction of their own cherujanmam. In such a situation Kannan Peruvannan would have found this excursion of the Theyyam to Thrissur as a violation of customs and ritual traditions which have been maintained over generations. A form of worship that was nurtured and maintained by earlier generations was now being projected as a marketable commodity, and this aberration is a constant source of mental tension among the performing communities.

56 These sorts of prohibition from conducting traditional rights is still be practiced in many parts of north Malabar. The dancers who exercise their individual freedom in articulating their right to get adequate wages and demanding equal treatment from the kaavus owners usually being part of these subjugation and practices of the past. This is called as ooru vilakku, means preventing ritual practices of certain member or castes in such and such locality and kaavus. As the dancers are very marginal in number in a locality, mostly subjugated to these social conditions without resistance.

57 A warrior kolam who is believed to be originated from Kathivannur in Coorg or Kodagu, presently an administrative district in Karnataka state. This form is mostly worshiped by the Thiyyas. For mythical background and photographic plates, see Rajagopalan and Komath, Theyyam: The Other Gods, 52-53.
A Theyyam dancer who is a regular, performing Theyyam outside the the *kaavu*, in newly emerging venues opined that⁵⁸:

"I go outside and perform Theyyam. There is nothing wrong in it. Yet, from the recesses of my mind there is a question that arises – am I doing the right thing?".

The *Vannan* and the *Malayan* who performs Theyyam does get the respect and status of a special kind from the local people. I mean they consider them as an asset of the society and a member who appear before their ritual needs. They call these members as *Panikkar*, *Perumalayan* and *Peruvannan* etc., even though these titles may not be granted on the traditional lines. It implying that the Theyyam dancer of the land and its people. Such an honour or consideration sometimes value too much by these members because they are otherwise not so important in the social and political scenario of the locality. These honour that comes from the community may no more be theirs if the Theyyam performer moves away from the ritual spaces, the respect and humility may no more be shown to their lot. This is ample reason to deter the performers from moving out of their regular traditionally assigned spaces. This is a kind of social pressure that these castes generally face and this is intrinsically deny their mobility to go ahead with their personal wish and interest. This is a peculiar internalisation of social structures. Thereby, they are not able to come out of the traditional ritual ties of the *cherujanmam* rights and obligations.

⁵⁸ Interview with Pramod Panicker, Mattanur, Kannur District on 22 August 2012.
Pramod Panikkar remembers a Vannan Theyyam dancer who violated his cherujanmam status and performed outside, describes thus:

"In the Mattanur desam the Malayans were stopped from donning Theyyam. The then dominant feudal family enjoyed this power. When Theechamundi had to be performed, the question arose as to who would take on that duty. Theechamundi is performed by the Malayan castes. When the Panikkar honorific is given to a Malayan this happens to be among the significant Theyyams they are assigned. A suggestion arose that the Vannan caste can take over the task, to which the response was that since this is traditionally the forte of the Malayans, it could not be passed on to any other. Since the Vannan was appearing as Theyyam for many years it was decided that they be permitted to do the Theechamundi also. It is but natural that the Malayan who enjoys the cherujanmam rights would be affected by the decision. The Vannan appeared as Theechamundi. He fell on the meleri (fire) and two of his toes got singed in the fire. Over a period the sore spread and the limb had to be amputated. He himself believes that this happened because he appeared as Theechamundi violating the customary right of the Malayans. In a programme telecast on the Television Channel on a programme titled ‘Viswasichaalam Illenkilum’ (believe it or not) he explained this.

In case of any violation of the socio-cultural role of the Theyyam, it is finally the will of god that prevails and this belief enables the Theyyam to rise from its established instilled spaces. The

59 Pramod Panikkar is a Theyyam dancer from Mattanur, Kannur who was also one among the group of Theyyam dancers performed at Kanakakkunu palace ground in Thiruvananthapuram. I met him there and he has been a principal source for my queries. Though he was reluctant in the beginning, slowly participated and cooperated in my research work. I visited him at his house and participated in Theyyam dances there. He was a key informant and his role is evident in writing about a Theyyam festival in the proceeding part of this chapter.

60 This is a fire jumping Theyyam hence the prefix ‘Thee’ (fire in Malayalam) to the Chamundi’s name. A huge bundle of fire woods will be set fire. Four or five assistants will be helping the Theyyam to jump and take away from the fire pit. This is a very tough but prestigious Theyyam as it deals with fire. Most of the dancers who don these deities used to suffer from the fire and subsequently become unhealthy in early ages.

61 Excerpts from the Interview with Pramod Panikkar, Mattanur, Kannur District, field-note dated 22 August 2012.
historically entrenched belief systems get disturbed when the Theyyam is geographically relocated its footprints transferred to a fresh locale and the internal conflict that shadows every Theyyam dancer who has to face such a situation. While the point that the Theyyam identifies itself with time and space is accepted, the dynamics that exists among performing communities, the kaavus, the members of the tharavadu is also recognised. That is the reason for a ban being imposed on the dancer who leaves home territory or his own kaavu. It states that the mentality of the dancer and hosts of the Theyyam, are fully not come out from the mindset which is legitimated by traditional customs and beliefs. An element of these pre-modern features are still prevalent among the moral community of the Theyyam. And the specific reasons for these features are many:

a) The Kathivannur Veeran that is performed in certain Thiyya homes is not just a Theyyam, it is considered to be the return of their ancestral. Wayanaatu Kulavan is their ‘Thondachan’. At a time when mastery over the bow and arrow for hunting was considered solely the right of the Nair escorts the challenge came from Wayanaatu Kulavan who asserted his skill with the same. The Theyyam dancers could take this Theyyam to other places because they hold the view that once the element of faith is removed, then what remains is just the decorative elements. There are

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62 This is a hunter/hero Theyyam. This Theyyam perform a rite called Bapidal, which means the hunted animals would be cooked in front of the kaavu and this will be distributed as prasadam to the devotees. This form is widely seen in the kaavus of Kannur, Kanhangad, Nileswaram and Kasaragod. The ritual of hunting has been subjected to hard debate by the environmentalists who argue that in the background of this hunting ritual, so many enter into the forest and shoot and kill the animals in abundance which was otherwise prevented by the law of the land. Thus, the sacred spaces of the Theyyam comes in conflict with the conservative spaces of the forest department. Government of Kerala. This issue is still continue to be a major conflict between owners of the kaavu, environmentalists and the forest officials. See E. Unnikrishnan,"Namuku Nere Nam Choondunna Nayatu Thokkukal," Mathrubhumi Weekly, 26 April-2May 2009, 8-19; Ambika Sudhan Mangad, "Nayatu: Drushyavum, Adrushyvum;" Mathrubhumi Weekly, 24 May 2009, 69-73. Forest Department of Kerala state annually conducts workshops to make awareness of forest protection in the context of worshipping this Theyyam and its hunting. I was also invited to make a talk on the aspects of ritual and the need of the contemporary. The meeting came to end in conflicting voices and many has raised their voice in favour of and in against the hunting. Extracts from the field-notes from one day workshop titled Wayanatu Kulavan and The rite of Bapidal, conducted by Kerala Government, Forest and Wild Life Department on 03.03.2007, Kanhangad. To view photographic plates of the kolam, See Rajagopalan and Komath, Theyyam: The Other Gods,135.
however, many who refuse to perform this Theyyam beyond the precincts of the *kaavu* and rituals. Because it is mythically and emotionally integral to the *kaavu* owners, especially the *Thiyyas* who practice these rituals and see it as their worship of god.

b) When Theyyam that is propitiated in their *kaavus* travel to New Delhi, Goa, Chennai, Mumbai and Kuwait the belief is that their Theyyam is being taken out of the *kaavu*, for which restrictions can be imposed. The *kaavu* owners would be a dominant caste in the locality and whereas the families of the Theyyam dancers would be very few. The dominance of this sort of social capital compels to Theyyam community to bow to the decision of the upper caste families-*tharavad-* conducting the Theyyam.

c) When the Theyyam is taken to the ‘market place’ it is not done so by the head of the community, is something one has to take note of. The people behind it are event managers, organising committees or tourist centres. The Theyyam dancing castes never appear as part of such set ups. The arrival of organisers with a capital is a new feature in the Theyyam’s affairs, something that is made possible as a combining of the new times and changing venues which in create a space for Theyyam the ‘commodity.’ Most of the dancers who don Theyyam outside says that the new venue itself is alienated to them so feel uncomfortable. But, few others were able to overcome these culture shock and tap venues to perform it as an art form.

d) The aspects of credibility, political leanings, sanctity and sacredness that is present in the Theyyam dancing groups and the dominant families and castes makes the moral community of Theyyam divisive. There is a large majority who believe that ‘Theyyam is God’ and that the “*kaavu* is a sanctified space’. There are others who maintain that it is a part of the feudal
establishment. This opinion could also be observed from both the groups—The dancing groups and its hosts-. The differences of positions are so persistent.

A bank employee who dons Theyyam during the season said this:

"The envy borne out of the Theyyam community moving out of the traditional spaces and prospering is what makes the upper castes take a stubborn stand that the Theyyam should not move out of its hereditary space".

A major issue that rises in such discourses is—who is the rightful owner of the Theyyam?. *Muchilottu Bhagawati* is a Theyyam of the Vaniyars. *Kshetrapalakan* of the Nairs, *Muthappan*, *Thondachan*, *Kathivanur Veeran* of the Thiyyas. Are they the owners of the Theyyam? This debate is pronounced with the Theyyam moving away from its traditional spaces.

The Theyyam dancers has a significant role in preparing the Theyyam: the face painting, the use of tender palm fronds for costume, other accessories are his own. The *thottampaattu* is also vested in his own hands with its rhythms. But the *aarudam* (origins, or fount), its sanctity drawn from practices of faith, the garnering of believers, are all rooted in the *kaavu*. Both these are integral and important for the Theyyam. Only when they remain free from mutually exploiting one another, only then can it survive free from contest-conflict in present times.

The Theyyam appear in the ‘market’ is owned by various agencies. Since they pay the Theyyam dancer according to the nature of the programme which is driven by market forces, rates or prices fixed for the Theyyam will be high and it is also said that those with visibility in the public spaces receive greater recognition. The changing times and social set up also facilitates a conflicts on
the question again who is the owner of the form. When a form transfer from a community generated worship pattern to the present lays out free and individual oriented structure, the discourse of conflicting forces who determine the ownership of the form does not conclude.

I have the experience of having performed a Theyyam outside the kaavu. When I was at the Centre for Development Studies [CDS] in Thiruvananthapuram doing my M Phil in Economics, I got the opportunity to perform at the Vyloppilly Samskriti Bhavan. Putting down that experience may bring forth the potency of the Theyyam and how it come along with me as a patrimony.

A senior and a friend of mine at the CDS told me that Invis Multi Media was interested in producing a CD on the Theyyam. Initially, I was not too excited about the prospects but later they got in touch and explained the whole situation. Whatever I get as remuneration out of this performance will be a help for me to pursue my course and stay at Thiruvananthapuram. A thought of means of existence at that time in a distant place like Thiruvananthapuram was flashing in the back of the mind. After going with studies, my attention was primarily turned to attain education and my Theyyam dancing had got only secondary preference. It is both a challenge and an opportunity, which was my thinking at those moments.

Since I had always performed in a kaavu, I had my apprehensions about appearing outside the kaavu. What if, my elders did not grant the permission? Secondly, the energy, enthusiasm and confidence for the performance is derived from the local milieu and its culture. The role of genuine assistants and devotees are very important. There is the concept of ‘koodiparichayam’.

63 A multi purpose cultural complex with a grand spaces to perform both traditional and classical art forms. It is an institution under the department of culture, Government of Kerala. It act as a research, documentation, performance and preservation center for cultural traditions of Kerala. It is situated in the capital city of Thiruvananthapuram.
which means the confidence derive from the familiarity of the co-assistants and practicing Theyyam with a familiar groups endows the man taking on the role of the Theyyam with the confidence and energy. Or else it would be a disturbed mental state. Mental harmony between these co-assistants and viewers makes a dancer to take the role of a deity.

I reminded of these aspects of the dancing. When I decided to appear as Vishnumurthi in the kaavu my elder brother had some reservations. This created an unease in me. When I stood up, after the face painting, wearing the headdress etc., my body started sweating profusely, a fear that rose from a feeling of isolation and the resulting fear. Only if the community, family, the co-assistants, those who own the kaavu, come together as one in the act of presenting the Theyyam, only then will the performer attain that superhuman-close to God power that helps him attain the state of being Theyyam.

A major source of strength and energy to perform the Theyyam is drawn by the dancer from his kin, the family. Those who perform in the kaavu usually go as a family. Father, mother, sister, brothers, offspring's of the uncle (father’s brother), usually form a group. Those related through blood ties are the ones who perform and for this reason there is a security that comes when the preparation, make up etc are done by close relatives. This sensibility is never present when the Theyyam is performed outside the kaavu.

I shared the anxieties and problems to my friends at CDS that face the Theyyam dancer. Some felt the urge to know about the Theyyam and see it. These are months after the MPhil coursework. There is no fellowship available at this time. So, I was in a tight corner, financially. After much thought I decided to perform the Theyyam.
The questions that troubled me related to the usual one regarding the Theyyam being seen outside its native spaces. On 22nd June, 2002 I went to the Invis Multi Media’s office. I got an advance of Rs 15,000/, signed a stamped receipt/agreement. Among other terms of the agreement was the commitment to pay the remaining Rs 15,000/ after the performance. The terms were:

a) The first party shall have exclusive right over the recorded programme (its video, audio recording and still photographs) and is entitled to use it in any form and style as they wish for their business purposes.

b) The second party has the right to perform the same programme for any other person without affecting the rights of the first party over the recorded programme.

c) The first party shall pay a consideration of Rs. 30, 000/- (Rupees Thirty Thousand Only) of which Rs. 15, 000 towards remuneration and Rs. 15,000 towards expenses incurred for the programme including his associates if any, participating in/or assisting the performance of the second party in any manner.

d) The consideration will be paid in two installments of RS. 15, 000 each and the first installment will be paid before the programme and the last installment within 60 days from the date of the programme.

I informed my brother about the terms under which we had to perform for company. My brother only looked at it as a new experience. When my father was informed, he also expressed interest in coming to Thiruvananthapuram they arranged for the make up, accessories and others to support the event.

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64 The Agreement is executed on the 26th Day of June, 2002 by and between M/s INVIS Group of institutions, a group of companies comprising of Invis InfoTech Private Ltd, Invis MultiMedia Private Limited and Invis Multimedia, engaged in multimedia and software businesses and production of VCDs, CD ROMs etc. with its registered office at 15, Vridavan, Pattom Thiruvananthapuram-695 004, represented by the chief executive officer of the group of institutions, (herein after referred to as the ‘First Party’ which expression shall include its successors and assigns) and Mr. Rajesh Komath.
My treatise for MPhil too is on Theyyam. I informed my research guides about the performance. They were happy to hear it. A brochure on the performance was designed. I invited all those in the CDS for the show.

Vyloppilly Samskriti Bhavan is a major area for art and cultural events in Kerala. The structure resembles a koothambalam\textsuperscript{65}. A square stage. Behind that the greenroom. The viewers sit in front of or on either side of the stage.

My father, brother, the person doing the face painting, and a priest and the drummers arrived. At the venue they chose the area where the lamp would be lit before an imagined sacred space. Although the ritual in its totality could not be presented but some of the basic elements have to be included was my father’s opinion and those of the others. I did not hold a different point of view. The manner in which the stage could be decorated with palm fronds, how to start the performance and whether the thottam had to be recited were points to ponder on. I thought of performing outside the kaavu is difficult because we need to think about all minute points which is otherwise taken for granted.

I also realised that doing a Theyyam outside the kaavu was a rather difficult thing. The space available for performance was limited. For this very reason the movement of the Theyyam would get restricted. In place of the Theyyam moving about among the viewers and also going through the movements, the Theyyam here would perform before a group of spectators seated on chairs, and this would drain the life giving energy of the performance, I felt. Such stages do not pose a problem for Kathakali, Koodiyattam, Ottam Thullal, because this sort of stage is specifically made

\textsuperscript{65} It means temple theatre, which is a closed hall for staging temple centered art forms such as Koothu, Koodiyattam etc. Vyloppilly Samskriti Bhavan is built in these model.
to such a way to suit these forms. A structured art form with every step followed to the core, combining with expressions to enhance the performance are unaffected by the limitations of space, but, a popular form like Theyyam this proves a limitation.

When this idea started dominating my thoughts, the energy to perform Theyyam dwindled. By then some of my friends who studies at School of Drama, Thrissur came over to watch the performance. Once they took personal interest in making arrangements I found myself regaining the positive energy for a performance. As theatre students, they conceived these as a performance and this notion has also passed to me without saying. From a Theyyam dancer from a north Kerala kaavu I found my mental state alter into that of one doing a performing art form and this helped me overcome the mental crisis.

I lay down to the right of the stage in a manner such that the face painting being done on me could be seen. There were many photographers gathered around, clicking away as the process progressed. There were many who formed a queue and moved on as they had got a glimpse of the face-painting being done. Camera men came to fix huge lights. The owner of the company was trying to complete the arrangements. For my classmates this was a totally new experience. Those who knew little about the Theyyam got to see the minutest details of the form shaping up before their eyes.

The sun had set. In such a performance arena there really was no relevance for the thottam, in the ritual being recreated here, but since my father desired that it be done, I followed suit. By then those I had invited, and many who I had not invited turned up at the koothambalam. Four men were playing the thayambakka with all the enthusiasm. The main person at the drum was a police
official. After the drumbeats, the invocation was chanted, I offered flowers and rice into the fire and performed as Vishnumurthi. After a short spell of low beat the dance would gain tempo. Thus, half forgetting myself and otherwise I danced to a frenzied pitch, which was really a tiring experience. The fact is that most of the thing I shows and dances would not be communicated to the audience. This realisation while performing is a tough moment. Because I was continuously reinventing and reenacting myself to catch the attention of the audience. This event was reported by the Hindu with a title--Straddling Two Worlds.

After this stage performance I was convinced and experienced that such a space was not suited for Theyyam. In the Theyyakaavu, it is a coalescing of the energies created by the owner, the oracle, the viewers and the Theyyam. Here, it is confined to the creativity of the individual thus reducing it from its large canvas which encapsulates a whole belief system to a mere performance. In a cultural transaction these performances have a utility value, as a product and most suited for such venues. To shoot and record a Theyyam in such spaces is more manageable.

A large number of institutions of various nature are emerging to promote cultural heritage as artifacts and thus channelise folk art forms into a commercially viable product. Greenix in Fort Kochi is an example of such resorts turning into heritage hotels set up as private enterprises, other than folklore academies established with the support of the Government, and the rural

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67 They advertise their programmes through a brochure titled as Kerala’s only cultural arts village, in which particular spaces are devoted as dance theatres and cultural museum. See Greenix Village: The Show Book, Journey into ancient art forms. To get a picture of transformation of these old godowns as new centres of culture and heritage, see Santhi R, Transformation of Space: A Case Study of Fort Cochin, Unpublished MPhil Dissertation, (Kottayam: School of Social Sciences, Mahatma Gandhi University, 2012), 72-76.
cultural groups that are formed with their assistance. An old tea warehouse of here is transformed into a place where Kerala’s exclusive art forms are presented. There are artistes on the rolls. Apart from Kathakali, Mohiniyattaom, Kalaripayattu, Ottam Thullal, and the Theyyam also is given a lot of importance. Entry is by tickets. The first item of the evening is Kathakali on a specially erected stage. The different bhavas/rasa (main facial expressions of artiste) of Kathakali are demonstrated and explained to the audience. After the navarasas and twenty four mudras, he would display sunlight, moon deer, river, fish, the bee sucking honey from the lotus etc. The permanent artistes present the main features of stories. Kathakali is followed by Theyyam. The bearded Kuttichathan, its halo and a small crown above the panel on the head comes on stage through a Kalari manoeuvre, the only six spectators including me on one day, some businessmen from north India are also present. After the performance each of the viewers was invited on the stage and blessed by the Theyyam, who also posed for photographs with those who were interested.

Other than rural arts the outfit offers Ayurvedic treatment, accommodation and a dental clinic. As permanent artistes of this establishment, they get invited for presenting performances in other hotels and cultural clubs. For instance, Taj Hotel in Kochi. Foreigners hold the hands of the performers and get themselves photographed for which, the artiste told me they are given ‘tips’. When performed in a hotel Theyyams get ‘tips’ instead of offerings. The ‘tips’ are pooled and

68The village demonstrate all these arts forms with a specific mode of performance which describes what the form is and it is well portrayed in their show book. Kathakali—Significance of its incredible make-up; Kerala natanam—A dance drama with religious connotations; Mohiniyattam—An art form of extraordinary grace and elegance; Ottan Thullal—A mono-play with an epi-cal touch; Kolkali—A dance form with a social significance; and the Theyyam—an ancient art of Northern Kerala are sequence they follow in order to introduce the rich cultural heritage of Kerala.

69Mudras are a form of sign language used to tell the story.

70My visit to attend the programme on 12 May, 2010.

71Greenix has appointed employees for conducting these performances. They sell tickets and release advertisements in the newspapers.
shared by all the artistes. Another interesting aspect is that the performance is not by those who traditionally perform the Theyyam. Any artiste who can perform or play the drum will do. This indicates the individual-centric activities in the culture industry. These institutions project staging Theyyam along with Kathakali, Mohiniyattam and Koodiyattam, as re-incarnating of traditional art. The transformation that Theyyam undergoes when it becomes a cultural product can be examined in the light of the change in the material used for make up. If it is the paste of raw rice that Theyyam’s use in kaavus for smearing the white colour, in Greenix it is white powder blended in coconut oil. Collyrium or black powder is used instead of ink-paste-mashikoottu. Traditionally chayiliyam is used for the red colour but here it is red kumkum powder. And turmeric powder in place of manayola. The instrument for fine drawing on the face is in brushes here instead of the spine of palm fronds. Thus the dies and chemicals available in the market provide the colour for the Theyyam. These changes impart freedom to the performer to improvise by ignoring the traditional systems and practices, and overlooking caste-based roots.

The main consumers of this cultural heritage show produced within the ambit of the culture industry are excursion groups of both domestic and foreign origin. Some of these institutions have an extensive chain of agents who bring such groups. I understood from the conversation I had with the artistes and other employees that Greenix also functions on these network of agencies as a chains linking tourists as customers of their cultural productions.

For instance, if a group of tourists come to Kochi from Delhi or France they would do so through travel agencies with whom these institutions would have a tie up. The travel agency in Delhi would get in touch with their counterpart in Kochi and inform them about the impending visit by the group. The Kochi based agency would strike deals with hotels with such cultural shows,
incorporating Theyyam and other art forms in the Kochi tourism package. The foundation of this culture industry is a chain formed by travel agencies in the place or the country where tourist groups originate. The bargaining indulged in by different agencies would have a major role in determining the remuneration paid for a Theyyam performance, thus making it possible to position it as a cultural product. It is also evident that the production and consumption of Theyyam is a link in the larger economic transaction that Tourism is.

**Summary**

The purpose of this part of the chapter is that to portray experiences of dancing Theyyam in the domain of cultural transactions. It draws the experiences, not only the autoethnographer but also others who become part of cultural productions of the Theyyam outside the kaavu. What are those experiences, what the dancers of the Theyyam say about the movement of Theyyam from kaavu to other spaces, what they felt while being part of it has been traced in communion with the experiences of the self. Writing about these aspects of cultural transactions has been drawn widely on the interviews and discussions with other performers and owners of the kaavu with an autoethnographic narrative of the self in hand. Thus, the writing of these experiences has been, in way, smoothly mixed with the method of fieldwork, ethnography and autoethnography with a broader political economy insights of shifting economies and spaces of the Theyyam.

How the Theyyam as a ritual and art in its later venerations are encountered in various spaces and how it is possible in a given context of time has been the key aspect I described in this section, which legitimize the potency of the Theyyam incorporating changing nature of time and space. The social process that led to commoditisation, and its experiential venues, and
consequent uses of the Theyyam as an image, forms etc., as an icon of culture and a symbol for political parties propaganda, its appearance as an item for Onam celebrations in southern parts of Kerala, explains the changing nature of subjectivity of the performer as well as the dilemma he is encountered when the Theyyam is taken away from its traditional roots are the processes that modify and reinvent the Theyyam. While writing aspects of change in ritual spaces, it bring forth in the lime light that the traditional sacred map of cherujanmam and the notion over its working still have a marking presence in the thinking of the dancers as well as the kaavu authorities. The biographical sketches of Kannan Peruvannan and his travel towards various spaces as the Theyyam and the I narrative of the researcher bring forth the aspects of dilemma a Theyyam dancer encounters in the shifting spaces of the Theyyam. At the same time, there are performers who do Theyyam both at its traditional sacred spaces as well as in modern sites without having a mental block as it is well managed by them. It opens a way to argue that there are Theyyam dancers who could adapt and assimilate themselves according to the time and space without any traditional barriers, rather who could use their hereditary assets to improve their status in society. But at the same time there are others, who still find difficulty to adjust with the changing vicissitudes of contemporary social process associated with the traditional cultural forms. This is more important as it locate social changes through the lens of a ritual form in social spaces where old customs and traditions have been entrenched for centuries.
Part III

When the Village Gods Enter Urban Spaces

The 2011 Christmas-New Year celebrations was witness to the Grand Kerala Shopping Festival between 25 December and 4 January jointly sponsored by Kerala Kaumudi, a leading news paper group, Josco Jewellers (gold traders) and the Government of Kerala, extending across all districts for 11 days. The Kanakakunnu palace ground was the venue for the shopping festival at Thiruvananthapuram. I was drawn to the festival venue because I came to know of Theyyam being performed. Certain questions arose in my mind when I came to know of this venue, a shopping festival, as the space for performing the Theyyam: what would be the form and function of the performance and the arrangements made for the ‘space’ to be used for the Theyyam? What happens to the Theyyam dancer and the ritual when there is a relocation of this kind? How do the visitors to the fair view the Theyyam in a commercial space? What I attempted to do was to find out first hand information from the Theyyam dancers, the organisers of the Theyyam, the managers of the shopping festival how they brought the Theyyam to Thiruvananthapuram.

I set apart all my evenings during the festival period to explore the venue from the many angles mentioned above. The panchavadyam ensemble at the entrance to the palace grounds is what greets you to the venue. The inaugural fell on Christmas day, which was a holiday and therefore had drawn large crowds. Entry to the festival is ticketed at thirty rupees. The venue has been lit up with decorative lights and festoons, and flex boards dot the grounds. Large hoardings of advertisements by the sponsors Josco Jewellery and Kerala Kaumudi had also been placed all over.

72It means an orchestration with five instruments.
Toy trains, merry-go-rounds and similar set ups for joy rides to attract children, tattoo experts, stalls which familiarise the *adivasi* tradition to the urban crowds, their hamlets, the *machaan*-tree house, the farm patch, the worship spot beneath a tree, *adivasi* herbal medicine etc., were on display. Continuous rows of stalls with wares for sale, in fact the festival was a place which explored the marketability of products and transformed the marketing into a festival. One gets the feeling that any thing under the sky would be available at the festival—a grand display of aspects of cultures and commodities inside a vast compound of the palace premises.

To the rear of the palace grounds a space is being set up to serve as the Theyyam’s sacred space. A thatched shed to situate the god is being put in place. The square space that signifies the ‘thara’ (*sthanam*) in the kaavu has a roof designed like the shamianas prepared for weddings. There were fifteen Theyyam artistes present to don Theyyam at the Festival.

Close to the *Theyyathara* was a makeshift *aniyara*, the greenroom made by cordoning off a space with white cloth. Those entering this area had to remove their footwear. I too entered the *aniyara*. There were six or seven Theyyam artistes inside, setting and sorting out the properties and preparing the *aniyara* for the Theyyam. The little bells for the headgear, *choodakam*, outer coverings, the powders for face make up, colours all set in a ready to use manner. The place was crowded with photographers. They were in position to record every stage in the Theyyam, beginning with the make up till the final performance. The *Kerala Kaumudi*’s videographer is in a

dominating mode (he belongs to one of the sponsoring groups), instructing those who did not remove the footwear to do so, continuing with his task along with all this. I observed the effort he was taking to take shots of every line that was being added to the Theyyam artiste, from head to foot. In the midst of all this, other photographers were taking up varying positions, some sitting, some lying low, yet others standing, freezing on frame every minor element in the process of donning facial make up as well as the outer trappings.

The Theyyam artiste is not too pleased with this manner of intruding into his space while the make up is being done, all consider him an object and do not find it necessary to take permission, nor, even try to communicate a 'with your permission' visible in the body language of any of the photographers and videographers. He however maintains silent.

I tried making conversation with the men who were working on the tender palm fronds being prepared for Theyyam. They were from places like Kannur, Mattanur and Iritty. On this day it was the Karuvaal Bhagavati and Kuttichathan Theyyams that were set to appear. "is this not the season when Theyyams are held in kaavus at home in the north Kerala districts?" I enquired. "Yes. But when we were invited here we came away", responded one of the men.

Self: Who?

One of them pointed out and said, "There, that person. He has worked for the Asianet TV Channel. Now he runs his own music troupe. He is the one who invited us. We have known him since our childhood days."

Self: Does he belong to the Theyyam community?

"No. He is a Thiyya."
He was busy around setting up the performing space for the Theyyam. "Coconut oil has not arrived", "Some more tender palm fronds are needed", He … was speaking on the telephone.

In some time somebody turned up with coconut oil and the palm fronds.

I spoke to him so that I could elicit more information regarding the Theyyam being conducted on the Kannakunnu palace grounds.

"I was a filmmaker. But now I’m not associated what I was trained for. I was interested in music, very early in life. Learnt some music. Now, I manage my own music troupe. I am the event director of this programme"

In the midst of all this, he was passing instructions to other Theyyam artistes and those who were lighting up the Theyyam ‘spaces to dance’.

"There is need for a light behind the banyan tree. Then on the pillars behind the palace, on every tree large lights have to be placed".

The arrangements were akin to preparing the sets for a film shoot. Interrupting him, the Kerala Kaumudi photographer walked up to say:

"In the direction diametrically opposite to the palliyara a large light has to be positioned". Only then can we get the picture on camera....."

Recreating the ‘palliyara’ here, an oil lamp is burning and in front of it a ‘bhandaram’ (a box to drop cash offerings) has been placed--an aluminum vessel with ‘bhandaram’ inscribed on it. The vessel is swathed in red cloth.
I responded to the event director’s query about my identity with ‘researcher’. His question did put me in a fix. If I am to reveal my true identity there was every chance that I would not get appropriate answers to my questions, hence, my decision to introduce myself as a one researching on Theyyam. It had been my experience in my village to be told, "You know all this", and my questions became damp squibs. I had felt that in my role of researcher, I need not reveal my status of being a Theyyam dancer myself.  

I asked the event director, "Which are the Theyyams that will be appearing here?"

Event Director: "All the major Theyyams."

Self: "Back home each Theyyam is performed by a particular castes?"

Event Director: "It is the same here. They are persons associated with the kaavu tradition of performing Theyyam. Moreover, all discipline associated with the customs and rituals are being followed here. That, is what makes the Theyyam performance here special".

It was time for the Theyyam to take up position in the performing space. Others are getting ready for their turn. The face-painting and body painting of the Kuttichathan is being done in the greenroom. Circular motifs are being placed on torso using a wooden mould which contains the rice flour. In the midst of all this, a Theyyam with the headgear, face smeared with turmeric and wrapped appeared in red cloth or pattu has entered the arena. This is the vellattam form of

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74 If I reveal my status as a Theyyam dancer and a member of those castes, there is a high chance that he will not fully open his heart on the aspects related to the conduction of the festival. Rather he may try to avoid my queries and may instruct others too, not to encourage my questions and comments. There were lots of moments that the kaavu owners withdraw their corporation in getting details of the kaavu, old account book of the festivals etc., when they came to know that I also belong to a Theyyam dancing family. In such cases, I have sent my friends who are unfamiliar to the places where kaavu is situated and friends belong to other castes to get details. But, there is a huge difference in getting details directly from the people and getting it indirectly. But, in such cases, I do not have other options. There are moments of disadvantage as insider of the community and locality also.
Karuvaal Bhagavati. In place of the traditional sacred seat two large stools have been placed. This will not be a convenient seating arrangement for the Theyyam. With its slender legs the stool may not be too secure for the Theyyam to stand on and move to the beat and rhythm of the music. The stool has been draped with a red pattu. The kolakaran places crisscross spathes of banana leaf on the stool while chenda moving to the music, placing betel nut and betel leaves as a manner of paying obeisance to the scared seat. The belief is that this is performed as a manner of bowing to the goddess who is supposed to be present before the glowing lamp inside the palliyara.

The Theyyam’s performing space is the grassy patch before the palliyara. The event director uses his hands to mark out the space for the performance, in a way communicating to the Theyyam artiste the space that is available for him. ‘This much space’—the Theyyam artiste and the man playing the drums understands it. I also gauged the approximate length and breadth. From the moment the Theyyam started moving in the space, the spectators who crowded around the area blurred the demarcation that had been defined by event director and the sanctified space was being violated. People had started getting closer to the Theyyam with the footwear on. The event director was seen appealing every person who stepped into the arena to keep off and for a short while seemed deterred from moving ahead: They’d move out of the imagined sanctified space leave the footwear and then enter the crowd. Since this effort of checking every person was proving burdensome, he entrusted some others with the task of keeping a check on the crowd movement. Three people then continued to maintain a watch on the gathered crowds by standing three different corners of the space.
People who were ignorant about the sanctity of the dancing space of the Theyyam were in reality violating the imagined purity or sacredness assigned to the area of Theyyam's performance. Besides, the place was crowded with photographers and videographers. Those who gained access up close to the Theyyam in the success of having secured a good pose of the Theyyam, seemed to forget the fact that they were stepping into inviolable space, when they moved nearer to the Theyyam wearing their shoes. They were a little uncomfortable when asked to remove their shoes and socks, but finally did concede to the request.

The Theyyam's movement had gathered tempo, moving in frenzy to the rhythmic beats of the drumbeats, as if in a trance. The Karuvaal Theyyam in its minor state gradually withdrew into the aniyara, and a silence suddenly descended on the area.

This was followed by the arrival of the Kuttichathan Theyyam. The kaavus follow the practice of the arrival of Kuttichathan being preceded by the vellattam. But, it was the Kuttichathan Theyyam in all the regalia that stepped into the arena. He was led by two assistants who held both his arms and helped him raise himself on the stool. He then starts narrating, chanting, and reciting the thottam, describing the form of the chathan and the stories that are linked to the myths of the Kuttichathan.

The thottam describes the Kuttichathan's travels through Kaallakaadu, Kaattumaadam, Kambaraparameswaram, Kandamangalyam, Neenduthadam, Meppad, Keepad, Arupaattipatteri, Arivin pattathiri, Noyyaoth, Karimaarath 75. After traversing Eruvanaad, Kumbranaad,

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75 All the thottam songs of each form of Theyyam has a narration of the Theyyam's travel to various sacred places and sthanams. From where and in which tharavadu that the form first emerged and how it has moved to other places etc are the themes of narration. It talks about its own oral history. These are the names of various tharavadus and
Kadathanaad\textsuperscript{76} Kuttichathan stops at Malamelkunkan’s\textsuperscript{77} home to quench his thirst. God appeared before Kunkan after he had offered the water, blessed him and granted a boon. He then narrates the tales of those who took revenge on chathan, and their decimation at his hands, thus revealing the power of black magic and sorcery that Kuttichathan personified. Since Kunkan quenched Kuttichathan’s thirst by offering toddy, for this reason this happens to be Kuttichathan preferred offering. The meethupidutham rite with toddy normally associated with Kuttichathan was missing here.

The thottam attained a frenzied pace, so also the drumbeat touched a crescendo, followed by peedaattam, dancing on the sacred seat. Rising on the peedadam and doing a 360 degree turn to the music is what is implied by peedaattam. The assistants with flares in one hand and gripping the chathan with the other move along with the dance, making this as significant part of the dance. The difficulty experienced by the Theyyam here was because he was on a thin stool and not the traditional peedadam which is wide and thick enough to balance oneself, was visible. With the Kuttichathan’s moves the stool was becoming unsteady. Recognising the difficulty he was facing, a drummer stepped in to help by holding the stool firmly down to the earth.

A loss of balance for a split second can result both in the stool and the Theyyam breaking their legs. This was a sad situation. Kuttichathan’s costume was of large circumference and had peacock plumes spread out. The beauty lies in the Kuttichathan moving in a circular motion with these trappings. Since Kuttichathan is a ‘mantramurthi’\textsuperscript{78} it is difficult to assign a specific

\textsuperscript{76} These are the names of various territory—nadu, under the rule of local chieftains.
\textsuperscript{77} A person’s name.
\textsuperscript{78} A magical connotation here.
appearance for the Theyyam on the *peedam*. Viewers can witness only the circular movement and it is for this fluidity in form that the Theyyam declares that it has no form, but only an illusion. What is the form the Theyyam takes cannot be predicted, and the dance is meant to communicate this haziness about its form, the absence of a specific form. When the stool became unsteady, all eyes turned to this element and few paid attention to the performance or visual presence of the *Kuttichathan*. "Could they not have brought along the *peedam* from the *kaavu*?" I wondered. Then, I corrected myself: no *kaavu* owner would part with the *peedam* that is used in the *kaavu*. Because, the *peedam* has ritual significance within the structure of the Theyyam and the *kaavu*. By this time the crowds are restless and difficult to control in the Theyyam space here. *Kuttichathan* suspends his dance before it peaks and completes a *kalaasam* (a round of dance sequence) before withdrawing into the *aniyara*. Without a *Thiyya* men as *komaram*, without *meethu*, without toddy as offering by the devotees, the *Kuttichathan* Theyyam bows out of the the hallowed space created in the *Kanakakunnu* palace grounds.

Before the next Theyyam takes up position I got the time to speak to the chief priest, who belongs to the Theyyam group, to ascertain certain things. What happens to the Theyyam ritual when it is supplanted from its original spaces to such locations, I asked.

"We are following all the discipline that is adhered to in the *kaavu*, here", he explained—"by 'We' I mean the Theyyam group that has arrived here", he pointed. "There was no dilution of the practice when we firmed up the location for Theyyam. All items required for the worship has been brought here. Two swords have been placed in the imagined hallowed space. Both these have been brought by them, all the way! As was the practice in the *kaavu*, the *chenda* ensemble commenced at this venue also with the customary offering of betel leaf-nut", he elaborated.
Usually the drummers receive this offering from the *anthithiryan* (a person who always lit lamp in the *kaavu*) or the *karanavar* of the *kaavu*. The present situation does not have the scope for such a ritual because there is no such individual who fits that role, therefore the permission to commence the Theyyam was granted by the event manager who stepped into the space of the *karanavar* of the sacred space and made the offering of betel leaf-nut. While the event manager and the Theyyam artistes accept this as a sanctified space, the crowd watching the sequence of events cease to understand it.

*Karivaal Bhagavati* was the next Theyyam that took up the space. This Theyyam is performed by the Malayans. The Theyyam commenced with *‘Pettu Piravi’ thottam* which is associated with the birth of a child. The myth is this that the *Nambuthiri* woman of the *Kaatumaadam illam* develops labour pain. The *Malayan* woman who is the midwife proceeds to the *illam*, but she was accompanied by the *asura* (demon) who consumes little children. The head of the *Kaatumaadam* family was a master of sorcery, therefore he could identify this feature and transformed the *asura* into a *mantramurthi*. The name *Karuvaaal* is derived from word *‘Karu’* (embryo) one who consumes it. Thus the child born in the *illam* was saved.

*Kandalmudi* (a headgear of triangular shape), *arayoda* (waistband), *thrikannu* (third eye), flare in the hand, are the decorations to this Theyyam’s costume. The Theyyam normally appears in the Nambiar, *Nambudiri kaavus*. The *Karuvaaal* Theyyam which performs with flares tied to its waist and also without it, are normally seen in the *kaavus* of northern Kerala. This is performed for the

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79 A *Nambuthiri* brahmin family well known in their *tantrik* traditions.
betterment of a pregnant women. Karuvaal Bhagavati in the Kanakakunnu grounds appeared without flares.

The viewers had many doubts: What is the Theyyam, why does it dress the way it does. Many walk towards the area where Theyyam is performed just as they would have walked into many of the commercial stalls on the festival ground, often attracted by the drumbeats. Some were heard saying, "it's Kathakali..." some others made enquiries. Yet, others were found making fun, trivialising it. Those who belonged to north Kerala and were here, could be seen bowing with folded hands and making a cash offering. Some others exclaimed, "crazy people..!"

On the first day the crowds were thin at the Theyyam. The news report on the following day on the Theyyam in the Kanakakunnu palace grounds brought more people to the venue on the 26 December. I reached there in the afternoon. The performers were setting up and laying out the make up and accessories required by the Theyyam. That evening would see the Kandakarnan and Vasoorimala Theyyams, said the Event manager. I took the intervening hours to move around to the festival grounds, one slope of the palace grounds quite resembled a circus tent. The ‘Death Well’ on one side had a middle aged lady exhorting visitors "to step in to enjoy the experience for just thirty rupees". Stalls with plenty of playthings to lure the children could be seen around. Some throwing tantrums and making demands of parents to let them enjoy a joy ride, or, buy the knick knacks. Plenty of food stalls to add to the scene, Kanakakunnu looked well illuminated by the time the darkness grew.

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80 Well of death, is a carnival sideshow, a silo- or barrel-shaped wooden cylinder, inside of which motorcyclists, or miniature automobiles, travel along the vertical wall. This is a kind of driving while performing stunts.
It was time for the Theyyam. The drumbeats had begun. People had gradually started gravitating towards the Theyyam. The face-painting on Vasoorimala was nearly over, nearly ready to enter the Theyyam-sthanam. Once again cameras were taking shots of the Vasoorimala. The name is indicative of what this Theyyam is associated with, the small pox. In all probability the Theyyam may have gained currency at a time when the area was afflicted by the small pox epidemic.

“During a war between Bhadrakali and Darika, the latter’s wife Manodhari meditates on Shiva and Shiva wipes the sweat off his body and gives it to her. If this was sprinkled on people they would give anything she asked for, was the boon he granted her. She is then face-to-face with Kali carrying the mutilated body of Darika. Manodhari splashes the sweat on Kali’s body and this becomes small pox on Kali. Bhadrakali gouges out Manodhari’s eyes and names her ‘Vasoorimala’, compelling her to be subservient to Kali. Kodungallur Kaavu and the Sri Porkali Kaavu are places which has the presence of Vasoorimala”\textsuperscript{81}.

Relief from sickness is what this worship of Vasoorimala achieves. Vasoorimala runs into the space with vattoda, sword in hand and the jingle of the heavy anklet. Out of curiosity people come towards the Theyyam space. They try to get shots of the Theyyam on the mobile phone and cameras was high on their agenda.

For those who are ignorant about the Theyyam and the myths that surround it the Theyyam is a mere spectacle. Those from north Malabar who visit the Theyyam spaces at the festival maintain the reverential demeanour and bow to the Theyyam with folded hands. A group of families who originally hailed from Kannur, but now were residents of Thiruvananthapuram had come as a

\textsuperscript{81}See Nambuthiri, Folklore Nikhandu, 776.
large group to the palace grounds to watch Theyyam. They aired their disappointment in not being able to go to Kannur to participate in the Theyyam. The schedule of the children’s schooling and the demands at the work place prevent them from being in Kannur during the Theyyam season, said some of them.

In the meantime, Kandakaran has appeared. My father used to take on the Kandakaran’s form at the Kaitheri Palayi Kaavu in Kuthuparambu. With sixteen flares fixed around the waist and a huge headgear reminded me of my father. He suffered from coms. Even at a stage where he could not put his feet on the ground, he still continued to don this heavy make up and headgear and created a lot of anxiety within us, his family members. Taking on the form of this Theyyam was a source of awe, fear, surprise and anxiety.

Having taken the form in the neck of Sri. Mahadevan and emerged from the ear, the name Kandakaran was given. The myth is that it was to cure Shiva of the small pox that Kandakaran was born.

People were in a hurry to take photographs and videograph the Kandakaran Theyyam aglow with the circle of flaming torches and an imposing headgear. The strut ting around with the torches was a fearsome spectacle and Kandakaran had succeeded in recreating the ambiance of the Theyyakaavu, so I felt. They walked up to Theyyam to receive blessings. The Event manager repeatedly announced that the people present could go up to receive blessings. The people present were ignorant of such a practice. When one of them went up to receive the prasadam, others followed suit and fell into a queue. Kandakaran showered blessings and lent a patient hearing to their woes.
On the 27 evening I reached the venue of the Theyyam. My concern was about snatching a few minutes with the Theyyam performers. I walked up to the tea-stall close by and saw two of them there, found it an opportunity to strike up a conversation. The moving out of the Theyyam from its traditional space the ‘kaavu’ into cities and going to the gulf countries was raised here. If the people wished to see the Theyyam there was no issue in going to the places they were able to and there was nothing wrong in such a trend gaining ground, was their opinion. But, some of the kaavu owners were not keen to make an exhibit of their Theyyams and some Theyyam performers shared the same view.

In the beginning of the conversation they were trying to justify their coming with the Theyyams at Thiruvananthapuram. That is what they were very positively endorsed that it is not a problem to enact Theyyam for any spaces and locality if people or devotees want to see it. When the talking had progressed and I started interacting with them, they realised that I knew the contexts of Theyyam in kaavus very well. This might have been the reason that they showed a dislike also in bringing Theyyam in other spaces. These performers try to justify their movement with the Theyyam in their own life context and faces a situation of not exactly able to answer the question of shifting spaces of the Theyyam for economic gains. I think some of them understand that the shift is not good a moment but for their means of livelihood and getting an opportunity to earn money, they do it.

The shift from the kaavu to urban spaces and modern market situations was not exactly a thing that was too easy, even in these people’s mindset. The inner conflict was quite evident in the conversation. There seemed to be a flaw in the present state of things. The beliefs and practices were so deep rooted in their immediate environment that such a dilemma raises its head.
Quite unlike the procedure followed in the *kaavu*, such venues are not conducive for strict adherence to the discipline demanded of the Theyyam. In the midst of the conversation the event manager took them away. It was time for the day’s Theyyam to commence the performance. The drum beats could be heard rising.

The Theyyam artistes and the event manager seemed to have a growing concern about my presence around the Theyyam space. My questions and jotting down of notes were taken note of, by many among them. Naturally, they were prompted to inquire why I was asking such questions. One of the member in the group seemed to have identified my familiarity of Theyyam was more than that of a researcher. He voiced his opinion that I was closely involved with Theyyam. "You seem to have something to do with Theyyam. Are you a fly'"? he asked me. "I've seen a lot of Theyyam", was my stock answer. But, the latter question shook me a bit. What was this 'fly'?

"Why did you compare me to a fly?" I asked Panikkar. "It is the character of the fly to go all over and partake of all things, irrespective of whether it is good or bad; the poison is in the head". The *Panikkar* is the person who carries out the role of the *komaram* or prests. He had taken note of the fact that I was coming without fail, getting into conversation with those present and taking notes. The event manager and the Theyyam artistes are supposed to have spoken about me, the previous night when they returned to their rooms in the city. The *Panikkar* said it was time for the Theyyam, we’d speak some other time and he turn towards *aniyara*.

The prominent Theyyams of the *Malayan* community, *Bhairavan* and *Gulikan* would appear today. Both have an aspect of *Shiva* in them. *Bhairavan* is *Shiva* in another form, that of *Sri*
Paremeswaran as a mendicant. The Theyyam usually appears at midnight with his metallic eyes, striped costume and the begging bowl, all of which are its specialty. Bhairavan is said to have emerged as a result of the brahma’s curse, as is mentioned in the Agnipuranam. Certain Nambuthiri homes do worship Bhairavan. In north Kerala, it is Malayans that dons this Theyyam. Some kaavus do have Vannan, Velan, Munnoottan and Pulayas doning this Theyyam.

The thottam is being recited. Bhairavan is gradually adding on his accessories in the greenroom, keeping pace with the thottam and the beat of the chenda. In between, I inquired of the Panikkar the myth associated with the Bhairavan Theyyam.

"Brahma had four heads. When Brahma lied, Shiva removed one of the heads. This implied killing of Brahma and as retribution Shiva was cursed that he would roam with the skull of Brahma as the begging bowl. A bowl-shaped container with tender frond carried by the Theyyam is symbolic of the skull", he explained, pointed to the bowl in the Theyyam’s hand.

The Bhairavan Theyyam had a splendour in its total appearance. Looks appealing in its completed form. Bhairavan is dancing to the drumbeats. The spectators are swaying with the movement of the Theyyam. After the dance it is time to move away as a mendicant.

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82 In the Kolamthullal and Padayani of southern Kerala, one could see Bhairava’s varied forms. This form is much expanded one among other forms, which used to made with 101 palms fronds.
83 This is one of the 18 Mahapuranas, an item of Hindu religious text, contains descriptions and details of various incarnations of Vishnu. For more details see Vettam Mani, Puranic Encyclopedia (New Delhi:Motilal Banarsidass,1975)
84 Some of these illams/homes are also mentioned in the case of Kuttichattan thottam too. This tottam mentions homes where sorcery was practiced.
A Theyyam with its body coated with rice-flour paste and intermittent black stripes, draped in a skirt made of tender palm fronds appeared in the makeshift-thara at the Kanakakunnu grounds. This was the Gulikan Theyyam. A common saying among the older generations of north Malabar goes like this: "The Malayan's father Gulikan and the Gulikan's father, the Malayan", indicative of the connection between the two. The Theyyam taken up by a Malayan for his maiden performance is the Gulikan. Lighting the lamp at the Gulikan thara, performing a Gulikan puja at the request of the devotee are practices of the Malayan. The frangipani, kaanjiram, paala trees are places where the Gulikan resides it is imagined. Normally, if any of these trees sprout in any ordinary household it is removed, the belief is that such trees would attract the Gulikan. There are certain localities which are identified as places which are frequented by the Gulikan.

In my village, the grounds behind the lower primary school I studied in is supposed to be frequented by the Gulikan at night, say my friends who gather there at night. They have felt the smell of goat's blood emanate in the spot! This points to the killing that happens on the arrival of the Gulikan is how old timers explain it, and accepted by the believers even today. This could be a historical discourse on the Gulikan which continue to exists as a social memory.

There are varying perceptions with regard to the worship of the Gulikan. Some identify a Shiva element in this Theyyam while others assign a Vishnu aspect to it. The Gulikan can affect humans and cattle alike. Some black magic practices are carried out to protect the cattle from being affected by the Gulikan. While there has been a dip in the number of people who go to the Malayan home for remedial worship rituals from the Gulikan, the numbers are not few. The Gulikan is supposed to get along with certain people and the usage, "Gulikankoottu", i.e., a kind of friendship with the form springs from this. Such an attachment can be done away with
appropriate prayer routines. The Malayan, Munnoottan, Panan, Vannan are the castes that traditionally carry out such acts for atonement.

A Muslim woman used to come to my father with the complaint that she was sighting Gulikan. She took a black thread which had been sanctified by him as a protection. These days the numbers of such persons are negligible, but as part of rituals associated with the demise of a person in a home, a Gulikan puja is done.

For "Aakanallneekku" a rite of sorcery, we Malayans don the Gulikan Theyyam. This is known as "Gullikankettu" in Thalassery and its adjoining areas. It is the belief that the Theyyam goes into cremation grounds and places where death has been happened. For this reason the locals believe that the Gulikan is the deathly face of Shiva. Therefore, the arrival of Gulikan is equated with the arrival of Kaalan, the God of Death.

Gulikan, according to the legends emerged from the left index finger of Shiva, a detail that is narrated in the thottam we recite. The Theyyam is considered the God of the Malayan clan, sometimes a protector. Since death, Kaalan and Gulikan are closely connected, Gulikan is considered the god who asks for retribution.

My father has told me that the Malayan caste seek the protection from Gulikan. A subaltern section of society was always at the receiving end of atrocities at the hands of the superior castes. Torching the Malayans homes and molesting their women were not uncommon acts indulged in by the upper castes. In the feudal set up the show of power and domination by the upper castes by unlawful takeover of the landed-property of such marginalised castes was a manner of
demonstrating their authority. My father has shared with me the molestation of his aunt by a member of the *Nambiar* family.

At *Kanakkakunnu*, under the blue glow of the tube lights the *Gulikan* Theyyam with two clusters of flaming palm frond bunches keeps to the beat. In the *kaavu*, the *Gulikan* appears in the early hours of dawn. Here, the sun has just set and the Theyyam has started performing, strutting around on the stilts that raise him many meters from the ground.

The *Panikkar* is preparing for the ritual using 16 *kolthiris* (small torches). The crowds gazing in awe while peanuts and popcorn munching is on. A little child has gone into the ritual space and returns with exclaiming to his mother, "*Amma*…. It is Christmas Father (Santa Claus)". It’s December and the child is in X’mas mood. The Theyyam danced in a trance providing a range of experiences. Even before the Theyyam withdrew from the arenas, the crowds had started growing thin. The camera’s continued to take in every nuance of the Theyyam.

In its original space, the *Gulikan* narrates (*naattukottiparachillu*) the manner of care and propitiation done by the different caste tiers of the village community. A word of caution is sent out to *tharavads* which are engaged in wrongdoings. The Theyyam looks out for those who maintain the ritual discipline and blesses them. The spectators and those who conduct the Theyyam wait to witness this.

This wait nor the obedience is not on display in *Kanakkakunnu*, not in any way surprising. The spectators here have no cultural affinity, nor sensibility that can set them into a dialogue mode with the *Gulikan*. Here they are mere spectators of the ritual, quite oblivious of the other
associations. But the attitude of those associated with the ritual, wherever they may be situated remains the same. Apart from the event manager, other performers and the Kerala Kaumudi photographers there is nobody else around for the rite of naattukottiparachillu. The naadu, or locality the Gulikan intended to talk about is not anyway the Thiruvananthapuram.

Naattukottiparachillu has an importance in the Theyyam’s repertoire, the reason is the manner in which the local community and the locality contribute to the status of Theyyam acquired by an individual. When people approach the Theyyam with their litany of woes and seek solace the Theyyam is able to offer advice and provide relief because he is part of this community and knows their problems to some extent. When some devotees approach the Theyyam and clutch his hands, the Theyyam pre-empts by identifying the problem even before he is told. The listener is dumbfounded, sometimes they breakdown on being told so.

The common folk approach a Theyyam dancing family at his house with a host of requests; particularly the women, many of them elderly women:

"My grand-daughter is down with fever. She is weak. The fever does not subside. She is unable to go to the school".

A very simple problem, but these do come to either the Theyyam dancer or to his wife. The elder woman, the father or an elder brother would chant mantras which would have a salutary effect. A sacred thread, the offering of rice and ash, or through Gulikan puja, the family provides relief to those who come with appeals.
There are others who come with issues affecting their cattle. The cow is not consuming the grass, the output of milk is rather low, so go their problems. For such conditions, a coir rope which has been sanctified by the Malayan or Vannan is given. Sometimes the chant is done on a coconut, which is taken to the cowshed, cracked open and the contents offered to the cow. Often the problem is solved, if it does not, they come back again and offer remedial puja. Gulikan is offered toddy, puffed rice, and rice. In certain situations, the puja is offered to Muthappan. When they come home to seek an answer or relief from the problems that bother them, they share their woes with my parents. "It is two years since my daughter got married but has had no child yet". They describe in detail the temples, the Swamijis they have visited seeking an offspring. However, the problems they narrate will spill over and details of the neighbour would also be confided. Local party politics and associated stunts, a peek into their lives, elopement, all of this reach the Theyyam dancer's home. The Theyyam dancer or the elder women in the home are asked to go to other homes to perform sorcery.

Once in a year when the same person appears as a Theyyam–God in the kaavu the same people arrive there to narrate the same woes. The Theyyam is able to respond to this in the manner it is seen by the complainant. It is a bonding with the local community that enables the ascent of the Theyyam to a cult-god status. This sort of understanding is not possible in the Kanakakunnu set up and for this very reason, the Theyyam becomes a visual feast or display in these sorts of social spaces.

The Kerala Kaumudi newspaper in its issue dated 28-12-2011 had carried impressive photographs of Bhairavan and Gulikan and a news item on the sale at the venue as it is also a space for grand Kerala festival. That particular evening the crowds were dense, the greenroom
was more crowded than the usual, the pairs of footwear lying outside the aniyara were indicative of the number. I entered the greenroom, Muthappan Theyyam was getting readied. The event manager granted the photographers some time to take photographs and later directed them to move out. I then stepped in, only to be deterred from taking a photograph because Muthappan’s torso was being smeared with turmeric which would splash on bystanders I was told. I moved out, and walked closer to the performing area.

Today there was a change from the regular space of performance. The area defined for the ritual had been demarcated with the tender palm fronds being tied to a wooden fencing in a circular shape. This would prevent people from entering into the space, as well as, a reminder to remove footwear. The drinking water stand which was placed to rear of the Theyyam space has now been shifted to the eastern side. The collection box has been placed on top of this stand. A large number of tourists have arrived today. A Malayali tourist guide is accompanying them, giving the necessary inputs about what they witness around there.

The event manager and his team have rearranged the space probably because it is Muthappan Theyyam that is scheduled to appear. There is no set space dedicated for Muthappan. This Theyyam can appear anywhere. For this reason we have railway Muthappan (adjacent to the Railway station) or a bus stand Muthappan next to a bus stand. On special occasions and auspicious events Muthappan Theyyam is hosted in homes. There is the madapura also where Muthappan is presiding. It would not be wrong to say that the largest number of kaavus have the Muthappan Theyyam. For all good events, devotees make arrangement to perform this deity. ‘Payamkutti’ is the offering that is made to Muthappan, which consists of toddy, salt-dried fish, and green pulse roasted and this particular rite is performed by and is restricted to the Thiyya
caste. It is the Thiyya who do priestly rituals for the Muthappan even in a Malayan or Vannan home, which reflects the connection between the Thiyya caste and the Muthappan.\footnote{There is a strong mythical connection between the Muthappan and this caste. It was a Thiyya member who started worshipping this god in Parassini Kadavu, one of the prominent kaavu of the Muthappan in north Malabar and the role of Madayan, a priestly position for this god is confined to the members of this specific caste only.}

The event manager is rather busy. He has extended a special invitation to the organisers of the grand festival and Kerala Kaumudi’s representatives. He seems to have got absorbed in the ritual and bare torsoed. He hails from Mattanur, is a Thiyya and had earlier mentioned that there was a kaavu near his home. Today the Theyyam receives ‘kodiyella’ first from the event manager and subsequently from the invited guests, who also in respectful reverence appear bare torso and hand over the banana leaf with three pieces of betel nut with a lighted oil wick to the performer. It is observed that today the organisers are more serious and actively participate in rites and rituals which feels that the activity out there are so sacred.

As in its performance, the Muthappan is a popular Theyyam. Even people from southern Kerala travel to Parassinikadavu to pay their respects to the Theyyam, and their numbers are increasing. Since there is not site-location specificity for performing the Theyyam it can be performed anywhere and Muthappan is a very mobile Theyyam.

The myth behind the Muthappan Theyyam goes like this:

\begin{quote}
*Paadikuttiyamma (a mother) of an ilam in Kottiyoor*, could not bear a child even after offering many prayers. One day while she was bathing at the ghat of a pond, she heard the cry of a child. When she reached the spot from where the cry emanated, she saw to her utmost surprise a little child.
\end{quote}

\footnote{A name of a village in Kannur district which is situated in northern hilly side adjacent to Wayanad borders. It is also a famous Hindu pilgrim center of Shiva and Parvathy.}
She lifted the child and happily took it home. Together the couple took care of the child. But, once it grew up, it started showing difference in behaviour. The parents were shaken by his altered behaviour and bonding with the Thiyya and other lower castes. The child had made a habit of eating meat. Unable to take all this change they decided to send the boy out of the house. When the father in anger asked the boy to leave the house, he transformed into a fierce godly form. Fire leap out of his eyes. The mother realised that the son she had brought up was transforming into a godly form. The mother cursed, "Let the third eye be a false eye" or else all that his eyes fell on would burn to ashes and that was how Muthappan arrived in Kunnathurpad87, the sacred land, with his poikannu (metallic eyes). At Kunnathurpadi, Muthappan climbed a pala tree (Apocynaceae) and partaking of the toddy when the owner Chandan came that way. He abused the toddy imbibing Muthappan. That very moment Chandan became a stone. As per the request of Chandan’s wife he restored his human form. Both of them continued worshiping Muthappan and toddy stayed on as his favourite drink.

The Thiyya's traditional occupation is that of a toddy tapper and coconut plucker. Their origins according to the myths lie in Lord Shiva’s creation of the community dedicated to procure toddy for him. These mythical facts details the close link between the Thiyya, toddy and Muthappan, and that probably is the reason for the Muthappan become the ishtadevata (close deity) of the Thiyyas. But as a Theyyam, Muthappan is donned by other communities too. From that point of view, the Muthappan is so closely associated with the worship of the common people, thus a popular god image.

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87 It is a historic center of worship of the Muthappan. It also a place stands in Kannur district, again a hilly area.
The crowds were larger than usual. In a short while the Cheriya (minor) Muthappan appeared, led into the venue by the event manager and a helper. A body smeared in turmeric, white beard, and a small headgear was the make up for this Theyyam. Since the myth describes him as one fond of hunting, he carries in his hand a stick to symbolise the bow and arrow. The thottam describes Muthappan’s hunting escapades with the Kurichiya. The minor Muthappan walks like the common man. He moves with the crowd, giving the feel of engaging in conversation with the crowd.

The Valiya Muthappan, also known as ‘thiruvapana’ is literally larger. When the child was sent out of the house, the mother Paadikutti had seen this form! The Muthappan has metallic eyes. As he went about embellishing his body Valiya Muthappan maintained chanting the thottam. After this he started moving to the music and the rhythm aided and assisted by the smaller or minor Muthappan. The rapport between the two can be compared to what exists between a Theyyam and a komaram. Valiya Muthappan becomes a presence with his tall headgear and the long dark beard. Both are laughing out loud. Muthappan starts recreating his hunting adventure. Two more assistants have entered to support Muthappan, they hand over the bow-arrow to Muthappan and tender coconut.

While the two Muthappan’s perform, the sacred boundary created by drawing a coir rope along a fencing has given way in some parts. The event manager and assistants manage to restore it to standing position. They received support from the crowds to set the thing. Amidst this a spectator steps in take a photo of the Theyyam, with his footwear on. When checked, he decides against

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88 A matrilineal adivasi of Kerala distributed mainly in Wayanad and Kannur districts. They are very able in shooting at the target. Therefore, the word, kuri, means target and the chiyan, means people. Thus they are experts in archery. For more details on this group, See Bindu Ramachandran, "Fertility Concept in a Ritual an Anthropological Explanation of "Pandal Pattu"," Stud.Tribes Tribals 2, no.1,(2003): 19-21.
taking the photograph and goes back muttering, "Then I won’t take the picture". Muthappan was being offered toddy from a spouted jug.

The cherujanman rights for performing Muthappan rests with the Vannan, Anjoottan, and Velan castes. For example in Parassinikadavu cherujanmam right is vested in a Vannan family. But, in Kunnathurpadi, it is vested on a Velan family. But, in Kanakakunnu Muthappan Theyyam is being donned by a Malayan, something I saw for the first time. The local customs and practices are not applicable in such locales. Those who did the facial painting of the Theyyam click photos of the Muthappan. When those accompanying appear on the spot, Theyyam becomes a spectacle.

After the ‘attam’ the Theyyams wait for the offerings. Contrary to the usual the crowds were larger. The Theyyam held their hands and put turmeric on the head as he blessed them. As I went to make the offering I also touched the feet of the Theyyam. I do this in the kaavus too. Suddenly the god uttered, "Is this not my ‘kallaadi’?") I got a jolt. I recognised that the god had recognised my identity. My body language, manner of speaking would have struck a keen observer. The Theyyam uses the term only to refer to one who belongs to the community, particularly the Malayans. Before moving out from the space the Theyyam blessed the kallaadis who played the accompaniments with, "let luck come in abundance….may you be blessed and safe", and moved out.

89 It indicate I belong to a caste who perform Theyyam. Thus, an assistant of the Theyyam.
Highlights of *Muthappan*

As per the social practices associated with the ritual tradition, there are no rigid rules laid down regarding the *cherujanmam* rights and limits of jurisdiction enjoyed by the *Muthappan* Theyyam. No specifications about the performance space, nor, can it be confined within the inner courtyard of a *tharavadu*. *Muthappan* can appear in any home, *tharavadu* or even in the paddy field. For this reason the *Vannan* caste which usually has the hereditary right to perform this Theyyam tend to economically better off than other Theyyam castes. The Theyyam in this case is not seasonal and can be performed at any time, any place. When we *Malayans* observe ‘*karkitakam*’ the lean season, the *Vannans* move all over the countryside with the *Muthappan* Theyyam. According to the myths, the journeys of *Muthappan* are not limited to day or night. So also, when constructing a house, when the auspicious entry into a house is made, or when a child is born *Muthappan* Theyyam is performed. This has come to signify a reflection of economic prosperity. After the *Muthappan* Theyyam completes his Theyyam in *Parassinikadavu* and *Kunnathurpaadi* he returns home with sacks full of cash.

The Theyyam that gets very easily transplanted rather easily from the villages to the urban spaces is also the *Muthappan* Theyyam. In *Kannur*, adjacent to the railway station there is the railway *Muthappan kaavu*. *Kanhangad* and *Thallassery* also have its respective *Muthappan*. Before the railway overbridge was constructed in *Kannur*, a large number of labourers resided on the site. They used to get *Muthappan* Theyyam to perform as a safeguard for their lives. The space then made way for a *Muthappan kaavu*. 
Muthappan now has dedicated madappuras in Madurai, Hyderabad, Mumbai and Delhi. People from Kerala go to these centres to appear as Muthappan Theyyam. Muthappan has also appeared in the Gulf countries, and my friend who goes on these trips claims he gets around two or three trips every year. When I went to a relative’s home, he was busy getting ready the headgear of Thiruvapana and the explanation he offered was that:

“In Kunnathurpaadi, the person who appears as Muthappan is one Velan Ravi. He is going to the Gulf countries this time to appear as Muthappan. The organisers have decided to buy all the costume and the make-up accessories that are required and keep it in the Gulf country itself. Then the Theyyam performers need only travel every year for the Theyyam!”.

Since it is cumbersome to transport the accessories across every year the organisers have chosen this method. Theyyam has now become a form which has modified for the changing times and altered geographies. Quite like the inaugural presence of film stars and religious heads in the gulf to inaugurate malls, Muthappan is also present on such occasions.

With each passing day I felt my presence there was getting blurred: was I a performer or a mere onlooker? I was becoming part of the Theyyam group in the palace grounds. The drumbeats would create its own reverberations in my body. For an observer who was aware of the movements and rhythm of the Theyyam the movements that were rising from my body on hearing the music and beat it would not go unnoticed. Such a reciprocity does exists between the Theyyam dancing castes. The performing body and the mind encapsulate this discerning power.
On the evening of the 29th when I reached the venue, the first person I saw was the Pramod Panikkar. He is a regular at the Theyyam sthanam. He is unable to assess the reason for my presence, or, my jotting down things during the days proceedings. He was not too happy about the Theyyam being performed outside its traditional boundary, was evident, and the conflict that he was undergoing.

I was eager to know what had been placed in the Theyyam sthanam as 'nivedyam'. Two oil wick lamps have been lit and, chopped slivers of coconut placed. Three bricks have been kept standing vertically, to recreate the installed stones in the kaavu. In north Kerala it is laterite stone that is used, the non-availability of which must have led to the use of kiln bricks. Three plantain leaves with five spouted jugs (meeth kindi) have been placed close by. Meeth is the nectar. Here the Theyyam is offered toddy in these small spouted jugs. Flattened rice, rice, puffed rice, jaggery, tulsi flowers, ixora flowers, yellow marigold, betel, betel leaf are being used by the Panikkar to complete the ritual.

When he moved away from the spot during a break, I stopped him and inquired where he was staying? "A house in Sasthamangalam. The preparation for the evening was done at home". In an interregnum he went back. "Today is a Theyyam with the large headgear". There was work to do on this. While Theyyam is conducted in a kaavu, none associated with it would move out of this space. They keep working within the greenroom-aniyara. Either they’d be working on the tender palm fronds, or sprucing up the accessories. Those arranging the Theyyam and the komaram centre all their activities around the Theyyam during this phase, but it is quite contrary here, in the changed local space. Everyday seems a ‘show.'
My attention fell on the ‘Centenary Pavilion’ of the Kerala Kaumudi arranged on the verandah of the Kanakakunnu palace. Selected photographs and reports of last 100 years are on display. Within the palace children are participating in a painting competition. The Theyyam sthanam can be seen from inside the palace. The drummers there, are lined up playing the evening’s ensemble. At the sthanam a 10 ft long headgear has been held up. The frame has been covered with cloth. Red, white, and black cloth has been arranged. In the centre a circular space has been decorated with shimmering pieces. The headgear points to the sky. Today’s Theyyam is Porkali.  

The Theyyams are setting out for the day, the first to step out is one among the Boothagana-sprits. Face smeared with turmeric, torso covered in rice paste and a waistband form part of his make up. The event manager and his assistants escort him to the performing space. They are wearing white dhotis with a piece of red cloth (pattu) thrown over the shoulder when escorting the Theyyam. The Theyyam runs around the space, walks up to the spectators and takes a close look. He enquirers of the crowd if they don’t find him good looking. The spectators look flustered.

Porkali Bhagawati has started performing. The facial painting is intricate and complicated. Extended incisors. The first stage of the Bhagawati’s dance is without an elaborate headgear, though for a short while. This is followed by the ceremony of wearing the bigger mudi, with which the Theyyam becomes the form of the violent goddess Kali. With the imposing headgear the Theyyam also wears false metallic eyes, by which time Porkali becomes a fearsome and awe raising presence. She dances and sways with the support of others. It is a truly super human

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90 According to the myths, the Asura god was killed by the Sri Porkali. See, Nambuthiri, Folklore Nikhandu p.830. The Kottayam (north Kerala) ruling clan worshiped Sri Porkali Bhagawati, See Menon, Kali-Worship in Kerala, 1.
visual of dancing Theyyam on the sacred seat that happens before viewers. Some watch in total wonderment and some with the reverential folded hands. The spirit form of Theyyam is moving around as if lending a helping hand to carry out the rituals. A Darika's killing or the blood thirsty Kali is recreated here. A flaming torch under which a cock is sacrificed, the drumbeats rise to a crescendo. Then the Theyyam withdraws carrying a leaf with rice and betel leaf, a spouted jug in hand, completing a few rituals before exiting. After taking three betel leaves, and a coconut it is thrown on to the ground. Taking cues from the manner in which the things have fallen, the Theyyam carries out predictions. Were the rituals done correctly? Did it signify any ill omen? The spirit speaks out whatever he sees in the predictive signs. The event manager and others stand in obeisance. The Panikkar places a coin on the forehead of the spirit form, the drum rises to a special beat, and the spirit moves out of the arena.

The remarks, observations of the spectators reflect their perceptions and how they receive the ritual transacted at the venue. Their attitudes, cultural background and the differences from person to person vis-à-vis the Theyyam are pronounced.

At today's rite two cocks were sacrificed. A lady who was present shut her eyes and was heard telling her husband, "Oh! They are killing a cock!" The husband's response was, "Oh...We kill so many cocks for Christmas." Some others moved off from the spot when they saw this offering being made. A north Indian girl kept running back and forth between the Theyyam and her parents, who, seemed disinterested. She kept repeating to them, "This is supposed to be a God." She went up to one of the men standing near the hundi and asked him, "What is God saying?" The man flustered. She ran back to her parents and said: "The God is speaking, come we will also watch". She brought her parents before the Theyyam. Theyyam held her hand uttered
blessings. Since she could follow nothing that was said, she asked the man near the hundi, "Tell God to speak in English." The man near the hundi could not control a smile escape him on hearing this. "You are studying aren't you?" Theyyam asked her. Promptly came the translation. The girl answered, "English M.A". The Theyyam had to take some effort to see her go from the performing space.

A lady with a rosary was at the site with her child. She seemed totally disturbed. She asked of people around her, ‘What is this?’ She turned to me and asked to know about the form before her.

Myself: "Theyyam. It is a form of God."

She caught a few pics of the Theyyam on her mobile camera.

"Can one believe in this?" she asked me.

Myself: "This is a belief."

In the midst of all this she revealed about her own belief and its fate. It was only a month since she became a believer, which, explains the rosary. She belongs to Chertala⁹¹. She used to be frequent in the Kali puja that was held there. The priest has told her that she should no more harbour such beliefs and practices. The Kanakakunnu experience was manifesting itself in different ways on people with varied mental states and beliefs.

The following day I reached the Kanakakunnu grounds in the morning itself. The people were in the greenroom arranging the tender palm fronds for the Vishnumurthi and Pottan Theyyam. The Theyyams require plenty of fronds for the skirt that is wrapped around, in two tiers, so as to

⁹¹ A town situated in the district of Alleppey, Kerala.
cover the torso. *Pottan* Theyyam requires more of the fronds than the *Vishnumurti*. The spine of the fronds are removed and the fronds are strung around the *Pottan* Theyyam. Thick decorative ornaments are made of palm fronds for the *Pottan* Theyyam. This being a major part of the costume the assistants have started working in the morning itself.

They did not take my entry into the greenroom with my little notebook with much pleasure. I asked the *Panikkar* if he would spend spare some moments for me. He very promptly answered with a, "I am a little busy” and got away from it. They did not seem to understand my intention and that is why they were distancing themselves from me, I felt. Or, the event manager may have directed them to keep away. If I am to enquire about the remuneration received for the Theyyam in *Kanakakunnu*, the event manager would not be too inclined to part with this information. At such venues the decision takes place on the basis of certain contracts and agreements. On the basis of agreement reached by the organisers of the Grand Kerala Shopping Festival and the event manager on an amount, he will have an agreement with one of the Theyyam dancer. This dancer will have a chain of contracts with other dancers belonging to various castes and hence the programme will be conducted. In all likelihood, the fear that the various tiers of the contract would unspool before me may have been the fear of the event manager! In case the true figures spilled out might be the fear of the dancers. I was keen to explore the economic and political strings that are involved in a ‘Theyyam’ event being held outside its sanctified spaces and moving to fairs and festival grounds.
There was a similar dislike about taking photographs of the Theyyam. The Panikkar cites an example:

"A person by name, Hari would click photographs of the Theyyam and market it abroad. Finally, he lost his mental balance. The Theyyam has power. He is totally mad now. If you do not respect in regard the Theyyam, the Theyyam will retaliate". I said, "I m a researcher. I’m trying to understand more about the Theyyam”. Panikkar: "Yes, when studying about Theyyam, even before the learning is complete the person will be finished" he said.

This was the same person who had compared me to a fly in an earlier conversation.

Here, when the ritual is presented as an art form, the artiste is as committed to the performance as he would be in a ritual’s customary space. But, when the Theyyam moves out of its location and appears in the midst of locals and tourists who approach the Theyyam as a spectacle, give it no genuine reverence, instead trivialise, mock, commercialise, take photographs and commodify the Theyyam, he uses the situation to speak of his own angst through the stories he narrates. Further, when transplanting the Theyyam from its own space there is the hostility, wrath, displeasure they incur of the community and the relatives. When the performer is ill-equipped to overcome this situation with a rational approach, it triggers of intense mental conflict and dilemma in the mind of the dancer.

A lot of branches of the tamarind tree has been brought to the venue. These are required to prepare the meleri (a heap of wood for burning) for the Pottan Theyyam. This is piled up and lit, the Pottan Theyyam falls on the embers, laughing, unaffected by the hot embers beneath his
body. The wood is being arranged by a person called Sreedharettan who has come all the way from Kannur to prepare the meleri. He belongs to the Thiyya caste. The toddy, tender palm fronds, piling timber for the meleri are prepared by the Thiyya in its traditional spaces. This is something they considered a right. Sreedharettan is helping the Panikkar with the arrangements.

The meleri is prepared by using the axe in the kaavu. Here, they got a knife. That is why Sreedharettan calls it a way of killing time. The framework used by the Porkali Bhagavati yesterday, shown of its embellishments is resting against the palliyara. This reflects the craft potential among the Theyyam castes. Wild creepers, the strong but slender spine of the frond, the split stems of the areca nut have been used to criss-cross and girdle the raw material to form different shapes in forming the framework. The tall headgear that is further mounted on this circular base is an indicator of their craftsmanship.

By the evening the meleri is being put in place. The heap is catching fire gradually. There is hint of a rain in the air, and a strong breeze is blowing. The latter fans the leaping flames from the meleri.

The Pottan Theyyam has the role of a social commentator, according to myths:

When sage Sankaracharya attains the state of omniscience, a Chandala comes from the opposite side. Body, dark like mud. A child in arms, a stained mud pot of toddy on his head. Sankaracharya was jolted. He asked him to "give way Pulaya". The Pulaya was unaffected. The discriminatory hierarchy of casteism provoked an argument between them. This debate is
described in great detail in the *Pottan* Theyyam’s *thottam*\(^\text{\textsuperscript{92}}\). Those who ask questions like "why do you speak of caste difference" are not just a *Pulaya* or a *Pottan*. He touches the feet of the *Pulapottan* and seeks his blessings. This is the essence of the myth. The *Chandala* was actually, the form of Lord *Shiva*.

The person who is to appear as *Pottan* Theyyam walks up the *Panikkar*, draped in a red *mundu* and receives a full plantain leaf. He seeks the permission and blessings of the people gathered around, and proceeds towards the spot where others are reciting the *thottam* and joins them in the recitation.

Four *kolthiris* have been lit. Four jackfruit leaves have been shaped like a scoop and placed on a plantain leaf. The Theyyam narrates its travels through the highlands- *Malanaadu* in the *thottam*. *Konnath* and *Thayikara* are the two places where the *Pottan* initially instilled. *Kaiyath Kottam, Muyath Kottam, Kaavumbaayi Kottam, Pattani Kottam, Paranki Kottam, Mannathana kaavu* are the places of worship of this *kolam*, and requesting the supreme to see these sacred spaces and get possessed. The *thudi* is also being intermittently played. The *thottam* which started to the low decibel of the drumbeat gradually attains crescendo. While the *Pottan* Theyyam’s *thottam* is being chanted. A person who is going to don the *Vishumurthi kolam* appears to receive the *kodiyla*-- before the *sthanam* draped in a red *mundu* and white *thorth* (towel) tied round his head. The *kolakkaran* receives rice and wicks on a plantain leaf, circumambulates the *meleri*, pays obeisance and moves into the greenroom.

\(^{92}\) For a detailed version of the *thottam* in english, See Pallath, P. 100-101.
In the greenroom, Vishnumurthi Theyyam is getting ready. A large part of the face-painting is over. The event manager announced that in a short while Vishnumurthi Theyyam will be take up position. Since this is the Theyyam I don, a sort of personal affinity I felt for the Theyyam. The beat of the drums of the Pottan Theyyam and the face painting of the Vishnumurthi Theyyam created some impact on my person. I felt as if the Theyyam was entering my body. My bodily movement, my gait, all seemed to have got into my physical self.

For me who was watching the Theyyam, unknowingly the transformation was taking place: the bodily movements, the mental frame were becoming like that of the traditional-cultural format. The ambiance of Theyyam—meleri, thottam, the beat of the drums, elathalam, Kurumkuzhal—the sound that scapes with the wringing of the neck, that is what the kurumkuzhal reminds me of. There is the state that allows the Theyyam dancer to forget his human self and attain a state of trance absorbing within his person the manner of presenting and mood of the Theyyam. I felt as if I was slipping into that condition.

The Vishnumurthi Theyyam appeared on the stage. The jangle of the large anklets, the specific beat of the elathalam, the Theyyam looks into the mirror and starts dancing and hastens the pace of his steps. Crowds were pushing hard to get a better view of the Theyyam.

Completely engrossed in the Theyyam I was also watching the Theyyam perform. It starts raining, the spectators scattered, to take shelter. Those with umbrellas are still standing there and watching the Theyyam. The Theyyam is also in the rain. This bothered me. Some persons held up a sheet of a flex sign to shield the Theyyam from the rain. I joined them. Long poles were brought along to raise the height of the sheet, with many more persons joining us to protect the
Theyyam from getting drenched. I was totally drenched. But, all seemed more content that Vishnumurthi had not got drenched. Panikkar looked at me with a smile lighting up his face.

When the rain subsided, the Vishnumurthi Theyyam offered blessings to the onlookers. The next was the Pottan Theyyam’s kalasam. Pottan Theyyam is getting his make up. Thick layer of palm fronds, a thalapalli, the headgear that resembles the trident held by Lord Shiva. No facial make up but the eyes have collyrium in them. The body is covered in rice paste, the neck has a light korraloram. A very simple manner of make-up is adopted for the Pottan Theyyam. When the Pottan enters the space, Vishnumurthi is seated amidst the crowd with the trident in hand. The tube light and the burning torches light up the path of entry from the greenroom to the performing space for the Pottan Theyyam. Others from the Theyyam group bow to the Theyyam. Some prostrate before the Theyyam.

Four kalladis (assistants) stand around the Theyyam with flares in hand. When the Theyyam starts moving the electric lights are switched off, and then it is the hazy light of the palm frond bunches aflame that lights the area. Sparks fly. As the glow of the light goes dim, the Theyyam gets a super human otherworldly appearance. After the dance he blesses the people and then the thottam commences and carries out some rituals in a space marked off by four kothiris. In front of this space the mask for the Pottan Theyyam, anklet etc., have been placed. Two spouted jugs of toddy as nivedyam-offering. Then comes the kuruthi-sacrifice of a cock. After this the Pottan Theyyam is seated on a peedam and a palm frond sheaf is thrown over his head to symbolise Lord Shiva. The thottam is being recited. The completed form of the Pottan Theyyam is now on show. We then see the Pottan Theyyam with a sword and a decorative wand in hand.
Three rounds of the heap of embers the Theyyam lies on this meleri (embers of the log), one leg placed on the other raised. When the fronds start getting dry and sparks emerge the Theyyam rises and falls again, repeating quite a few times. Then he dances. One of the kalaadis fall unconscious. He is removed to the greenroom, despite the rain there is a heavy crowd present to watch this Theyyam. Even if one does not know of the Theyyam, the superhuman appearance can attract anyone, as also its performance.

There is another legend about Pottan Theyyam’s practice of falling on and lying in the embers. On hearing that Sankaracharya has been obstructed by a person of low caste, Brahmins rushed in, caught him and threw him into the fire. The indignation of the victimised when fighting against the oppression by the privileged castes are evident in the rhythmic beat of the thottam, the movements and the body language of the Pottan Theyyam.

As the performance drew into a close, rain intensified and the spectators dispersed. It was as if I were myself a performer: when the drums went silent, I felt a sense of loss.

When I reached Kanakakkunnu the next evening, none of the performers had arrived. A little later, a vehicle marked ‘Kerala kaumudi’ pulled to the kerbside near the arena. On the rear door hung the ornate headgear of Raktachamundi. The drummers and the performers alighted from the vehicle. "Hello, you’re early today"!, one of them greeted me. They seemed to have developed some intimacy with me after my help the previous day which saved Vishnumurthi from the rains.

That was the last day of their performance of Theyyams by Malayars. (They had performed a few Theyyyams usually performed by Vannans). They would go home by the late night train. The event
The manager has so arranged things that their place would be taken by Vannans who will arrive tonight with their kit and equipment.

Today it is Raktachamundi. There is just one form. After annihilating Chanda and Munda, Chamundi must have been christened Raktachamundi because on killing Raktabeejasura, Kali drank up all his blood (lest new demons should emerge from the drops that fall on the earth) and got drenched in blood. She is known by different names in different regions. Rakteswari is a Theyyyam akin to this Theyyyam in appearance and rituals.

The headgear of this Theyyyam is breathtaking, with a variety of embellishments. Apart from the decorations on the hair, there is a vest that exaggerates the bust and shows off the midriff and the breasts. Once the form is assumed, the performer refer to self as "Mother".

In the greenroom, the face is being painted. The headgear in place, thick cloth is being wound tightly around the waist to support the body; the weight of the headgear and the other heavy accoutrement tied around the waist that such a thick padding of cloth or waistband is necessary. The Theyyyam with blood-red cloth covering its body from ankle to torso and then a large garland hanging from the neck, the kalladis escort the Theyyyam to the sacred space holding his arms. He sits on the peedam to narrate the thottam. One person narrates the Rakta Chamundi thottam. Others are adding on the embellishment to the Theyyyam, one at a rime. With the placing of the circular headgear the make up is complete. The Panikkar is on the opposite side with the kolthiris lit up, getting ready for the cock sacrifice. The biting of the cock’s neck and blood sucking is a

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93 Chanda and Munda, two monsters whom Chamunda killed.
94 It is the mythical explanation that Raktabeejasura had a boon from Brahma where he could alive again himself from every drop of blood that fell on the ground. For more details on the mother goddesses, See David Kinsley, Hindu Goddesses: Vision of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Traditions (California: University of California Press,1988); Madhu Bazaz Wangu, Images of Indian Goddesses (Abhinav Publications,2003).
ritual specific to this Theyyam. *Rakta Chamundi* dances in a frenzied trance. After the *Theyyattam*, the goddess took up position to receive the devout. I too joined them.

When the Theyyam came back I enquired from them their contact numbers. Told them I’d meet them in their *kaavus* at home.

1<sup>st</sup> January 2012–today has a new set of Theyyam performers at the festival venue. Stepping into the greenroom I’d be able to know which was the Theyyam appearing. The circular headgear has been placed on a stool and some finishing touches are being given. One person is working on the fronds. He is focused on fixing the fronds on the out perimeter of the circular *mudi*-headgear. One strip of frond is being stapled on the next. Another is working on preparing *arayoda*-the waistband.

A bell metal *mudi* decorated with strips of wool make up the design of this gear. An aggressive god, this *mudi* is usually worn by the Mother Goddesses. A broad-based inverted ‘U’ is its shape. Bamboo and wild vine are used to make the lattice framework of the *mudi*. The front portion appears a little protruded. Ixora flowers have been threaded and kept on the side. The carved crown of the headgear in Indian coral wood is being decorated and painted with natural dyes.

The banana stem, tender palm fronds have been used to make the *arayoda*. The banana stem has been given a circular shape and then wound with cloth which has been stitched together, by the person who had donned the *Pottan* Theyyam yesterday. He will play the drum and the *kurumkuzhal*. It was probably because he was to play these instruments today also that he stayed on and did not return with his team yesterday. I could identify his multiple skills within the Theyyam ritual from the manner in which he was making the *oda*. Which is the Theyyam, I asked.
"Puthiya Bhagavathi" was the reply. The Bhagavathi’s arayaoda has to be tied on with extreme care and caution, because the flaming torches are tied on to this waistband. The arayoda also serves as a protection for the Theyyam from the heat that emanates from the torches.

The kolakaran—is lying ready for the face painting to be done. At the same time a Theyyam artiste has appeared at the sacred space with the hand lamp to receive the plantain leaf as a symbol of executing the ritual. The headgear has been placed on the peedam. He is pasting sandal on his body. Spouted jug-kindí full of water has been placed under the sacred seat. Some ixora flowers placed on three betel leaves, on a veeku drum which is keeping to the beat of the varavili. On a large plantain leaf with betel leaf, betel nut, rice grains, turmeric paste were given by the priest in the sthanam. He had received the kodiyila on behalf of Puthiya Bhagavati.

This being a God who personifies fury and aggression, the predominant colour in the facial make up is red. The upper part of the nose is given a coat of yellow and the rest of the portion in dark red (chayilyam). The eye brows have been outlined in black on the outside. Yellow dots mark the black line at regular distance. Collyrium in the eyes. Although the face painting is not too complex, the costume-aharyam of this Bhagavati is exemplary and requires of delicate working with palm fronds.

Puthiya Bhagavathi is the goddess born from the sacred fire-homagni. She cured her father lord Shiva of his illness. With the headgear, decorations for the head, and huge ear tops in front, the Theyyam walks up to the spot and places himself on the peedam. A breast plate has been attached to the upper torso and smeared with lime and turmeric paste. Spread the same on the hands and pasted with puffed rice. On the outer rim of the circular head gear are flaming torches,
giving the appearance of the otherworldly form. Later the minor flares tied to the waistband are also lit up. After all the fares have burnt out, the lamps in the performing area are also turned off. The Theyyam becomes the point of focus. Under the aura created by the fire the Bhagavathi sways. To protect the Theyyam’s body from getting burnt with the sparks from the fire, a helper keeps handing over the thorth-towel like cloth, drenched in water to protect the skin. The Theyyam adopts an unusual movement of back and forth in the four cardinal directions as if to demonstrate the super-human-close-to-god form. There is one person feeding the flames very carefully with oil. The helpers are totally concentrating on the flames that arise from the flares fixed to the waistband.

The Theyyam takes his weapon from the palliyara and dances. Then it is a cock given in sacrifice. After this the Theyyam comes forward to bless the people. This was an unusually crowded day, considering the earlier days. Being New year’s day a lot of families have come for the shopping festival. The event manager asks the people to accept the blessings but they are more distracted and just gather around the Theyyam. There is contingent of cameramen. The photographers appeal to the spectators to cooperate. In the crowd I go up to the Theyyam and accept his blessings.

Another Theyyam that appears with Puthiya Bhagavati is the Veeran. On the 2nd January 2012, this was the Theyyam. Closely resembling the Puthiya Bhagavati, this Veeran Theyyam has only minor difference from the Bhagvati, particularly in the headgear. There is no burning torches. When I asked about this Theyyam, I was told: “This Theyyam is a different form of Kali. The Theyyam is also called the Veeran Kali. In matoth temple, the goddess of revenge Puthiya Bhagavati lead away the Veeran Kali who was enjoying the breeze, and seated her to the right”.
The circular headgear, tender palm encircling it, ear tops in frond, circular vattoda are all part of the Veeran’s costume.

Reminding of a Veeran, in the manner of flailing his arms and body, forgetting himself. The tempo of the drumbeat was controlling the movement of his anklets, I noticed. The drummers also continued to maintain the rhythm. Veeran Kali was delighted, so also the drummers. They communicated with their eyes. On a number of occasions Kali continued to change the pace of her steps and thus prompt an alteration of the drumbeat, inducing some excitement in the spectators too.

The following day it is Puliyoor Kali. This is again another imaginary form of Kali. This was Goddess Parvati’s daughter who took the form of a puli, jaguar. All Muchilot kaavus present this Theyyam before the Muchilot Bhagavati starts performing. Like the Veeran Theyyam, this Theyyam too presents martial art forms during the course of its performance, a highlight of this Theyyam. A circular mudi, headdress. Holding the headdress with the left hand swaying in a manner such that the hair touches the ground.

The last day of the Grand Kerala Shopping Festival. I reached the venue by evening. With the thalapali hanging from his waist, wrapped in red cloth, a person is standing in the Theyyam arena with folded hands. A grid has been made to the left of the Theyyam sthanam with plantain spathes, another has been placed in the middle. Two equal squares. Rice, tender coconut, beaten rice, puffed rice, bananas have been placed. The spouted jug has been covered with a piece of plantain leaf. A small jug has been filled with something. Preparations seem to be on to fulfill some ritual.
The Theyyam performer has placed three betel leaves three pieces of areca nut on the sacred seat and is worshiping the thalapali. The right hand holds a large plantain leaf. Small portions of rice grains have been placed in a row. After uttering something on to the betel nut, rice grains is being sprinkled continuously. Then he ties a thorth (traditional woven cloth used as towel) and then ties the headgear on to it. Soon after the drummer places a drum on the sacred seat. The Theyyam holds the drum stick, with folded hands utters something. It is the varavili or invocation, one that is awakening the thottam. After each exhortation he beats the drum in a particular way. After this the Theyyam recites the thottam of yet another Theyyam. I could not identify the Theyyam here. The kolakaran with a plantain leaf in hand, with rice and an oil wick that was lit waits to receive the kolthiri. A permission taken before some specific Theyyam starts performing. From the sthanam he accepts a full plantain leaf from an assumed priestly person in the palliyara and receded into the greenroom.

Another Theyyam’s facial make up is getting done. It is quite close to the Puthiya Bhagavati’s mukhathaezuthu (facial painting). Outlining the eyebrows and the forehead are fine lines. All others are like the Puthiya Bhagavati. Below the eyes and the ears a blood red coloured area. Symbolic of the bloodthirsty, revengeful Devi-Goddess as in the case of a Bhagavati.

A pleated apron like piece is being tied on. Black, white and red are the colours of this pleated piece of clothing. The red is quite a pronounced colour. The whole body is covered with a red kuppayam (blouse-like garment). Above this is a koralaram (a large breastplate) which covers the stomach and the chest, fastened to the body. Protruding incisors. Above the thalapali a small decorative piece and above that the horse-shoe shaped mudi that was used the last few days.
The outer periphery of the mudi is fixed with decorative floral shapes made of the dried fronds. The outer edge is shaped like a bud jutting into the sky. This conical piece is something quite different from what has been seen the Theyyams that appeared all these days.

The forearm and the ear lobes of the Theyyam have decorative pieces which enhance the appearance of the Theyyam. With anklets on the feet the Theyyam's movements are in the halo of four clusters of dried fronds. The drumbeats peak in unison. The Theyyam is performed by a person who has an agile form. Effortlessly he sways with the large and heavy headdress. It requires extraordinary practice to spin with the heavy head gear, in a manner that makes the identification of the Theyyam difficult.

The speedy spin with the heavy costumes and accessories, headgear by this Theyyam leaves me dumbfounded. The rear of the mudi has been covered in red cloth. This is the *elamkolam*, a minor form that appears as a *kolam/vellattam* of the *Bhagavati*.

The ritual that follows reminds us about the agrarian system. A bunch of plantains with its stem and flower has been embedded in the earth in a space that has been marked out with plantain spathes. The *kolthiris* are being lit. The Theyyam chops the bunch of plantains that are kept standing in the space and then sacrifices a cock, at the same spot. After this *gurusi* is splashed on this spot. After a trance the Theyyam takes up position on the sacred seat and receives people who are waiting to see the Theyyam. A lady goes up to the Theyyam crying as she shares her woes.
All Theyyams conclude rather suddenly to the beats of the drum. The high pitched beats, when it stops, the Theyyam space grows silent. On this day too, the silence sets in and the Theyyam has withdrawn into the green room.

I was narrating the sequence of events and rites that occurred at a space where fifteen Theyyams appeared for the urban crowds, for around ten days quite removed from their traditional locations. When I observed Theyyam as a participant observer and as an outsider of Theyyam structure, I went through moments which were akin to what is felt when one is within the Theyyam form. I also observed the Theyyam artistes develop a closer relationship with those who became regulars to the venue. The event in Kanakakunnu gave me the opportunity to narrate specificities, mythical background of quite a few of the Theyyams of northern Kerala and the new approach to presentation, as well as, explore the emerging meanings and trends. When it performs in a alien territory how does the Theyyam respond to such a situation. What are the differences bring forth? What is the opinion of the viewers? What is the extent of dedication the Theyyam has? How does the changing spatiality alter the ritual format? All these aspects could be observed at this experience of the Theyyam.

At Kanakakunnu it was only the Vannan and Malayan castes who donned all the Theyyams. The Theyyams that appeared in the festival grounds, the differences between the Theyyams donned by the Malayan and the Vannan was quite discernible. The Malayan Theyyams define through their myths the atrocities committed on grounds of untouchability and caste discrimination. The Vannan caste performs for the Thiyya and those above them in social order of caste, the myths retelling the stories of the ancestors, or repeating the unhappy experiences they would themselves have gone through in life at the hands of these upper castes.
The Malayan Theyyams use tender palm fronds for their costumes and its embellishment, whereas the Vannan Theyyam use huge *mudi*-headdress, cloth to drape themselves, extremely attractive decorations. The same headgear is used with minor variations. Traditionally, the Vannan caste is associated with tailoring and this becomes a reason for their ability to use the inherited skill to enhance the beauty of the Theyyam's costume. The ability to handle the headdress is rather effortless for the Vannan than the Malayan. But in maintaining the unbroken continuity of the rituals, the use of music, the creation of the phantasmagoric figures the Malayan excels. Since they play the drums and other accompanying instruments, the *thottam*, its structure and rendition, all within the castes command ensures a well orchestrated presentation. Even in the case of the *Pottan* Theyyam it is clear— the Malayan does a better frenzied dance in trance.

An interesting aspect on display at the *Kanakakunnu* event was a different social dimension of participation of both the Vannan and the Malayan in the preparation, rendering and dancing the Theyyam. Quite contrary to the separateness that is maintained in a *kaavu*, here Malayan donned the *Muthappan* which is really the forte of the Vannan. The face painting of the minor Theyyam of *Puthiya Bhagavathi* and *Puliyoor Kali* was done by a Malayan. He also donned the *Porkali Bhagavathi*. The preparation of the *arayoda* with fronds and the dressing up of the *Puthiya Bhagavati* was done by the Malayan. We have to accept that the caste distinctions and the strict hierarchy of roles, functions and duties and obligations associated with the Theyyam in the *kaavu* clearly comes apart in the new performing spaces, where, they emerge as creative artistes performing and bonding together in a performance art form. This transitory process from Theyyam in the *kaavu* to performer in an open air ground grants the Theyyam castes the space
to emerge out of the rigidities imposed by hierarchical caste distinctions in their sacred map called *cherujanmam*.

The resources for the Theyyam are garnered from various sources in north Kerala. If it is family/tharavadu *kaavu*, family members contribute a monthly or annual subscription\(^{95}\) and what accrues from the *tharavadu* wealth. In earlier times the tenant and others occupying the feudal lord’s property would contribute in cash and in kind towards the meeting the expenditure incurred for conducting the Theyyam. Every caste depending on their caste and its role set apart both resources and days of labour towards the Theyyam. As a continuation of a kind of patron-client relationship carried down over the generations a lot of resources is acquired in such a manner. If Theyyam is conducted by a local committee then a major collection takes place in the name of Theyyam. They stand on the road, stop vehicles and collect money. With the income from Gulf growing these remittances also add to the Theyyam coffers. In fact some of the *kaavus* have been revived after members of a family have become part of the Gulf-employed population. The land reforms in the state did ample damage to *Nair* families who could no long continue Theyyam. Thus proved a dampener for the practice. Then, those who left home for education and then careers outside the home state returned to resuscitate and breathe new life into the *kaavus*. They then rely on blogs to praise and make public their *kaavu* Theyyams and thus give access to their Theyyams on state-of-the-art social networking sites.

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\(^{95}\) For example, certain *tharavadu* form their own family welfare trusts to manage resources for annual Theyyam festivals and associated rituals. They deal all aspects of properties of the *tharavadu* and collect donations from each members, which the trust publishes and intimate all members via post or handover it directly. Family Welfare Trust deed, Constitution and laws of the *Koodal Thazheth Veedu* and notices which include the donations of each member and the total volume of amount collected. For 2009 Theyyam festival, they could collect Rs. 147798/-as donation from members.
The *kolu* or reward that is given to the person performing the Theyyam has not seen much change even after years. The *Chamundi* Theyyam received 1800/- from the *kaavu* where I done Theyyam. The argument put forth by the organisers or the *kaavu* committee is that the Theyyam is receiving offerings in cash from the devotees. When one rise voice to get more reward, they counter it with, "Only if there is a wall can you write on it".

This is not the state of those who appeared as Theyyams in *Kanakakunnu*. They have been paid reasonable amounts for appearing at the *Kanakakunnu* venue. But when calculated against the total outlay for such an event, what the Theyyam performers would have got is small percentage of the total payment received. Event manager, the one who contracted the Theyyam, the Theyyam performer who took up the contract with the event manager and when it reaches the *Kolakkaran* the payment is shrunk. The performing castes even today is in a state where it cannot determine its own payment or ask what is its rightful amount. They are still reluctant to ask for a price for donning the God-like status. But, there is a spark of change in this attitude too. When the Theyyam and its performers are able to invent and re-invent their labour and the performance according to the changing time and space, but the *kollakaran*’s effort is tied to the caste-owner-feudal lord as a link caught somewhere in this.

**Summary**

This part of the chapter form an ethnography of the Theyyam performed outside the premises of the *kaavu*. Furthermore, it is performed in a region where the Theyyam is completely alien to the natives as a form of worship as well as a ritual-art-dance. The social structural distinctions, and the ethnographic detailing of the people, and their inclination towards certain worship patterns
and much more urban characteristics of lives in Thiruvananthapuram makes the exercise of participant observation interesting and challenging. A group of Theyyam dancers from north Malabar reached Thiruvananthapuram to perform fifteen various forms of the Theyyams for around ten evenings at Kanakakunnu palace. I had to encounter with multiple sorts of people, contexts and processes to capture the event as performances in a space arranged by new forces of agencies under the patronage of state and market. To some I need to open myself to get in touch with what I intend to capture and to some others I need to act as purely as a researcher. Thus, participant observations has conducted by delving into two ways--one is covert and other is overt-. This situation makes me to define my observation through different modes of construction. Moreover, the event in place also work as a pointer to remind me about the Theyyam in kaavus and various contexts where I have encountered similar situations and meeting people who shared myths, legends, and memories of various experiences of Theyyam in their lives. This, in turn, enabled juxtapositions of locations and connecting experiences of varied sites while positing a logic of associations. In some part of this ethnographic narrative I could talk about certain ritual processes that occurred in my own family such as observing sorcery to ward off problems of my own natives, where I could bring the role of my father, mother and other members in contact with the ritual needs of the villagers.

When the fieldwork and participant observation progressed especially in the final days of the performances I largely engaged with the Theyyam dancers and felt one among them. When objective conditions of strategies meet with subjective conditions of life, it makes the context more complex in terms of relationships and rapports which was located within the constraints of boundaries of the subjectivity and objectivity. While interfacing these points of status I could construct a story of human experience in the field that formed as an ethnographic text. Though I
tried my level best to covertly observe the ritual event, in the process of its progress I was not able to hide my identity as a Theyyam dancer and the observation becomes overt participation. Thus, the story of performances in these spaces makes an ethnography with an autoethnographical touch or a fieldwork makes an ethnography which led to locating autoethnographic feeling of the event while participating with the event in place. Thus, it bring forth a narrative that was made possible through a technique of following the Theyyams, kaavus, people, costumes, forms, myths, spaces and the life while identifying as a researcher.