III

Double Lives
Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to narrate the social and cultural context in which a Theyyam dancer transcend to the status of local deity. This is explained not only in the form of a subjective or inner experience of a person which may not be observed by others, but also been presented as lived experience of a person who happened to be an enactor of the Theyyam from his childhood onwards. Thus, it bring forth, through the fragments of autobiographical narrative that explores the researcher's experience of preparing for and being a Theyyam dancer in a local shrine (kaavu). While narrating the experience of being a Theyyam in a kaavu, it covers a wide range of aspects--such as the nature of kaavus, the social setting, the rituals, castes, their duties and obligations during a Theyyam festival. It also pictures many other social spaces which emerge in the vicinity of the kaavus, during such festivals, such as small market places and spaces of gambling. Thus, the personal narrative becomes a text that opens up a kind of possibility to unearth a total sociocultural setting of the kaavu. The researcher is a Theyyam dancer and a member of a specific family and caste who have been performing all the rituals of this dance form and have been enacting it in the shrines for several generations. This narrative is centered on a single kaavu known as Koorara Mandamullathil, situated eight kilometers to the North of Thalassery town in Kannur district in Kerala. This is taken as a micro-setting, which
represents and features the characteristics of a *Theyyakaavu* in general and specifically, it is in this *kaavu* the researcher had began to enact the Theyyam and has performed it many times annually.

While becoming a Theyyam, the dancer straddles in two very different worlds. The first one is the world of gods and the other is the social world where he belongs to a lower caste. As this lower caste individual transforms into a Theyyam dancer through the processes of *thottam*¹ and *vellatam*², he acquires a state of divinity, a unique position and a voice, that even people from the upper castes cannot ignore. But, as soon as this state of being Theyyam is over, he reverts to the state of the same ordinary man from the lower caste. The life narrative as a source of investigative concern describes the hard surfaces of life³. Thus, the narration and self are inseparable here⁴, and further they give rise to a new way of thinking and feeling about a domain of culture. What are the subtleties in these experiences, how one undergoes various social hierarchies and positioning are the main focus of this chapter. This introduces an account of the complex universe of the Theyyam.

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¹ A song which praises the god narrates his origin, biography and travelogue. Most often the length of the *Thottam* of female *kolams*-the costumed form of deity-will be lengthy. For example, the *thottam* of Kadavangad Makkam, a mother goddess begins in the evening and last till the day break.

² A preliminary rite prior to the actual Theyyam. This is performed on the day just before the actual performance. This first phase is a kind of prelude to the main form. All rites and dance is rehearsed in this phase with lesser costumes. The performer do this phase of rites with a white towel tied around the head offered by the *kaavu* preists. The *vellatam* is also called as *thottam* in many *kaavus*. See Nambuthiri, *Folklore Nikhandu*, 810.

³ Geertz state that these hard surfaces such as "the political, economic, and stratificatory realities within which men are everywhere contained" where people seek different positionings within the contextual constraints given to them. See, Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 30.

⁴ To get a review focusing on narratives of personal experience and to have a familiarity of the literatures on narratives that interfaces with the concepts such as self and society, socializing emotions, attitudes and identities, see Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps, "Narrating the Self," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 25,(1996): 19-43.
Mandamullathil Kaavu

The Koorara Mandamullathil Kaavu known locally as Mandola is patronized by a Thiyya family. My father was the holder of Cherujanmavakasam of this kaavu. After the demise of my father, now my brother holds this hereditary obligation. Though I have donned the Theyyam in many kaavus, it is extremely difficult and some what meaningless to talk about all those experiences I have had, I am describing here my experiences of dancing Theyyam in Mandamullathil kaavu only. This autoethnography of Theyyam tries to portray the social structure of the kaavu, the caste dynamics and its relations and obligations, various deities and associated rituals, and the process of my transformation from the status of a kolakkaran, a person who is entitled to perform the Theyyam, to that of a deity.

The patronizing Thiyya house is modeled in a typical Thekkan (South) Padinjitta (East) style of architecture. The Mandola kaavu belongs to this house. But, there are many extended families who have right on the same kaavu. It is with their consent and offerings that the kaavu arranges its annual festivals. Each family offers its share in the form of gifts and mostly, it is considered their social obligation. This is a family network of marshalling economic resources to conduct the festivals annually. Each kaavu in northern Kerala, has a chief deity installed in it. Similarly, the chief deity of this kaavu is Angakaran. The Theyyam performed at this kaavu has some stark differences from the others in terms of its rituals and the nature of participation of the family members of tharavadu (ancestral home) in the rituals offered to the kolam (the costumed form of the deity). The differences are also observed in the costumes, ornaments and the headgear of the Theyyam dancer.

5 At the Madappura, the chief deity is Muthappan. At Muchilottu, it is Muchilottu Bhagavathi. In certain other kaavus the chief deity may either be Raktha Chamundi or Thee Chamundi, or Kuttichathan.
The *Palliyara*, is the sacred space where the swords, and stick weapons of the *Angakaran* are kept. Besides the weapons, the iconic images of Lord *Vishnu* and Lord *Shiva* are instilled within this space, which is a new addition that has been done according to some astrological advices. This space is the chief sanctum of the devotees. Entrance to this place of worship is restricted only to the members of the family which is also selective according to the ritual procedures of the *kaavu*. It is also interesting to note that only the *Angakaran* Theyyam can enter into the portico of this space. Other *kolams* may sit anywhere in the outskirts. They may even dance there. I have mentioned this privilege that the *Angakaran* holds to point at the significance of this *kolam* in this *kaavu*. The *kaavu* holds this Theyyam with great awe and reverence.

In 2005 the *kaavu* was renovated. Till then, the *aniyara*, the make-up room of the Theyyams of *Angakaran* and *Asuralanum Makkalum* was on the right corner of the *palliyara*. In those days, the Theyyam dancers which belonged to the *Munnoottan* caste alone had a permanent make-up room. Usually, the ordinary make-up rooms of Theyyams were covered with coconut leaves on all four sides. The make-up room of the *Angakaran* is one built of bricks and stones, and is also thatched with tiles and cow-dung was used to cover the floor. But ever since 2005 all the Theyyams here now have permanent make-up rooms. They have an electric supply and have grilled doors for safety. Now the make-up room of the *Angakaran* has been shifted to a small building which has a concrete roof and is situated just a little behind the shrine. The make-up room of the *Vannan* caste is situated on the left corner of the *kaavu*. In 1998, when I performed in

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6 One of the castes who perform Theyyam, especially in the places near *Vadakara* and *Thalassery*. They are one sect whose lineage is associated with the caste called *Velan*. It is said that they are *Munnoottans*, as they committed three offences namely killing of cock, goat and buffalo. These were considered to be offenses to the Brahmins. *Munnoottans* perform *Angakaran* and *Asuralanum Makkalum* in this *Kaavu*. See Thurston, *Castes and Tribes*; K.K.Kusuman, eds., A Panorama of Indian Culture (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1990), 127.

7 In Mandola they perform Karanavar Theyyam and Pothi.
this kaavu the make-up room of the Vannans was only a temporary thatched shed, and was covered with coconut fronds. The Theyyam ornaments and costumes hung on twined threads could be seen from outside. Now everything is kept inside the make-up room and outsiders cannot see the make-ups, the finishing touches that the dancers do to the wooden headgear and the way in which they string together palm fronds to make various costumes.

The space or sthanam of the Karanavar\(^8\) and Poth胛Theyyams are not in close proximity to the palliyara. They are instilled in a small room of the Mandamullathil Tharavadu. In the northern most corner of the house, there is a little room where the swords and the shields of these Theyyams are kept along with a lamp. At the time of the Theyyam festival the central wall of the room is covered with a red silk cloth. This room is opened only at the time of the festival or at the time of the most important events or occasions of the family.

On the right side of the palliyara there is a plot which is a bit more elevated from the palliyara, and this place is outside the kaavu compound. The sthanam of Chamundi/Vishnumurthi Theyyam, and Gulikan\(^10\)Theyyam are situated there. We, the Malayans are assigned to perform these Theyyams. Our aniyara, make-up room are also built just adjacent to the sthanam of our Theyyam. It is thus observed that the positioning of various castes and deities according to the caste hierarchy.

\(^8\) Karanavar indicates an elder person or patron who control and conduct Tharavadu. Thus, this Theyyam is an ancestral hero worship and the Karanavar of the Tharavadu itself.

\(^9\) Short form of Bhagavathi.

\(^10\) It is said that this form is born out from the left toe of Shiva. He walks on the stilts which gives him an abnormal shape and size and worshiping him is primarily to ward off deaths in the family. See Rajagopalan and Komath, Theyyam : The Other Gods, 51 for more details like how he look like and his mode of performance.
The annual Theyyam festival of this *kaavu* is held on the 15, 16, and 17 of the Malayalam Month called *Makaram*. This period usually falls in January-February. My memory of Theyyam starts from this *kaavu* as I saw my father, brother and many close relatives perform and fulfill their obligations towards this *kaavu*. I had also started performing Theyyam in this *kaavu*. The Theyyam starts in a *kaavu* with a specific rite called Theyyam *Kurikuka*, i.e., to decide about the conduction of the Theyyam. The formality starts on the day of *Makara Sankramanam* i.e. when the sun moves from the *danu* zodiac (rasi/month) to that of the *Makaram*, which is considered to be a very auspicious time. According to the English Calendar this particular day changes every year. Two or three days before this auspicious day of *Makara Samkramana* the owners of the *kaavu* come to my house and invite us for the rite of *Kurikkal*. The word *Kurikkal* literally means noting down. It means deciding the days of the festival and then noting the details as soon as the owners receive our consent to perform the Theyyam rituals on specific dates. On the *Makara Sankramanam* day a token of money is given to the hereditary holder who has the right to perform and do necessary rites in this *kaavu*. This position was held by my father and later on after his demise was automatically transferred to the the next elder male member of my family, i.e., my elder brother.

Every year the 15 of *Makaram* is considered to be a day for *Kavil Kayaral*, i.e, entering the precincts of the *kaavu* to perform the initiation rite. But even before that, our close relatives will come one after the other to my house. Apart from the percussionists such as *chenda* players i.e., the drummers, the man who plays the *Ilathalam*\(^{11}\), the man who plays the *Kurunkuzhal*\(^{12}\) reach my house at various points of time. The *Karanavar*, who is the senior most member of our family will

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\(^{11}\) A metallic musical instrument which resembles a miniature pair of cymbals. It is made out of bronze and has two pieces of it, one hold in the left hand and banging on it with other in the right hand.

\(^{12}\) A double reed wind instrument used as an integral part of the Theyyam percussion.
also arrive to instruct us on how to observe the ritual formalities associated with the tepu, i.e., painting and drawing on the face of the dancer, and invoking the deity through recitation of verses. This is a preliminary planning before going to the kaavu and performing rites in actuality. Looking at this kind of dedication, I thought and realised that we are not doing all these not for others but for ourselves.

The fine-tuning of the chenda, which is in Theyyam parlance is called chendamurukkal is always done one or two days in advance, before the performance, to avoid any discordance. The changing of the reed of the kurumkuzhal, which is known as seevali or nadanazhi, means the hole of the sound, is also done early. The palm leaf is cut in the necessary size and shape and is put in cold water to make it viable and flexible and when it is wet enough it is folded in a particular shape and tied to form a reed. As guests come pouring in, my mother and sister are very busy cooking, and serving the food to the guests, which is their forte. Playing the hostesses used to make tense them a lot, especially at a time when there were no gas ovens, mixier-grinders etc. They had to manually draw water from the wells to meet the domestic requirements. In those days, we did not have a well of our own. So, the woman had to draw water from the deep well of the neighbour and fetch it home.

On the 16 of Makaram, a day before our Theyyam performance, my mother has to prepare the rice paste necessary which is a pre-requisite for the make up. A kind of rice called pacchari (raw rice/white rice) is put in water and is soaked overnight, then it is ground to a paste with the required consistency. The grinding is done with a heavy tool made of stone which is used to grind
and mix materials against a slab of stone\textsuperscript{13}. This rice paste is required for the body make-up of the \textit{Gulikan} Theyyam. Besides, the clothes in which the performers dress up also have to be collected, washed and soaked in starch and then dried to make them strong and stiff. After being treated in this manner the clothes become stiff and when they are tied around the waist, the Theyyam gets adequate largeness which is suitable to the \textit{kolam}. As I grew up I remember my mother complaining that all these tasks that she has been attending to for several years, are very tiring and give little returns. It was assumed that all these tasks had to be attended by my mother and sister themselves, and the male members of the family never paid any heed to their complaints and grumblings.

My father considered it to be his pride, a false one for that matter, to give a feast to all the guests, which he really could not afford. Even then he would make arrangements with the local store of \textit{Purushuettan} on the pretext of paying the expense after the Theyyam fest. Thus some how the lunch was arranged for. It was followed by hurried activities related to the \textit{kavilkayaral}, which meant entering the compound of the \textit{kaavu} in the evening. If by any chance the \textit{chenda} players who had agreed to perform got late, my father used to very nervous and I still recall the tension which was palpable on his face.

During the 1999 performance, all the drum players who had promised to come, had to come from a place near \textit{Kuttiyadi}, which is in the Kozhikode district, just after Vadakara. The father of one of the \textit{chenda} players breathed his last and that was why all of them got late. My brothers and my father ran helter-skelter in panic and anger not knowing what to do. In our village the telephone or mobile phones were not available that time. Just like my father and brothers, I was also haunted

\textsuperscript{13} This is called \textit{Ammikallu} in Malayalam. This gridding stone is used to be a marking item in a traditional kitchen of a Kerala family.
by the fear of what would be the consequences if the chenda players did not come and because of that age-old customs were broken. The time for starting the ensemble had come and the authorities of the kaavu literally lost their patience. About ten to twelve men came rushing and entered my house and started shouting severely: “Why the ensemble has not started”? “Explain”? For a few minutes there was a heated argument and then suddenly a jeep carrying all the chenda players appeared there. As my father saw them jumping out from the jeep, he started hurling abuses at them. It was actually not abusing, but calling names, in the colloquial language. They were the same set of abuses that the kaavu authorities had showered on my father just a few minutes ago. I could see my father shivering with fear — the fear of alienation, the state of helplessness before the kaavu authorities, and also the experience of being a subaltern. I remember how fiercely I had reacted to this incident when I discussed with people of my age who had accompanied the kaavu authorities. I said, “you see, we are not slaves, a drummer's father dead, and that was the reason why they did not turn up in time.” As we were already late and there was no time for any exchange of words, all of us hurriedly proceeded for the ceremony of Kaveral.

Before the Kaveral my father had to pray before the Theyyathara with a lit lamp and also had to adorne a petal of chempaka (frangipani) flower on his ears. Then he would ask me to take the lamp, called the kuthuvilakku. Carrying this lamp in my hands I used to accompany my father along with the chenda players. Every year in the same manner, my father and our troupe will go for the entry to the kaavu on 15 of Makaram evening. On entering the kaavu, my father used to stand before the sacred space palliyara with a white towel hanging on his left shoulder and used to bow and pray:

14 A lamp hanging in a long iron rod of sharp end, used to fix in ground easily. It is usually black in colour so it is also known as kakkavilakku.
“I, the servant of your divinity will execute my duties to you. Oh lord, so let me and my people start the ensemble.”

His voice used to be very loud, loud enough for all who were present to hear. There is a chief priest called Embran\(^{15}\) to initiate the rituals, and before lighting the lamps of the shrine, he used to offer my father an amount of Rs.10 (a single currency) along with two or three pieces of areca nut on a betel leaf. This offering is called a “betel leaf offering” (vettilakaineetam) done on behalf of the deity. After my father, each percussion players and the Theyyam dancer, would come forward to accept a similar offering, one after the other. They would then bow before the Embran and also bow before each other as a symbolic gesture of being one.

Then came the time when the chenda players would arrange themselves into two teams. Each team would then stand face to face on both sides of the palliyara and would start drumming. This is the first ensemble intended to inform the people that the Theyyam festival had begun. The kaavu precincts were cleaned and floor was given a coating of cow dung. In all Theyyam-sthanams there would be lighted lamps. There is another important ceremony during the Theyyam festival which is known as kodiyettam, which means hoisting the temple flag. The flag with black and white marks on a red silk cloth is tied to one end of a pole, and is tied to the chempaka tree and erected as a symbol of the festivities. In certain kaavus the areca nut tree is cut from the root and is used for hoisting the flag of the kaavu. The member of the carpentry caste hold the right to light a lamp with several tyers that is tied to the chempaka tree and they only have the rite to hoist the temple flag. The first vadhyamela or orchestration of drums lasts for about two hours. By this time the devotees of the locality come to the kaavu. Some may also bring their offerings as a vow to

\(^{15}\) Main priest of the kaavu, a Thiyya man called as Embran. He is selected as priest on astrological basis.
the deity. Some bring coconut oil and give it to Embran, who is the priest, and get prasadam. After getting the prasadam from the Embran, the devotees retreat to a vantage point from where they can hear the ensemble. After this passage of almost two hours of this ensemble there begins the most vibrant and exhilarating rhythmic orchestration called the Thayambaka. The Embran offers a token of money as a gift to these players. In the meanwhile, the preparations for the vellatam, the preliminary rite of Angakaran goes on, on the right side of the palliyara.

When the dusk sets in the Angakaran, who is the cynosure of the devotees, starts the make up of the vellatam. The performer gets his eyes bordered and then darkens the eye lids and lashes with soot, then he applies a turmeric paint all over the face and ties a white towel on his head. This towel is given to him for the vellatam. Then he covers his head with a talappali, a frontlet band, and smears his body with sandal lilacs. Then he decorates his body with a long garland and ties a long red cloth like a girdle around his waist and starts singing the thottam loudly. He begins to shake, moves sideways, twirls and dances in a possessed state.

After the vellatam of the Angakaran there is a ritual called the korayal. This is a ritual of extensive sword play which virtually turns it into a martial arts exhibition. This happens just in front of the palliyara in a squared space called kalam which is specifically built for the same. This space for ritual was usually kept clean and polished with cow dung. But since 2005 we find this space now

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16 Prasadam is what the deity is supposed to give back to the devotee as a token of the deity's pleasure in the devotees offering. The prasadam will be bit of flowers, turmeric powder etc.

17 This is a kind of solo performance in which the main player of chenda will stand at the centre surrounded by other players improvises rhythmically on the beats and other instrumentalists follow this rhythm in particular style. To have more on this ritual playing of chenda, see Rolf Killius, Ritual Music and Hindu Rituals of Kerala (New Delhi: BR Rhythms, 2006).

18 A frontlet band stitched with 21 silver serpents tied on the dancer's forehead. These 21 little rearing cobras are believed to represent the 21 gurus or divine preceptors. This ornament is integral to every stages of rites, i.e., thottam, vellatam and theyyam. Before it is tied on the forehead, it is touched with respect with the right hand and brought up to the brow.
covered with inter-locked tiles and thus, neat in appearance. People stand around the *kalam* to witness the *korayal*. This is performed under the guidance and leadership of the chief priest *Embran* who is also responsible for the upkeep of the swords inside the shrine. The sword is wielded above the head in twists and turns and this shows the performer’s mastery and perfection as he wields such a dangerous weapon without even being hurt, and that too when he is moving in a dizzy manner. His movements are akin to those of the martial arts of *kalaripayattu*.

While following a rhythm of *chenda*, *Embran* does this strenous exercise with great dexterity. The swords so used for this terrifying feat are supposed to have a divine power ingrained in them. The *kalam* is a square ground, but the *Embran* may go beyond the periphery of the square and this performance usually creates awe in the spectators. During this *korayal* dance with the swords he goes to many nearby places and then returns. Sometimes he climbs on the stone-built raised platform and performs there. The *Embran*, at last gets so exhausted that he falls before the shrine. Then five or six able bodied persons would come forward and support him and lift him up and make him lie down near the shrine.

Meanwhile the people who belong to the *Tharavadu*, who are decided on the basis of astrological consultation and also following the matrilineal tradition and hierarchical status that they have in the *Tharavadu*, will come forward to do the *korayal*. The viewers may get a chance to see six or

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19 The *kalaripayattu* is a traditional martial art form widely practiced in Kerala. The word *kalari* means school and *payattu* means to fight. Exercise in a *kalari* includes strikes, kicks, grappling, preset forms, weaponry and hereditary practice of healing methods. As many forms of Theyyam part of hero worship, the practice of this martial art is part of ritual. To have a sense of how hero worship is related to the cult of Theyyam, see K.K.N.Kurup, *The Cult of Theyyam and Hero Worship in Kerala*, Indian Folklore Series, Vol 21 (Calcutta: Indian Publications, 2003) To have a performance aspect of this art, see Philip B.Zarilli, *When the Body Becomes All Eyes: Paradigms, Discourses and Practices of Power in Kalarippayattu, A South Indian Martial Art* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000).

seven of them dancing with their swords wielded almost in the same manner as the Embran. The climax comes when after a fierce indulgence, one by one, all of them get exhausted and fall down and are also lifted up and made to lie down on the sides of the palliyara. The korayal ritual does happens in only a few kaavus where the Angakaran is the chief deity. There is one kaavu, Urothummal, situated on the way from Thalassery to Panoor road, near a place called Koppalam where a similar ritual could be observed annually.

There are two kolams of Angakaran in Mandola. One is the permanent kolam, as part of the routine of the annual Theyyam festival. The other is an offering at the personal level as a vow. On the first day of the festival the dancer or koladhari comes before the shrine and stands there with devotion. His forehead is smeared with very broad sandal paste marks. Then, the person who acts a helping hand to the Embran offers him the wooden sacred seat (peedam) and the kolakkaran then places a banana leaf on which he puts some rice grains, a betel leaf and nuts. He then conducts the rite of peedapuja, or worshiping the sacred seat with water, fragrant stuffs like camphor and flowers.

Again the peeda pooja will be performed with a dhoomakori, a particular tool used for this rite, which is filled with some scented thing that gives rise to curls of smoke. It is then the time of the Malayar’s to start their chenda ensemble in certain defined rhythmic syllables. This is followed by putting a veekchenda on the sacred seat by the kolakkaran and then he plays it himself, subsequently he calls the deity loudly, which is called as varavili or the call to come, an invocation by the performer to the deity to come and be present. Then he starts the thottam of the deity, which will be very brief. The Angakaran then receives rice grains and flowers from the Embran and he prays internally and returns the rice grains and flowers to the Embran. The Embran takes
them from the Angakaran, who stands there bowing his head, and then the Embran sprinkles the rice grains and flowers on the Angakaran’s head. Then he returns the sword and the Angakaran vellatam, will thus, leave the sacred space.

Then the same kolakaran with some changes in the costumes and other paraphernalia of vellatam, appears as the vellatam of Asuralanum Makkalum. Now he wears heavier ornaments. According to the customs, this particular deity demands such an ornamentation customarily. He appears with a facial make up with chayilyam, (vermillion) and manayola, both materials profusely on used in Theyyam. His chest is covered with a wooden chest ornament called meyyaram, mey is body and ‘haram’ is garland. A long red cloured cloth is tied around his waist and it falls till the toe of the kolakkaran. A wooden waist piece, a lacquered wooden crown called olakathum pattum, chilambu; bell-metal anklets that are hollow and contain beads inside them that produce the musical rattling on the feet; all of these together constitutes the aharya of the vellatam of Asuralanum Makkalum. This vellatam does not have any elaborate rites of passage.

After dancing for sometime, the kolakkaran goes around the palliyara thrice and withdraws from the ritual space as soon as the Embran places some rice grains and flowers on the bowed head of the vellatam. By that time it is usually midnight. There is no chenda vadyam anymore. A serious silence now grips the shrine.

The helpers who used to assist me and my father in our make-up room would then go for dinner. They would squat on the mats before spread banana leaves. We were served rice and sambar

21 Manayola is an orange shade of colour which prepares from a particular part of the stone, and is used for face painting. By mixing other colors with Manayola, one could make colours like green and red too.

22 This particular term is employed by Van Gennep in his classic and pioneering cross-cultural study of status changes and the associated rituals. He notes that rituals follow certain conceptual pattern as initiation rites which has separated ritual stages into three that of separation, transition or liminality and reincorporation. See, Arnold Van Gennep, The Rites of Passage (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1969(1909)).
and one or two pappadams. It was not an elaborate feast and consisted of a few items only. It is to be noted that the kolakkaran do not take rice for dinner. We are given woven coconut fronds to sleep. We try to sleep somewhere in the premises of the kaavu. I still recall the irritation caused by the sharp edges of the leaves and they seem to hurt me even now.

The next day the chenda orchestration will start by seven o’clock in the morning. For that we had to wake up early and clean our teeth with umikkari, the black burnt rice husk, or had to use mango leaves for the same purpose in the absence of the former. But gone are the days of such indigenous teeth cleaning. Now every person has his tooth brush and a small tooth paste tube in his kit. We fetch the well water for the morning bath, and some people will take bath at the closest precincts of the well. After the bath the chenda vadyam starts. The courtyard of the kaavu gets lively and vibrant and noisy. The morning ensemble (vela) lasts only for one hour. I used to play the Ilathalam. After the ensemble we would retire for breakfast. Each one of us gets Rs. 50 and one bunch of banana. Other Theyyam troupe (Munnoottans and Vannans) also get similar rewards. We also get aval (beaten rice) malar (puffed rice) along with pieces of jaggery.

The sad part is that our burning hunger will never be satiated by these easily digestible food. Besides, the quantity given is too little and there are too many mouths to be fed. So naturally the drummers, the helpers and all those who were engaged in many tiring jobs the previous day and night would rush to the closest teashop run by Rajettan from where we consumed hot steam cakes mixed with banana. For the bananas that I used to carry back home, there were too many contenders there at the kaavu and before I lost a major portion of the fruits to them I used to rush towards my home, because sharing such hard earned bananas was literally unthinkable. As I was helpless, I could not stop anyone from taking some of those bananas, so somehow I used to fly
home with these fruits so that I could share them with my mother and sister and also the guests gathered at home.

That day, during the day time there are no specific rites at all except the intermittent beating of the drums, thus the first half in the morning will be comparatively free. Still, the drum players are expected to be present throughout at all point of time in the kaavu precincts. It is during this leisure time that the craftsman in charge of the costumes are busy with their work. They prepare costumes and ornaments with tender coconut fronds which are of a variety of length and breadth. This is called kurutholapani. The kaavu authorities will supply the kuruthola i.e, tender coconut leaves, kamukinpala, broad tender areca nut leaf stem, vazhapindi the cylindrical banana trunks etc and our craftsmen never waste a second and continue to make the costumes and ornaments that will be used in the evening performance.

All the preliminary rites begin from the make-up room itself. The performer go before the palliyara to receive a lighted wick. This wick is then taken to the make-up room and a lamp is thus lit from it. The significance of this lighting comes from the fact that this lamp is kindled from the sacred lamp of the palliyara. This borrowing of light from the palliyara is symbolic as it indicates the transfer of the divinity to the aniyara. The wick and the oil are provided by the Embran or his assistants. I used to receive the wick for our aniyara. Only after this auspicious act, activities in the aniyara will begin.

**Market and Gambling**

As devotees come streaming down to the kaavu, it gives rise to a myriad of activities including the setting up of small market spaces in vicinity. This market is locally known as chantha. The place is
taken through an auction by a person or a group of people through a contract with the kaavu authorities. The purpose of the market is to provide tea, coffee, snacks rice and curries and cigarettes to the thronging crowd. It is a temporary establishment which resembles a shed. Earlier, the sheds were built with coconut leaves, which formed the roof and covered the sides and usually these sheds were not well furnished. Now these make-shift sheds have electricity connection and are furnished with plastic chairs and tables. The process of auction of this small market is a slightly long one. One or more interested parties approach the kaavu authorities and inform them that they are ready to take up the chantha that year. The person who offers the highest bid gets the right to run the chantha. The one who wins the bid enjoys the monopoly over all the things that are sold there. The person who gets the contract decides what goods are to be sold and where to set up the petty shops. The shops that sell balloons, ice-creams, a variety of toys and bangles and jewellery are an important and attractive market site for kids and girls. Those who wish to start one of these of shops had to meet the chief of the market and take his consent. They will mutually agree on the rent on which the shop could be run.

The group of gamblers are called chattikalikkar. This gang offers gambling games that are played on a rotating disk which has certain marks on it. These people shout very loudly and endlessly to attract the people. Mostly the youths indulge in these games. Some of them may start their games with Rs. 10 and may end up earning up to Rs. 200-300 and then boast of this achievement. These games may sometimes end up giving rise to fights between different groups.

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23 In the discussions on defining a society’s economic systems, economic anthropologists describe the nature of organization of labour and work in various forms of market. They were concerned primarily on the social conditions in which forms of market emerges in different economies. To have those discussions see G. Dalton, ed., *Tribal and Peasant Economies: Readings in Economic Anthropology* (Garden Cit: New York Natural History Press, 1967); C. M. Duncan, C M. and D.W. Tandy, eds., *From Political Economy to Anthropology: Situating Economic Life in Past Societies* ( Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1994).
or persons. Some *kaavus* are well known not because of their deities but for their gambling. Thus the presence of police is essential throughout this fest. These quarrels sometimes extend from the level of the members of the *kaavus* to a level where the localites and at times even the police men get involved in them. At times even police cases are lodged and finally these quarrels end up getting settled in the court.

Whatever may be the trade, whether it is selling lemon water, toys, bangles are as a matter of fact even gambling, all these have to first come to terms with the conditions laid by the contractor of the market. Most of the times we could see vendors bargaining with the contractor to settle the contract on an agreeable price. The chief activity during the day time is to get the consent from the contractor and finalise the contract, so that the market place becomes alive with activities at the earliest possible. In between, we sometimes have to start an ensemble that is specifically planned for the noon time. Sometimes even the drummers gamble to try their luck. As they get defeated, they return to the *aniyara*. The other drummers then mock them on their failure.

At the time of the auction for fixing the contract, the *kaavu* authorities usually come and put certain demands before the contractor. The condition is that native or foreign, no liquor should be sold. Though, the contract accepts these conditions firmly, the vendors usually sell liquor secretly and thus violate the condition of the contract. Consequently there are many a quarrels between these two parties. These things were a cause of concern for me as my father used to get drunk. He would promise to pay the money after the Theyyam festival is over. This will slowly create a credit note in my father's account. All the relatives, friends and assistants of *kolakkaran* etc., would also move towards the liquor shop and drink arrack and credit the amount to my father's account, which would further result in a huge amount. The amount or rewards we would get from
the kaavu was never enough to pay these debts. There were times that we had to borrow money from others to settle these accounts.

When ever my father used to get drunk, I had to give my whole attention to him. The reason was that once he was drunk I could not predict exactly when he would start abusing kaavu authorities. He would not even spare the priestly figure of the Embran. All this would happen before the public eyes. The local people had always tried to forget and forgive my father saying “after all he is our Swami”. *Swami* is the short form of *Swaminathan*. Natives used to call him *Swami*. But his drunk state and abuses used to cause me a lot of worries and also shame. My father who used to loose all his senses would fall down before the kaavu, and I had to carry him on my shoulders, while a whole lot of people would watch me sympathetically while I used to walk slowly towards our make-up room. There my father would start calling me names. He would ask me in a loud voice--“Don’t you know that I am your creator”? I never had a fear in performing *Vishnumurthi*; which was a tough form, the toughest challenge for me was to control my drunk father.

Both inside and outside the kaavu I and my father had always been reminded of our identity as members of the lower caste and were always subjected to the prejudices of the higher castes against the lower. On top of that we had this compulsion of dancing Theyyam and other obligations as a member of the village service caste. This realisation of being a subaltern used to come out in the form of foul and abusive language against the superior members of the kaavu as a passive resistance.25

24 My father’s official name is *Kunhiraman*. The name *Swami* came into being as he go to visit pilgrimage centres and return home when he wishes. Mother and other members of my family would not know where he is and when he will come. He also used to go to Kodungallor temple along with a person who collected money from the natives as vow to the *Bhagavathi*. This caused the natives call him-*Swami*. 25 Identifying and experiencing ones own social position and how people locate themselves in society in relation to
My father used to especially recite this couplet when he was drunk:

"Ningalku Rajavu Kamsanennakilum
Nammakku Rajavu Nammal Thanne
Poanaal Poagattum poadaa
Indha bhoomiyil nilaiyaay vaalndhavar yaaradaa?"

Though your king is Kamsa
We are the lords of Ourselves
If it went, let it be gone,
On this earth, who is going to live permanently?

As my father used to abuse the kaavu authorities and also used foul languages and criticized them vocally, for this reason some people liked him very much, especially the true communists of the locality.

The Korayal Rite

As darkness descends, the vellatam of Angakaran would emerge from the make-up room. Two kolakkars would come in the form of Angakaran and stand in the courtyard of the kaavu, while the puja i.e. the special worship associated with this rite will be going on. After it, there would be thottam, which is soon followed by the possessed dance of the vellatam, that would go on for a long time. Then the ritual of korayal would start. Each man belonging to the tharavadu assigned for the korayal, would lift the sword from the peedam and start performing the korayal. When

other groups and institutions has discussed in the work titled as Fractured Identities. See Harriet Bradley, Fractured Identities: Changing Patterns of Inequality (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997). To get a conceptual application of it in the context of caste relations in Kerala, see Anna Lindberg, Experience and Identity: A Historical Account of Class, Caste, and Gender among the Cashew Workers of Kerala, 1930-2000 (Lund University: Department of History, 2001).
each member would start falling in front of the palliyara the Angakaran who would be witnessing
the scene would come to support these people and would bless them for their ardor. When the
korayal of the members of the tharavadu is over, the two Angakaran kolams would also start
performing the same and it would make us recall the movements of kalaripayattu.

The pattern of the korayal of the Theyyam is different. The two Theyyams would go to the sacred
seat, i.e the peedam and wield their swords in different patterns. Furthermore, they would lie on
the peedam with their back against the peedam and exhibit their prowess in controlling and
regulating their body suitable to the character of the deity. The way in which they would wield the
swords while lying on their backs and while looking up at the sky is incredibly dexterous. The
whole show would be keenly observed by those who are ritually assigned to perform the korayal.

Adiyarakayattam: Mobilizing the Resources

Now, we may have a glimpse of the second day of the festival. In the evening, there is the custom
of adiyarakayattam, which actually means the flowing in of the devotees in the form of a
procession from the neighboring localities along with offerings to the kaavu. They would bring in
children who carry little vessels containing grapes, lemons, oranges, aval (beaten rice) malar
(puffed rice), while the elders would primarily carry coconuts and tender coconuts. As these
devotees pour into the courtyard and precincts of the kaavu, they would be attracted by a group
of people who would be dancing to their heart's content according to the beats of the chenda,
played by the spirited drum players, performing both hilariously and in a frenzied manner. Here,
we find the kaavu becoming the meeting ground of the people of the locality.
In order to get the drum players for the *adiyarakayatam*, the groups concerned would approach my father in advance and get it arranged\textsuperscript{26}. The people who come for the *adiyarakayatam* are mostly from nearby places like *kadepram theruvathu*, *aattupuram*, *koorara kunnu*, and *koorara library*. The offerings brought by the children who come in the procession are collected by the *kaavu* authorities and distributed among the people gathered there as *prasadam*. By this time the entire atmosphere of the *kaavu* becomes lively and festive.

It is our customary right to get a share from the offerings brought to the *kaavu*. Generally five coconuts, five tender coconuts, some beaten rice (*aval*), puffed rice etc are distributed to us. So I would just wind up my way through the crowd, to gather these items and keep them in the make-up room. My mother used to always remind me with a proverbial ring:

“Everything has to be done at the proper time at the *Theyyakaavu* otherwise we would never get them”.

In some processions toddy is brought in toddy-pots to the *kaavus*, and the processions are generally led by the *Thiyyas*, as a part of their caste obligation. This rite is called the *kalasam*, an offering of toddy to the deity. This rite is not done in this *kaavu*, as it may be patronised by the *Thiyyas* themselves. The family *kaavus* of upper caste landlords had means of mobilising resources for the festival in the form of extraction from agrarian rental surplus, in which the *Thiyyas* were their tenants. The rite of *adiyara* might be invented as a rite to mobilise resources to this *kaavu* from the surrounding localities. The coconuts and tender coconuts are the principal

\textsuperscript{26} Nowadays in the *kaavus* instead of the usual *chenda* ensemble, *sinkarimelam*, a drumming genre of youths lining up, drumming and dancing simultaneously in frenzy can be observed. *Karakattam*, a folk dance of Tamil Nadu in which the performers balance the water pot on their head and dance with the percussion can also be seen. These two genres of *chenda* ensemble are special items usually seen during the festivities of the folk festivals in Kerala.
resources the procession bring in as these are an integral part of in every form of rites in the *kaavu*. What could be observed here is a historical social re-positioning of the *Thiyyas*.

There are two historical points that could be reflected upon this rite. a) The patronage of this *kaavu* might have been in the hands of the upper castes, and procession of carrying the toddy to the *kaavu* might have been done by the *Thiyyas*. Some where at a point of time in history, the *kaavu* might have been acquired by the *Thiyyas* and subsequently they stopped the practice of *kalasam*, refraining from the use of toddy. The idea to give up rituals like offering cocks, and toddy can be read as a process of Sanskritisation of rituals. b) Socio-religious reform movements of the 19th century might have also influenced in changing the ritual objects as a manifestation of Sanskritisation. To attain social and symbolic capital in the contemporary society, the educated in the family argue for the removal of old practices with an intention to project the *kaavu* as more sacred which follows the features of a temple worship. The newly emerging tendency to mobilise families around shrines and temples to articulate their presence and influence in socio-political process of the locality might have also contributed to the active presence and participation of members of the family in making of the *kaavu* more presentable through the changing structures and spatiality of the *kaavu*.

**Immortal Ancestor**

When the night grows and it becomes slightly late, we can find the entrance of the *vellatam* of the *karanavar*. The *vellatam* of the *karanavar*, dances in the long courtyard of the *tharavdu*. *vattoda*,

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27 In the process of Sanskritisation, a caste seeking promotion within the caste hierarchy by adopting the practices of higher *varna* or caste. See M.N.Srinivas,“Sanskrit and Sanskritisation,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 23, no.3,(1963): 261-296.
which is a huge hoop which serves as a framework for the skirt, is tied around the hip of the
Karanavar Theyyam, whose face is smeared with the pastes of chayilyam and manayola and his
bare chested body is covered with yellow turmeric paste. He adorns a crown on the head and a
sword in the right hand and a shield in the left. The crowd would swell to witness his
demonstration of body movements in martial arts. In the midst of his brisk and difficult movements
which he would do with an apparent ease, he now and then resorts to humorous twists and turns
and pirouette, which would extract laughters from the viewers.

When the dance reaches a crescendo, an elderly man of the Vannan caste would come and take
the ilathalm from me and he would play the instrument in order to regularize the intricate time
units (tala) in agreement with the sound of the chenda. Karanavar would go near the well of the
house, which is located near the kitchen where he performs some kalasams, i.e., set steps of
dance, for sometime and then would return. The Karanavar’s physiognomy is very typical with a
big belly which he further bulge up while perambulating or strutting and it is this form of walking
that would make him claim to be the Karanavar, which literally means an elderly person.
Karanavar is performed annually by a person in our locality who is popularly known as Vannan
Babu.28 The Karanavar would sit on the sacred seat and receive the dakshina, i.e., offering to the
deity which constitutes small amounts of money. Finally Karanavar would return to the make-up

28 People of the other castes would address the Theyyam performer by putting his caste name as a prefix to his actual
name. So we use to hear such addressing as 'Vannan Babu', 'Malayan Babu', 'Malayan Swami', etc., in our place and in
North Malabar region generally. My family name is Komath. But people of our locality refer to my house as
"Malayantavide", i.e., the house where Malayan reside. To collect data for my research, once I went to a place called
Maloor in Kannur district, to meet a Theyyam performer Mr. Babu. He is my relative too. As I was traveling in the
autorickshaw I asked the auto-driver whether he knew the house of the person. He answered my question putting
another question, 'Are you asking me about 'Malayan Babu'? I found it quite natural, but I replied that I was asking
about Babu who does Theyyam. As the place was distant, I and the driver could talk about it further. I asked whether it
is the practice there to add the caste name in front of the real name. He replied as if he made a mistake by referring to
the caste, and in apologizing tone he added that he did so in order to identify the person. It clearly shows how deep
rooted is the aspect of caste in the ritual field of Theyyam worship. It unravels an attitude of the people to classify
Theyyam, kaavus and its performers on the basis of caste, as an aspect of internalizing social structures of the caste.
room after performing the necessary rituals in front of the sacred place where its sthanam, i.e., the spot where his weapons are instilled, is marked. When it is 12’O clock, early in the morning it is the time of the Vellatam of Chamundi.

The Legend of Chamundi

Behind every form of Theyyam there is a specific myth. The first kolam I had performed was that of Chamundi. It was the poignant story of Kannan, a Thiyya boy who was grazing the cattle of a Kurup, when the poor boy could not control his starvation and hunger, he climbed up the mango tree, belonged to the Kurup’s family and began eating the mangoes. At the same instant the niece of the Kurup was passing that way. Panicking at the thought of the charge of stealing, he accidentally dropped off a mango from his hands which fell on her. This was an act of defying the caste/custom and Kannan had to run away from his native village to escape the sharp edge of victimization. But, after many years, anticipating that the village must have forgotten Kannan returned. And as he was taking bath in a pond in neck-deep water, with fire flaming up his eyes, the Kurup and his accompanying Nairs, rushed into the scene. They shouted at him, ‘How dare you returned’ and soon they severed his head with a long sword.

29 The term ‘myth’ can be defined as tales which are sacred in nature and are concerned with the origin or creation of some phenomenon that may be natural, supernatural and related to the society and culture. Thus, it has the function of an explanation on why and how some phenomenon happened. The concept of ‘mythology’ has been approached in two distinct ways. One is that it refers to a body of myths found in a given region or social groups and second is that it refers to the social scientific study of myth. Levi-Strauss, French structuralist anthropologist perceived myth as a type of thought and explanation worked on it as an example to substantiate the universal structural principles on human cultural and social systems. See Claude Levi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," Journal of American Folklore 67,(1955): 428-444. See also, Thomson, E. Lawson,"The Explanation of Myth and Myth as Explanation," Journal of the American Academy of Religion XLVI, no.4 (1978): 507-523. The myths or tales would have many versions but generally its basic units and functions of dramatis personae would not be altered drastically. For an understanding of structural analysis of various folklore genres, especially on Russian fairy tales see Vladimir Propp, Morphology of the Folktale (Austin and London: University of Texas Press,1979).
Later a number of tragedies occurred in Kurup's family. Besides the death of entire cattle, the relatives and members of the family were afflicted with madness. In total consternation, according to the local custom the members of the family decided to consult an astrologer. It was found by the astrologer that the beheaded Kannan possessed God's blessings and had attained divine power. The astrologer advised them to regard Kannan as a Theyyam and worship him as an atonement.

There is one more myth about the genesis of Chamundi Theyyam. There was a landlord known as Kuruvadan Kurup who killed one of his shepherd Kannan, and this Kannan later became a spirit and reincarnated as Vishnumurthi. Kurup was the land lord of the place and Kannan was his servant who belonged to the Thiyya caste. Kannan was the cowherd of the ancestral Kurup family, who also milked the cows. One day Kurup saw Kannan standing in prayer at the family deity's shrine. This was waved by Kurup, but another day he found Kannan offering a bottle of milk to the deity, the sight of which drove Kurup wild with fury and gave vent to his ire. Kannan was frightened and he ran away from the locality itself. Kannan was given refuge by a grand motherly woman in Mangalapuram. This old lady was a Vaishnavite, devotee of Lord Vishnu, and under her influence Kannan also became a devotee of Lord Vishnu. After many years, Kannan returned to the native place thinking that Kurup must have forgotten all about the violation of customs. Kurup got wind of Kannan's return and with a handful of Nairs he went to find him. He found Kannan taking his bath in a pond, and Kurup severed Kannan's head. He roared loudly “You dog, you violated the local custom, didn't you?” Then all the men present there found the entire pond becoming red, and the sword that the Kurup used to behead Kannan rose up in the sky and disappeared. This sight made Kurup and the gang gaze in perfect amazement and they became demented.
Later, a number of tragedies occurred in Kurup’s family one after another. Besides the death of the entire cattle, Kurup’s relatives and family members were afflicted with madness. In total consternation, according to the local custom, the members of the family decided to consult an astrologer. The astrologer found that the beheaded Kannan, who was a Thiyya, possessed God’s blessings and had divine power. The astrologer advised them to deify Kannan as a Theyyam and worship him as a restitution or atonement. Thus according to the legend the Thiyya youth Kannan became a Theyyam. This Theyyam is known as Chamundi/Vishnumurthi.

It is to be noted that as myths and legends, folk tales and narratives are constructed through oral traditions, the social processes of reinvention of these traditions may contain aspects that are integral to the ongoing social practices. It is with a kind of social adaptation and compression that homologizes with the time-space and with the local specificities that the Chamundi has reinvented as Vishumurthy. It also points to the theoretical consideration that Theyyam as a ritual dynamics creates and constructs itself according to the time-space dynamics. It was my elder brother who used to don the Theyyam of Vishnumurthi. Like father like son, goes the saying, my brother also used to make fun at the kaavu owners. So owners of the kaavu

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30 As a response to the political and economic changes and advent of modernity, it is now imperative among historians and anthropologists to categorize ‘traditions’ as ‘invented’ during the course of time. They claim that nothing is more ancient, or linked to an immemorial past and ‘Traditions’, which are often claimed to be old are sometimes quite recent in origin and invented which usually implies a continuity with the past. See, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). This claim would not be fully acceptable and applicable to refer Theyyam as a tradition in the sense of the term they used. But the aspects that emerge in this ritual as part of social changes may be worth probing. The social context and the cultural specificity of the land and people are also imperative to understand a ritual form like the Theyyam. To have similar discussions also see Freeman, *Purity and Violence*, 38. To have a discussion on the question of change or stability in ritual performances in varied socio-cultural settings, pursued through an interdisciplinary analysis see Christiane Brosius and Ute Husken, eds., *Ritual Matters: Dynamic Dimensions in Practice* (London: Routledge, 2010). They argue that instead of perceiving rituals as static expressions of inner beliefs, it has to be viewed as overtly versatile and creative forms of cultural production. It also firmly suggests that rituals have in fact changed and transferred, invented and reinvented itself and shaped by their respective social contexts. This kind of perception of ritual, opens wide scope for unearthing its crucial role in understanding change in the socio-cultural order in both contemporary and societies of the past too.
formed an opinion against my brother and they wanted to prohibit him from doing Theyyam there. The *kaavu* owners would not show this dislike openly, but they tried to implement it through a legitimate story or gossip saying that they had consulted an astrologer and found out that the *kolam* performed by my brother did not please the deity. Thus, they suggested that the *kolakkaran* had to be replaced. As it was a well constructed suggestion, further legitimated in the domain of ritual beliefs, thus the underlying will of the *kaavu* authorities could not be questioned.

**I as Theyyam**

During this time, my father and elder brother were not in good terms with each other, especially after my brother's marriage. My father then insisted me to perform *Vishnumurthi*. At that time, I was a second year B.A degree student of Economics in the *Nirmalagiri* college at *Koothuparamba*. My father praised me that I had the necessary facial appearance for this Theyyam. I tried to backout, thinking that it may hurt the feelings of my brother. But my father continuously insisted me to do the Theyyam. He said:

"You know if you do this Theyyam you will be able to experience God and be a God yourself"

These were too big words for me to swallow. My father wanted me to get some more training and thus he invited his elder brother, *Kunjumbuti Moothappan* to give lessons to me. He thus stayed with us for three days and I was taught the intricacies of the Theyyam of *Vishnumurthi*. He gave me lessons on some aspects of martial arts to have more body agility and flexibility. He also taught me to recite the hymn a Theyyam dancer has to chant silently while lying down before the make up artist to work on his face. Then he taught me how to perfect my dance steps in pure
harmony with the percussion instruments, along with the rites I have to perform in the kaavu, before and during the performance. Then I also felt excited.

Early in the morning when the vellatam of the Vishnumurthi appears there will not be any crowd at the kaavu. It would be bitter cold in that month and the body will shiver in chill. I then make rite of doing aniyara vandanam\(^{31}\). Then I proceed to apply soot on the brows and around the eyes. I cover my face with turmeric powder soaked in oil. Then with the help of the attendant I tie up the white towel on my head, and wear a red silk cloth that goes down right from the head to the buttocks at the back. I then wear the talappali, the frontlet band with 21 silver serpants, and above it a thalathanda\(^{32}\), costume made by weaving together chethiipoovu, jungle geranium to keep the talappali tight, will be tied. A long sharp edged comb will insert above the ear, which causes severe pain. But by this the total head gear will get tightened. On both hands ring like ornament made with the wood of mull murukku (Indian coral tree) with bright beads are worn. A long garland, vanamala is worn around the neck covering the chest. As a last item of the dressing up I wear the chilambu, bell-metal anklets on the feet. Then a red cloth is tied around the waist. Then I proceed in the light of kakkavilakku towards the sacred space of performance. While I go to the palliyara my face will be hidden by a red cloth. As I ascend the steps and reach the palliyara I have to go around the shrine thrice. The Embran will offer on a creased banana leaf some rice grains, betel leaf and areca nut. I receives and hold it before my face and throw a sprinkle of rice grains towards the palliyara murmuring to the deity:

\(^{31}\) It is the rite conducted in aniyara. It is a kind of seeking consent both from the deity and all others who help to don the performer including the face painter. Kolakaran hold a betel leaf before his face and throws a sprinkle of rice grains towards the lamp instilled in aniyara. All others will also sprinkle the rice grains towards the lamp. Then the performer seek blessings from each one who assisted in his make-up.

\(^{32}\) It is another costume which is worn to keep the talappali tight. This is made by weaving together the petals of the chethi poovu (jungle geranium).
"May you grace me with all your blessings".

This is followed by the invocatory lines which is called varavili (a call to come).

The lines of the varavili are:

$$\text{Harivarddhi} \text{kaam veeraalum veeraparameswaree}$$
$$\text{Aantumaayussum sreepalam varddhikkaam}$$
$$\text{Kottappuram vishnumoorthyaam paradevathe}$$
$$\text{Ninngate kataakshamuntaayirikkaam}$$
$$\text{Polika.....polika daivame......polika.........}$$

Invocation:

- Bless us with prosperity,O valiant Goddess
- Grant us long life and plenitude
- Kottapuram Vishnumurthi, protector of the family
- Shower your benediction
- Hail.......Hail thee O God.......Hail Thee.......\(^{33}\)

After finishing this invocatory song the dancer has to stand with his right leg lifted up and bow in a prayerful manner to the deities of the north, east, west and south directions. There will be a sacred seat carrying the drum called the veeku chenda and the thottam will be recited playing this drum\(^{34}\).

As we are singing the thottam those who belong to our group will come and join the thottam singing one by one. After the beginning slow–moving thottam it goes towards a higher pitch and

\(^{33}\) Bhawani Cheerath-Rajagopalan and Rajesh Komath, \textit{Theyyam: The Other Gods}, 12.

\(^{34}\) At some \textit{kaavus} the thottam is being recited by Kalladi, who is one among the helpers of Theyyam and that will be repeated by the performer and in some \textit{kaavus} the person who dons the Theyyam or vellatam himself sings the Thottam.
singing becomes brisk. The chenda ensemble also gets rising to a crescendo. At this juncture the dancer experiences a shivering. This is the moment God appears the body of the performer revealing his omnipotence. At this time the veeku chenda placed on the sacred seat will be taken by my father abruptly and start playing it with proficiency. Then it is the time of the dance of Chamundi/Vishnumurthi which will last for one hour which has the story content of killing of the demon Hiranyakhaspu and the deliverance of Prahlada. Hiranya, an evil king had been granted a boon that he could not be killed by man or animal, day or night, inside or outside. Lord Vishnu who took the avatar (incarnation) to kill Hiranya goes in search of him, which is presented in a dramatic manner. So Vishnu waits for him at dusk near a threshold and catches the Hiranya and kills him. Then Prahlada gets his deliverance. The myth of Chamundi representing a Thiyya boy, who was unjustly persecuted and killed by the landlord, re-invented as Vishnumurthi as a part of Sanskritising assimilation of Narasimha myth.

Then comes the next part of vellatam, dance with the bow and arrow made of polished coconut leaf stem. Here the reference is to the story of Vishnu's incarnation as Rama. After this the bow and arrow are given to the Embran. There follows a dance with quick steps in a variety of rhythms known as kalasam, which is suggestive of the consummation of the vellatam. The dancer now sits to receive the offerings. Before the vellatam dancer goes away from the sacred space of his dance, the Embran and the kaavu owners offer him a white towel that has been made sacred by sprinkling rice grains. Climbing up on the sacred seat the dancer shakes the towel and ties it around his head dress. Then the dancer will withdraw from the space of performance. The white towel given has great importance. The purpose of this towel is to guarantee that the kolakkaran will execute the duties and obligations vested on him. He is not supposed to go beyond the

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35 Rama is the seventh incarnation of Lord Vishnu.
precincts of the kaavu until the final performance after receiving this towel. He should not part with this towel until the actual Theyyam performance is over. He is expected to rededicate his entire body and mind to the deity he is going to donne. Till he appears in full-fledged make up and costume as the Theyyam he has to wear this white-towel on his left shoulder. It is this white towel that he ties up first on his head as he enters as the Theyyam.

**Mother Goddess**

Before the vellatam of chamundi withdraws, the vellatam of Pothi, a goddess will appear. The white towel tied around the forehead, a red silk cloth is worn which extends from the head to the hip at the back of the kolam. Over the red silk, talappali, a frontlet band and over the talappali, a headgear pothippattam, is worn. The manayola and the chayilyam (vermilion) mix will be dabbed on the face and the body. Soot on the eyes and three lines of sandal paste on the forehead. Three lines are dabbed from the ear to the jaw. An ornament is tied around the neck. On both hands bangles made of murukku (indian coral tree) wood. There are four of them around each wrist. Around the waist tied a red cloth and a set of jingling bells is strapped to the calf. This is the aharya or costume for the Bhagavathi or Pothi vellatam. All these ornaments and costumes and facial make up actually transforms the man beneath and he looks exotic and strange. This exterior appearance is symbolic of the inner transformation of a human being becoming a deity.

There will be a lamp lit on cylindrical banana trunks on the courtyard of the kitchen and that is where the pothi vellatam has to perform the ritual dance. The vellatam of pothi behaves like the grand mother of that Thiyya family. The dancer may even imitate the body language of the old

36 Specific headgear for the pothi. This is to suggest the identity of the goddess impersonated by the performer.
woman, now and then the dancer impersonating the Bhagavathi will go near the well and looks into the well and sprinkles the rice grains into the well and comes back. The Pothi Vellatam’s dance mostly consists of a lot of strutting, treading almost near the well. After a fixed time of dancing the vellatam returns to the room that is located on the right (side) of the house. In the room to which the vellatam retires the Theyyyam observes certain rites with rice grains and the sacred ash called bhasnam and leave to aniyara.

The rite of 'Kallupiditham' or Conquering Stones

There is another interesting rite called as ‘Kallupiditham’ which is performed on an imaginary mount (samkalpathara) on the right corner of the shrine where all the kaavu authorities gather together to witness this highly symbolic rite. Those who participated in korayal will be present there. This korayal rite has already mentioned in the above sections. There will be spears (varikunthams) in the hands of some people, and will be carrying coconuts. There will be a low stone mount on which these people will be thrusting with the spears, and others throwing the coconuts with great force in order to make the mount dismantled and shattered. Though we may not understand the significance of this rite on the surface, it commemorate a forced land acquisition or some conquest. There were around a well bodied forty Thiyya men who will stand in tact as a defending force to look after the rituals and rites in this kaavu.

Then the korayal rite will be repeated. This time the two kolams of the Angakaran and each person coming forwarded for korayal will be given a sword and sent back. Each person falling exhausted after korayal will be supported by some of the viewers and devotees ready to help and the exhausted person will be laid somewhere around the palliyara for rest. The sword of the
person falling exhausted will be placed on the mount, now dilapidated, after a severe attack on it.

Now comes the *vellatam* of the *Asuralanum Makkalum*, and subsequently its final form of Theyyyam. There are two *kolakkars* in this Theyyyam. One is the *Asuralan* and another is a lad. For the *aharya* or costume of *Asuralan* there is not much change from the *vellatakolam* described earlier. This *kolam* does the make up not at the make-up room. The makeup is done by sitting on a raised platform adjacent to the back wall of the *palliyara*. There are two big teeth projecting from the extreme ends of the cheek, called *damshtra* also *ekier* and two swords are held on each hand. On the waist *vattoda*, a huge hoop which acts a framework for skirt, and beneath it a cloth folded in frills called *adukku njorium* is worn by the one who dons the *Asuralan*. The lad has his face painted and a head gear in triangular shape made with a cloth wound corner to corner. He also has the protruding teeth on both sides. *Embran* covers his mouth with a banana leaf, tied on the back of his head, and holds a small sized sacred vessel (*kindi*) containing offering. *Embran* pretends to give the offering to the Theyyyam thrice while circumambulating the *palliyara* but withdraws it. This is known as *meethupidutham*. This is being done in the background of a particular rhythm of *chenda* that reads by the people through their tongue as:

\[ Ente ingu thanne ninte angu edutho.... \]

Give me mine, and take yours...

He lingers there for a few minutes for *nercha* and he bows before the *palliyara* and leaves for the removal of his make up, costumes, ornaments.

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37 Receiving coins as offering.
In almost all Theyyakaavus in Malabar there is this particular rite called meethupidutham. This is a rite of offering toddy to the Theyyam which is collected through a ceremony called Kalasattam (dancing with the toddy pot). But in this kaavu the practices of using ritual implements like toddy pot, beheading chicken as blood sacrifice is being completely prohibited. This may be a recent origin as part of the influence of the socio-religious reform movements led by Narayana Guru. As the rite depicts the process of ‘pretending to give but taking back’ is sensibly read as ‘Give me mine and take yours’, which is imprinted in the popular memory of the people, suggesting that it might have been a serious concern of redistribution of resources and the quarrel over it. A similar rite of conquering the stone describes earlier also substantiate this.

The Gods Incarnate

When the night grows late, say at 3 or 4’o clock the Gulikan Theyyam has to appear before the devotees. As it comes during the odd hours of the early morning, there will be only fewer

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38 To get a social historical understanding of Sree Narayana movement and its social implications, especially in the context of Travancore region, See Thomas Issac and PK Michael Tharakan, Sree Narayana Movement in Travancore: 1880-1939, A Study of the Social Basis of Ideological Reproduction, Working Paper No.215(Trivandrum: Centre for Development Studies,1985); Lars Rudebeck et.al., eds., Democratization in the Third World, Concrete Cases in Comparative and Theoretical Perspectives (London: Macmillon,1998),144-172. Michael Tharakan describes the specificity of Travancore in relation to various social groups and looks into the factors that contributed to the initiation of social development. He was trying to locate the nature of high social development that took place in Thiruvithamkooor and its relationships with various socio-religious reform movements (SRRMS). The proposition was that the various SRRMS in Travancore identified certain public demands or development indicators and brought them effectively to the attention of the government and other public policy making institutions. It helped give shape to various other organizations that catered to these demands. These movements were primarily constituted on the basis of their caste identity and were able to solve their internal contradictions and differences and came to be called—community/ies in numerous emergent fields in modern Malayalee society as modern communities. Alok Bhalla,and Peter Bumke eds., Images of Rural India in the 20th Century ( New Delhi: Sterling Publications,1992).

39 The Gulikan is saivite, and known as the God of destruction, said to be born from the left toe of Shiva. This deity is usually instilled below the trees like Pala, i.e., Alstonia Scholaris, commonly known as Blackboard tree, Indian devil tree, Ditabark, Milkwood pine, White cheesewood. It is an evergreen tropical tree, the haunt of certain deities. The Malayan, Velan castes of North Kerala observes a faith in Gulikan and in each house of these castes there will be permanent fixtures(thara),where the Gulikan dwells. The hear says on Gulikan in the village is something that instills fear as his form itself is one such fearful and loathsome. People of my neighborhood sometimes say in secret pointing to some plot, ‘this is where Gulikan comes and goes, So better don’t go there’. We Malayans worship Gulikan as our principle deity. Gulikan is an immortal sorcerer in local terms a “matramurti”.

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devotees around the *kaavu*. It is said that it was not the case some years ago. The *kolakkaran* of *Gulikan* when he emerges after the prayer at the make-up room, bows and touches the feet very humbly of every elderly person in the make-up room and gets their blessings.

The soot is applied around the eyes, from just above the eye-brow and goes beyond the lower eyelid for an inch. A white rice paste, *arichantu* is dabbed on the face as well as from below the neck to his navel. Then this white rice paste is removed with the help of an *earkil*, the thin stem taken from the coconut leaves, as if drawing lines. This blank spaces are coloured with soot. Thus the body of the *kolakkaran* will be filled in black and white lines. Like all other Theyyams *Gulikan* also has *talappali*, a frontlet band and *talathanda*, an ornament made by weaving together the flowers of jungle geranium to keep the frontlet band tight. In order to keep the head adornments mentioned above intact in their places a comb is driven from the ears. Then at the back of the dancer reaching up to his buttocks a *chamaram*[^40], a wig is tied up. In order to hide the original nails of fingers a costume made of coconut fronds called ‘*nakoram*’ is fixed on the wrist. Down from the waist rings tender coconut leaves with their stems (*errkils*) removed are wound up and at the bottom the tapering ends of the fronds are cut uniformly in a level and looks like a beautiful skirt full of frill-like tapes hanging loose and makes ripples while dancing. This is appropriately called in Malayalam *kurutthola vanji*. The anklets are tied and the *Gulikan’s ilam kolam*[^41], minor form, is ready to dance. Firstly he lifts up one hand with the other held to the chest and then shaking both hands he starts the dance in a slowly rising tempo with hands moving alternately. In this *kaavu* now we have two *kolams* of *Gulikan*, one is the permanent offering of the *kaavu* and the other is vow by the devotees, called *Nercha Gulikan*.

[^40]: It is a black colored long hair like costume. It is made by colouring jute ropes in black. It resembles the long hair of female.
[^41]: *Ilam Kolam* means minor or tender performance before the final form of its appearance.
As the *ilamkolam* slowly transforms into a mature *kolam*, he transcends from ordinariness. Over the *talappali*, a frontlet band with 21 serpants and the *talappata*, a small headgear above the *talappali* he wears a mask called *poimukham* i.e., painted mask. This mask is specially prepared. It is a painted face with long and big eyes, long nose and a wide open mouth painted carefully on the broad tender areca nut leaf stem, called *kamukinpala*. This indigenous material has now a days been replaced by baseboard bought from paper mart. The 21 feet long *mudi*, head gear of the *Gulikan*, made with bamboo and arecanut wood layered with coconut fronds will be placed on the head and tied on the waist. It uses five feet long legs made of bamboo. On the bamboo sticks wooden rings are inserted and a piece of cloth is used for the proper fitting up of it. These rings helps the *kolakkaran* to keep his toes to get a grip and climb up on the stilts. He is very popular sometimes to walk on this stilts. With an incredibly long and unwieldily headgear and a painted mask, walking on stilts of bamboo, the *Gulikan* looks like a deity with a height of a coconut tree. Falling headlong while moving is not uncommon for this Theyyam, but he manages to stand on his own. The strutting of the *Gulikan* up and down and swaying side to side creates great suspense to the devotees. By this time the crowd swells to watch *Gulikan* walking on stilts.

The headdress of the *Gulikan* is a work of art in itself. It is made of areca nut wood and the coconut fronds, carefully woven in a particular pattern projecting out from its surface. It requires great skill on the part of the headdress maker who works for many hours to make one so consensually long but getting it done as light as possible. The decorative work on the surface of this headgear were fixed to it with sharpened *earkil*, the thin stick taken from the coconut leaves, but now a days the staplers are made use of.
The kolakkaran who don the Gulikan should necessarily be trained in martial art. It is lean and tall persons most suitable for donning this kolam, for with lean body and less weight, movements become enormously convenient and less risky for the performer. The spectators in order to test the dancers skill throws coins at him which he catches to general applause. He may even pick up the paper currency and coins from the ground with his lips, tongue and mouth. More amazing is his picking up the notes with the eye-lashes. Sometimes he manages to take them with his toes! All these very fascinating demonstration of the Gulikan Theyyam enable him to command the people respect. Children often generalise the whole thing in a phrase "Gulikan circus" which is a tell-tale expression.

By the time Gulikan Theyyam concludes his spectacular dancing, the kaavu and the villagers will be at the threshold of the third day of the festival. I and my group did not have even a wink of an eye that night because that night will be witnessing one Theyyam after another. On the previous days what we saw were only the vellatoms of the Theyyam, but today will witness the final form of each Theyyam. This day will also be filled with large crowd as it is the final day of the festival.

**The Theyyam of Angakaran**

The Theyyam of Angakaran comes out at about 6’o clock in the morning. The Angakaran dances with two burning torches (pantham) in hand. With a blackened face and a black beard Angakaran look fierce. His forehead wears a crescent, covering the ears he wears a mukhashobha\(^{42}\). Around the neck there is broad wooden necklace called koralaram, and the two hands are decked with bangles and a poothanda bangle made of jungle geranium, adjacent to the talappali. Around the

\(^{42}\) Ornament which is worn to cover the ears.
waist there is a hoop, on which a red cloth with thin black and white borders clad in numerous frills. He wears anklets. The torso is lined in black and white and red. My father used to tell that earlier *Angakaran* appeared at four o’ clock in the morning, and it was truly a terrifying feeling to look at the face of this Theyyam in the light of two burning torches that he holds. Now a days the spectacular potentiality of this Theyyam is taken away by the light of the electric lamps.

The *peedattam*, dancing done on the sacred seat, of this *kolam* demands two hands have to be stretched as long as possible sideways. The rhythm for the dance of *Angakaran* is also specific one. The headdress made of tender coconut leaves, *thirumudi*, is placed just above the *talathanda*. The tyeing of the *thirumudi*, headdress rests on the hip of the *koladhari*. Donning the headgear marks the final moment of the physical transformation of the *kolakkaran*. There is set of varying rhythmic dance called *kalasam*. Then he sits before the *palliyyara* to hear devotees and talk to them. It is the time for the deity to receive offerings and give blessings to the devotees. One could see a long queue of devotees, one for men and one for women. The people who approach for getting the blessings of the Theyyam are mostly woman and elderly. They used to put their tales of sorrows and grievances before the Theyyam. The Theyyam will also suggest the devotees the propitiation rites to be observed to fulfill their prayers and wishes.

The *kaavu* owners know that the *Angakaran* gets lots of money as offering. So it has been decided that a repository (*bhandaram*) must be given to a person standing close to the Theyyam to collect a portion of the money to *kaavu*. He will persue devotees to offer money not only for Theyyam, but also to the repository. Thus through the Theyyam a substantial amount of money is collected to the *kaavu* treasury. There is a choice to the devotee, they can decide whether the money be given to the Theyyam or to the *kaavu*. When too much money fall into the *Bhandaram* the Theyyam asks the devotee: “Is this to the God or to the temple?” It is not so common to the
devotees to donate to the *kaavu*. Now they set a practice that one third of the total money fell into the repository would go to *kolakkaraan* who donne the *Angakaran*. This is applicable only for the *Angakaran* Theyyam.

**Approaching Transcendence**

When the *Angakaran* Theyyam sits to receive the *nercha*, (offering) I will be lying with my head on the lap of the make up man for the facial painting of *Vishnumurthi*. It is not like painting on paper, because the human face is not identical as a paper and its difficult to draw on the face. The make up man should know his art and craft quite well and should also have enormous patience. As the makeup man sits with the performer’s head on his lap and the viewers get the frontal view he has to paint very carefully as if he stands in front of the performer. He ought to sit his head bend down for many hours continuously. The facial make-up of certain *Theyya kolams* are great time takers.

In our locality the facial make up of the *Vishnumurthi* is known as ‘*muchurul*’. This is because in the make-up there is the painted icons of three petals on both sides. *Muchurul*, literally means three (‘*mu*’) curves (*chaurl*). The same is known as “*kozhipoo*” in northern most regions of Kerala. It is so conventionalized or an established system that for each Theyyam, the facial make up should be along a particular manner and style. It is interesting to note that the colours and patterns used for Theyyam make-up are mainly taken from nature, the objects we find around and they are painted in imitation of natural objects and hence these facial make up are given the

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43 In local language the facial make up of *Muchilotu Bhagavati* is “*Kuttisamkhul*” (Small Conch) that of the *Thaiparadevata/Valiyatampuratti* is *samkhum, valum* and *prakezhuthum* i.e a conch, a sword and a distinct mark in drawing eye brows. While the *man kannum, villum, purikavum*, i.e., eye of a stag, bow and eyebrow are painted on the face of the Theyyam of the *Raktha Chamundi* and for *Poomanuthan* Theyyam it is *elanjiopoovum kuriyum*, i.e., the flower of the Bullet-wood tree (*Mimusops elengi* Linn) with a mark that is put on forehead.
names suggesting the natural objects connected with the materials used. There is an eye-opening saying among us the Malayans that it is not painting on the face but painting according to the features of the face i.e., Mukhathezhuthalla, mukham nokki ezhuthanu. This means that the facial makeup of a Theyyam depends mostly on the basis of the facial features of the dancer and with a lot freedom to the makeup man to apply his origination, in one word he is allowed to improvise.

The first step in make up is to apply soot into the eyes of the performer. This is often done by the kolakkaran himself. If the Theyyam is one that has to appear during noon (time) there is chance for the make up done to be wiped off by the sweat. So in order to avoid that, special care is taken to have more than one coating. In the facial painting of Vishnumurthi there is a very thick soot coating around the eyes and it is to elongate the eyes. It is the style of the eye make up that distinguishes the Theyyam from one another chiefly.

My father used to say that one should meditate the deity while the make up is being done besides he has given me to learn by heart the verses to recite in internally while I lay for the facial painting. It goes like:

\[
\begin{align*}
Brahmanandam & \text{ parama sukhadam kevalam jnanamurtim } \\
& \text{dvandvaateetam gagana sadrusam tatvamasyadi lakshyam} \\
& \text{ekam nityam vimala machalam sarvadheesaakshibuutam} \\
& \text{bhaavaateetam triguna rahitam sadgurum tam namaami}^{44}
\end{align*}
\]

This hymn Gurugita is taken from Skandapuram. It is a considered to be written by Vyasan. This verse is in the form of Lord Shiva answering to the questions posed by Parvathi. This could be yet another instance to state the influence of Sanskrit text to the indigenous worship forms like Theyyam. A case of an indigenous worship complex synthesis under the hegemonic umbrella of Sanskrit Brahminical doctrines. This could be also sociologically observed in the context of people getting opportunities to read the Malayalam versions of puranas, geeta and upanishads from the local libraries.
"I salute to that Sadguru who is the source of eternal bliss, supreme happiness, who has true wisdom, who is beyond the dualities, who is infinite, whose attention is always on the divine, who is unique, eternal, pure, steady, and who sees with the eyes of wisdom who is beyond thoughts and beyond three gunas".

As I lie for the make up chanting internally these verses from Gurugita my friends and the local people come now and then and have a look at my facial painting. Some people may come and take photographs without seeking the consent of us. Since the makeup lasts at least for about three hours I often go to sleep, and the sleep may be at fits and starts only.

When I was donning the Theyyam of Vishnumurthi for the first time after the facial make-up I just had to go out beneath a coconut tree to urinate. All on a sudden I was reminded of an event my father once narrated to me about a relative of ours. This man after the facial make up felt like responding to the call of nature. After adorning with ornaments the kolakkaaran should under no circumstances go out till he removes the entire aharya. This kolakkaran after getting the facial make up done went out to respond the call of nature and unexpectedly a fly came and perched on his face. Forgetting the face painting he blew on the fly and thereby spoiled the makeup. He realized his folly only after the deed. There came the angry reaction of the make up man, whose work of art for which he had spent hours, he spoiled within seconds. He scolded the thoughtless koladhari to his hearts content. I narrated this incident in order to show how important is to keep the make up done on koladhari intact from the beginning to the end of the Theyyam.
The Vishnumurthi is an incarnation of god emerging as a savior, to protect the devotees. The proto-concepts of Vishnumurthi lies at Neeleswaram Kottapuram kaavu and that is why we find in the rite of varavili, the call to come, the prayerful words:

\[ \text{Kottapurathu Vishnumurthiyam paradevate ningale} \]
\[ \text{katakshamundayirikkaam......} \]

Lord Vishnumurthi residing at the Kottapuram shower your kind blessings on me.

It is believed among Theyyam groups that it was one Palayi Parappan of the Malayan caste who had donned the Vishnumurthi for the first time\(^{45}\). It has also been believed that as he was pondering very deeply about the manner in which the Vishnumurthi to be performed, that he had a visitation in his dream of Vishnu in a particular form and appearance.

A kuruthola vanchi, skirt made of tender coconut fronds is worn. Then comes the task of putting on the headdress. The white towel I had received from the Embran during the Vellatam is tied up tight on the head and talappali is touched reverently with right hand and to the forehead. It is followed by the wearing of talathanda, which is like a band to keep the headgear in tact and to prevent falling. After putting a costume called koopi\(^{46}\) a cone shaped wooden costume, on the middle of the head, it will be covered with another ornament called kuppithazhika\(^ {47}\), an ornamental cone shaped wooden costume. To cover the ears an ornament called lakshmikathu is put on, and between talappali and lakshmikathu a comb is inserted to tighten the whole paraphernalia on the head. The kolakkaran will feel pain and irritability owing to several tying ups

\(^{45}\) C.M.S Chendera, Kaliyattam.
\(^{46}\) A cone shaped wooden costume put on the middle of the head. All ties of head dresses will be attached on the koopi.
\(^{47}\) An ornamental cone shaped wooden costume to cover the koopi.
all around his body. I feel the blood flow to the head obstructed and there is a restriction of movements to the head, because after wearing the head dresses, I cannot either lift the head up or lower the head. I can move the head slightly sideways only.

Then I put on an ornament called koralaram, an ornamental wooden necklace to hide the neck. And just above the lower arms a pair of bangles and there is a minor ornament that functionally tie up the two bangles, called kaithanda made of jungle germanium flowers. After wearing such an elaborate costume I enters the courtyard of the palliyara and gets kodiyla, that is a banana leaf which contains betel leaf with some rice grains and on oiled wick lit on the leaf, from Embran. Then I puts this kodiyla on the sacred seat and sprinkles the rice grain on the sacred seat. Then the thottam begins. In between the thottam I wore a trinket with small bells on both the calves, and paste chayilyam, vermillion, on feet as an immediate preliminary to the tying up of the anklets, the chilambu. I stumps the feet against the ground and produce the sound of the anklets. As the thottam rises to a tempo I wear a oda, made of tender coconut fronds to cover the entire chest and back. With the tying of oda above the kurutholavanchi, the coconut frond skirt, the costume will become two tiers, symbolizing the lion’s mane. Now there is only a little part around the chest uncovered. With oda a leopards tail is attached. After this, vermillion powder is dusted on the lips and nakoram, nail shaped ornament made of steel or silver is put on to cover the finger nails.

Then the person who did my face painting will hand over a brass hand mirror to me and will join his palms in adoration.

I picks up the mirror and peers into it by sitting in the sacred seat. Gazing the mirror with fixed stares I began to tremble slightly and then slowly falls into a trance. This is the time I realise and
come to the conception that what I see in the mirror is not my form, the sacred face is of the
divine and fuses with the God. This is the most significant ritual moment that turns myself to
undergo a psychological perception and experience the process of deification. There is a sort of
mixed, joint experience and this could be related to what Foucault talk about Other Spaces:

"I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own
visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent:
such is the utopia of the mirror"48

Every one who was integral to the making up of me to deity would come and touch God's feet. I
still recollect the picture of my father who came forward and touched the deity's feet and wept.
Then arrives the time of Vishnumurthi’s dance in trance. This is followed by sitting in the sacred
seat to hear what devotees has to inform and receive their offering.

At this time the Theyyam of Karanavar would still be present among devotees. Karanavar
Theyyam has a round shaped headgear vattamuti and this Theyyam dances with sword and
shield in hands. After the proper rites he will also sit for offerings. The Karanavar Theyyam sits in
front of the inner courtyard of the tharavad. Sometimes he sits on the Ural, a wooden mortar for
pounding or polishing grains. The Karanavar during this time moves about as a member of this
tharavad.

48 This is extracted from a text on 'Different Spaces', a lecture presented to the Architectural Studies Circle in 1967
which has also included in a book edited by James Fanbion, Michel Foucault: Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology,
Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984 (United States of America: The New Press,1998),179. There were several
suggestions in the anthropological literature that humans, natural and supernatural beings and the movements in the
processes of divinities. They argue that these are ranged along a continuum with fuzzy boundaries between various
status of being--transformation in the categories of being. In order to have a historical background of these sort of
deification and its folk bases see Kenneth David, ed., The New Wind: Changing Identities in South Asia (Hague:
Mouton,1977); Lawrence Babb, The Divine Hierarchy: Popular Hinduism in Central India (New York: Columbia
University Press,1975), 95-104.
It is almost the same time that the viewers have the opportunity to see two Theyyams, of Karanavar and Vishnumurthi. In older days there was only one scared seat (peedam). Only after getting a sacred seat that a kolakkaran could enter in front of palliyara to start the rites. There used to have disputes as to who should be given the sacred seat first. The kaavu owners always prefer Karanavar and allow the kolakkaran to enter first. This is because they perceive Karanavar as their ancestor. I recall the unbearing waiting with the headgear and costumes to get a sacred seat. It is on this account that my elder brother had to pick up a quarrel with the kaavu people and finally the responsibility fell on my head after the continuous persuasion made by my father.

Today there is a peedam for the Vishnumurthi Theyyam also. This new peedam for Vishnumurthi was a donation given to the kaavu by a devotee of Vishnumurthi as a token for the fulfillment of his wishes. This devotee was a witness of the quarrel between my elder brother and kaavu people on the question of the sacred seat. He had a vow to the kaavu that if what he wished for is obtained he would offer a peedam to the kaavu. As his wish had been realised he got ready to observe his vow, but as to what wish of his that got fulfillment he was quite silent. Anyhow that historical debate over the right to sit on the peedam has been resolved by the offer of one more peedam by an ardent devotee.

Vishnumurthi Theyyam used to sit under the shade of a chembaka tree, and my brother (the second one) will be there on my right with a leaf containing turmeric powder. When I sit for long time talking to devotees I feel thirsty. When I tell my brother about my thirst he would go and get me tender coconut water from around the kaavu. Drinking too much water would cause need for urination. Only when the make up is removed that you can respond to the call of nature.
The devotees will be approaching the Theyyam with their laments continuously and to their laments and appeals I will give my suggestions in a trembling voice. Some people approach the Theyyam with complaint regarding the delay in their marriage. Some others complain about their misfortune of childlessness after years of marital life. Still others complain about the absence of cure of the son's ailments. Then come the unemployed youths in anxiety. The old grandmas will weep and describe their grievances to the Theyyam. It is moral prerogative and obligation of the Theyyam to suggest some solace. Or I have to give them word that “by the next year their grievances will be redressed and the Theyyam will stand like the lamp on the hill unextinguished and resplendent and look after them like the Almighty.” Thus each one of them will return with a hope. Sometimes my friends may come with the intension of seeing me in my new avatar. One would say “Oh my Theyyam/God, I am in love with a girl could I possess her in marriage?” Though they are my friends I cannot behave forgetting my status of being the Theyyam. Some how I will manage them and send them away. It is to be borne in mind that most of these people tender their grievances so very sincerely to God and in good faith that one day their wishes will be fulfilled. I will be always chanting :

Gunam varane.....gunam vannu rakshippin..........  
Let there be good and kindly bring goodness and save.

By about the expiry of the noon the Theyyam of Pothi would appear and the dance in the courtyard of the kitchen. The crowd swells around Pothi. The dance of Pothi is as if a snake is moving around, and now and then the dance becomes brisk and quick. We may think that Pothi is calling us with the gesture of her head. She will be vibrating her lips as if she is very angry with us. Some mischievous lads will be standing there to hoot loudly into her ears. And they withdraw as she pursues them and run in fear. But this is only a pretense, she then give them chance to hoot
into her ears. While Pothi’s performance is in full swing the devotees have the opportunity to see all Theyyams except, the Gulikan and Asuralanum Makkalum. All other kolams will either sit some where or walk around getting the devotees offerings.

Thattum Payattum

By about three o’clock in the afternoon, the chief ceremony known as Angakaran’s thattum payattum will begin. The two Angakaran Theyyams will stand in a line, opposite to two persons. The two persons will have sandal paste marks on their forehead and red silk cloth wound tight around the hip. There will be eight sticks kept on the ground in between them. Then they both come forward to take two sticks each and move forward and backward. Wielding the two sticks on both hands and standing at opposite sides vis-à-vis they cry out as if to challenge each other. In between these loud calls they will be throwing handful of rice grains at each other. The challenge will infuriate the Angakaran and he comes forward to fight the opponent. There begins the actual encounter between these two- the deity and the opponents. This enactment is called thattum payattum.

This does not remain in one spot alone. The fight that has began at the courtyard of the palliyara will pass through tharavadu’s open space and then return to the former ground. The fighting may go to the premises of the kitchen ground too. This act of going from the palliyara yard to house’s open space is done thrice. The third time the fight gets very intense; the enraged Angakaran will give severe fighting. He will be behaving as if he is possessed. The percussion on the chenda will be adding an intensifying effect. The sound of the chenda will be tearing the ears of the viewers. This will ultimately end in tight fight among the Angakaran and the opponents, who at last resort
to running. It is really exciting to watch the furious Angakaran pursuing the opponents who took to heels. The pursuit of the Angakaran suggest that if he caught them that would be virtual end of their lives. But he never catches any of them though he goes running here and there in search of his opponents. It is interesting to see the Karanavar, not a party in the fight to accompanying the Angakaran in the pretext of catching the adversaries. At last exhausted and disappointed, the Angakaran would come to the stone mount mentioned before and he will go on hitting stone mount--kallupitatha thara-- with the stick in his hands. This repeated activity takes away all his strength with all passion spent up he will be falling. But before falling to the ground the kaavu authorities will support him.

After the rest for a while Angakaran will rise and returns his weapons to the Embran and bless him. He throws rice grains into the palliyara as a culmination of his dance and fighting. Now his headgear would be removed and suddenly withdraws to make-up room. It is believed that as soon as the headgear removed from the body of the Angakaran, he will reverted to a state of human being.

Reflections on the Rite- Thattum Payattum

The Theyyam Angakaran is rarely seen in kaavus of the region called Kadathanadu Swarupam⁴⁹ which is situated to the south of Thalassery and north of Koyilandy. Angakaran is the chief deity worshiped by the Thiyyas. As we mentioned, it indicate a hero worship commemorating a fight or war between certain groups. In the fighting rite of this Theyyam, it is to be observed that Theyyam

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⁴⁹ This place is now the part of Vatakara. It is sandwiched between the two rivers, Korappuzha in the south and Mayyazhi in the north. Its capital was Kuttipuram kovilakam. Kadathanadu was the centre of Kalaripayattu and the descriptions of both are found in northern ballads, vadakkan pattu. For an understanding of the genre of Vadakkannaptu and a structural analysis of this songs see M.R Raghav Varier, Vatakkan Pattukalute Paniyala (Sukapuram,1982).
fight with an enemy belonging to another clan called as–Maruthala--which reveals in the Varavili (call to come) In the texts of northern ballads, there are numerous indications about kalari soldiers. They may belong to either to chekon army or those accompanied Nair chieftain and were entrusted with the duty of protecting the landlord or a tharavadu.

We do not have archives to analyze these rites and understand objectively to bring forth the meaning of the rite, its implications in the point of history. One possibility is to observe the present rite and understand the hidden transcripts which has left over in the tradition of Theyyam and its practices. Thus, one could only make certain propositions on the rite.

The performer of Angakaran and the performers acted as maruthala are from a particular castes called munoottans. This caste is well known for keeping their martial art tradition. Even now they have a kalari (school for teaching the martial art) in a place called Kathiroor, nearby Thallassery. The nature of their Theyyams have a link and influence of the kalari in the dance movements.

The nature and context of this sort of rite symbolically signifies a fight between two parties or groups. It might have done between two caste groups considering the nature of social conditions unearthing in the Theyyam’s thottams and other texts including the oral narration of people on the rite. The rites of Kallupidutham and the Thattum Payattum indicates these conflicts and fights.

There could be multiple meanings and interpretations. One, it could be read as the fight initiated by the prominent families of the Thiyya caste, who hold the advantage of numerical dominance

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50 The word chekon is derived from the Sanskrit word Sevakar, which means warriors in service of royal families.
and had the lineage of martial training. Mandola might had a kalari run by the Munnottan castes, and it had conquered by the Thiyyas through the fights and made their head of the kalari, as a chief warrior and later worshiped him as a Theyyam. The Munnottan caste were assigned the obligation of performing the Theyyam of Angakaran. Two, the kaavu might have under the control of higher castes like Nambiar as they were holding the Janmam right of the locality. The organized Thiyyas might have led a struggle with the Nair warriors and won over the struggle that made them to own the kalari and kaavu. They made their ancestors as principal deity of the kaavu such as Angakaran, Karanavar and the Pothi, all of them keep kinship ties with the family.

It could be observed that castes and groups who enjoyed the privilege of social and economic capital out of three basic social processes i.e., to make a control over three kinds of social spaces. a) making a warrior team. b) conquering land. c) control over ritual and worship spaces. Briefly, making an authority over military, landholding and the ritual.

A continuation of this process in the past could be substantiated through certain autobiographical fragments. For instance, Madhavan (1987) writes about using cruel force by Nair landlords to possess the landed property.

“Each landlord (Janmi) always made use of their tenants to possess the landed property. The landlord with greater number of tenants used to win the game. The Kodom and Echikkanam, was always fighting for land. The Cheruvai Tharavadu of the Thiyyas was moderately rich in Madikkai. They do not have tenancy relationship with Echikkanam. But, Echikkanam generally won’t like people who stood on their own and live independent

with pride, especially the lower castes’. The *Echikkanam Tharavadu* decided to plunder land owned by the *Thiyya Tharavadu*. *Thiyya Tharavadu* somehow got information about this plan, but, they did not have enough strength to encounter *Echikkanam*. So they approached the landlord of *Kodom Tharavadu* and sought help to encounter the *Echikkanam*. Knowing about such an alliance, *Echikkanam* tried to propel a nephew of *Cheruvai Tharavadu* and succeeded in getting his share on paper. Thus, the stand of *Cheruvai Tharavadu* was considerably weakened by this step of *Echikkanam* and so seeing things are getting complex and out of control, the remaining land has given to *Kodom* as *Jannam* by the *Cheruvai*. But, one day *Echikkanam* landlord tried to enter the property of the *Thiyyas* and tried to cut down a jack tree. In order to prevent the cutting of the tree one of the female members of the *Cheruvai family* tied a cradle hanging on one of the branches of the jack tree. She laid a child in the cradle and stood there near the cradle. *Echikkanam* sent an elephant to throw away the cradle. The woman seeing the elephant took the child up and ran away. *Echikkanam*, thus succeeded in cutting off the jack tree. After this event the *Cheruvai* family were forced to give the major share of their landed property to *Kodom*. It is in this manner that the strong and cunning land-lords took into possession unlawfully the land belonged to those who only had less social power and strength in their command*.

Making an authority over the ritual and worship spaces can be drawn through the case of another landlord *Tharavadu* in *Koodali*, in *Kannur*. There is a Theyyam shrine owned by the *Koodali Thazhethu Tharavadu*. The center of worship or altar of this *Tharavadu* is addressed as *Kalari*. At the time of the festival it is observed that the worship of arms is an integral part. A number of long swords, shields, spears etc. are worshiped with great reverence. This particular rite of arms worship certainly prove that this *kaavu* had once been a training center of the martial arts. It is a myth widely in the memory of the people of the locality and members of the *Tharavadu* that
Koodali Tharavad of the Nambiar castes had gone with their soldiers to help Pazhassi Raja\textsuperscript{52} in his encounter with the British. It was thus, the entire Koodali desom was gifted to this Tharavadu by Pazhassi Raja himself.

The right on the Koodali kaavu and the land belonged to it was not with the head of the Koodali Thezhatu Veedu. It might have originally belonged to a Nambiar family called Nalledathu. The Nalledathu family was divided and when dispute over the ownership of their land occurred the Koodali family interfered into the dispute and took possession of the kaavu and its control. There is no forms of Theyyam worship in this shrine. Kurup (1995) in his Koodali Grandhavari\textsuperscript{53} makes a proposition that in Koodali kaavu there is every likelihood of having Theyyam festival. Later, Theyyam festival might have stopped there and shifted to Koodali Tharavadu. The Koodali kaavu then got transformed into a kaavu with daily puja (worship) of temple nature. It is also found that the priest of this shrine is a Nambuthiri. This landlord tharavadu might have acquired the authority of the shrine through disputes and fights. Whatever may be the means, the end was to attain an authority over rituals and worship of the locality.

Whatever may be the historical facts behind the social processes described above, it indicates that many tharavadu have tried to gain complete authority in matters of establishing the right to conduct rituals of the shrine or temples. It can also be proposed that it was through establishing complete control over kalari (where the art of fighting the enemies is taught and trained), religious rituals of the shrines and temples as centers of popular faith and worship and holding over the landed property that prominent tharavadu had acquired economic and social dominance in the

\textsuperscript{52} Kerala Varma Pazhassi Raja (prince) of the princely state of Kottayam in Malabar, India between 1774 and 1805. Pazhassi is popularly known as Kerala Simham (Lion of Kerala) on account of his martial strength.

\textsuperscript{53} K.K.N Kurup, ed., Koodali Grandhavari, Historical Series (University of Calicut,1995).
social life of north Malabar, in which the rite of Theyyam acted as principal source of authority and control\textsuperscript{54}.

**The Rite-Parana**

After the rite of *Thattum Payattum*, a good number of devotees return home. Then comes the ceremony of leave taking of the *Chamundi* from the sacred space, wearing a mask made of areca nut leaf bottom (*kavungin pala*). The Theyyam of *chamundi* circumambulate thrice around the shrine. It is to be noted that the mask is in the form of a pig's face. It is suggestive of the concept of *Varaha avataram*, the third incarnation of *Vishnu* as *Varaha* (Pig). After this ceremony there is another rite known as *Parana*, This takes place at a *tara* were *Vishnumurthi* is instilled and reside. In front of this *tara*, on a mat the resources came to the *kaavu*, as part of *adiyara* on the second day evening, such as beaten rice, puffed rice, jaggery, grapes, coconut will be kept. These are meant for the *Vishnumurthi* to brief a mime of eating the items by waving hands over them, and subsequently distribute to devotees that consists of primarily the members of the *kaavu*. They show the end of their *mundu*, the habitual white waist cloth of Kerala, open to collect what *Vishnumurthi* throws to them. This rite is performed in the background of the frenzied rhythm of *chenda*. In certain *kaavus* there is rite of drinking the blood of cocks while performing *parana*. It might have been here, but now it is not practiced here. Then I will get support from two to get up, and then move towards *palliyyara*.

This is followed by another ceremony called *Natukotti Parachil*, in which *Chamundi* while standing on the sacred seat opposite to the *palliyyara*, narrates his journey from one *kaavu* to another and

\textsuperscript{54} To get a discussion on the relationship between landowners and cultivators, their economic and cultural interdependence, the conditions of inequality and difference and how shrines work as a community of worship, See Dilip.M.Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India, Malabar 1900-1948* (Cambridge University Press, 1994).
explains the nature of blessings that he had offered to his devotees and the reverence received. Then he praise himself to highlight the qualities endowed with him. After Chamudis self-praising he raises criticism regarding the mismanagement and the lack of uprightness of the kaavu authorities. After this, the people who have gathered there will be given rice grains to partake in the get together just before the Vishnumurthi withdraws from among them. The bow and arrows the Embran had given to play the incarnation of Sreerama are returned to the Embran by the dancer. After receiving the sprinkling of rice grains from the devotees and the members of the kaavu, the Theyyam comes down from the sacred seat and stands with his hands placed on the stool. A person, kalladi, the one who does the face painting, will come and stand behind the Theyyam and then cuts off the tie of oda. After this I reverts to the satus of an ordinary human being.

**Approaching Conclusion**

What follows is the playing of chenda by a group of drummers going around the shrine. The chenda player goes through all the taras where deities are instilled and reside and play the chenda in high pitch. The chendavadyam finally reach in a crescendo and at this peak of sound there is suggestion about the approaching conclusion. As the crescendo of the chenda stops abruptly there descends a sense of loss, a slight disillusionment that the spirit of festivity is no longer there and silence becomes the reality.

My mother waiting for me will cover the food offerings of parana in a cloth. Then mother and elder sister will go home with the things to be taken home. I will be removing all the ornaments one by one and keep them safely. Then there remains the facial make that looks rather bizarre which is
removed with the cloth used for making the lamp wick. This piece of cloth is soaked in coconut oil and rubbed against the face with the left hand holding a mirror. Before removing the facial make up permission of the person who has painted the face is to be obtained. The oil soaked cloth cannot wipe off black paste applied so thick and only an elaborately pursued bath alone will help.

The last rite of the kaavu is the bathing of sacred seat. This rite is conducted by the chief of the Munnoottans. Most probably the person who donned the Angakaran. Lately when an astrologer was consulted, it was found that this particular ceremony should be conducted by the Embran. The Embran then took up the responsibility. He performs this ceremony in the presence of the elder members of Munnoottan, Malayan, and Vannan castes. Then the Embran will place, three pieces of areca nut, three betel leafs, $2 \frac{1}{4}$ nazhi$^{55}$, about 1 kilogram rice on the sacred seat. Then he takes a coconut with which he touches at the four corners of the sacred seat, then he breaks it by knocking on the sacred seat, making the coconut fall apart in fragments. It is on this basis that they evaluate whether the deity of the kaavu has been pleased or unhappy about the rituals offered. Last time the coconut broke out in two halves, one half fell upside down and the other half lying on the back on. This according to the custom of the rite that the deity was not pleased completely the way the rituals was observed.

By this time food will be ready to serve. The Theyyam dancers, and those accompanied them as helpers and the children of their family will be sitting before banana leaves in the courtyard of the tharavodu. For the meals there will be fish curry. Since till that day many of these people had taken the vow not to eat fish, the vow now being over they make a good meal of fish. After food I and my father and others will receive our remuneration, called kolu and bid farewell to the kaavu.

$^{55}$ Nazhi is an old measurement of grains.
It is no secret that on every occasion or most occasions there will be quarrels at the time of distributing the reward. The kaavu authorities will say arrogantly that there is only that much money and not more. This will naturally be landing on hot exchange of words and the reward will be received with resentment and protest on the part of the theyyakkar.

We come down the steps of the kaavu, with the paraphernalia of the Theyyam on the heads and the chendas dangling heavily on the shoulders. The children standing by the road side and even the grown up will be looking at me with the bundles full of my Theyyam essentials in an unusual way. The same night all our relatives will be returning. Then the remaining members of my house will be me, my brothers, sister, father and mother as before. Some relatives will have to join in the festival of yet another Theyyakaavu. Thus they will be going from one kaavu to another till the Theyyam season is over.

Summary

This narrative is a text that focuses on personal experience that could be featured as verbalised framing of a sequence of actual life events, unfolding reflective awareness of being in the particular social world which makes a sense of one’s past and the contemporary. In this perspective, narrative could be seen as a version of reality. There are two aspects or dimensions of personal narrative: temporality and point of view. The temporal aspects of a narrative depict a temporal transition from one state of affairs to other. It arranges a sequence of events chronologically as processes of events in progression. These narratives are put in the framework of the temporal perspective of the present. The point of view aspect of a narrative focuses on the themes, its style of beginning and how it approach its end. The autoethnographic narrative tries to
overcome conventional way of doing ethnography i.e., to keep personal experience out of research theme. This genre of ethnography lay stress on talking about one's own experience and make sense of the others in the field one study. It look at experience analytically too. Therefore, it pay attention to feelings, thoughts, and emotions of the researcher as a subject of analysis. A kind of 'systematic sociological introspection' intentionally followed while interpreting events in context and use life experience to generalise the larger group or culture. The aim is to enter into a field of social world through the concrete details of a life that works as a method or way of knowing as well.

Keeping this methodological perspective, this chapter as an autoethnographic text expounds the general system of Theyyam worship through a thick description of specificities of Theyyam in a specific kaavu and its associated interplay between the self and the family of the researcher/autoethnographer. It elaborates the nature of rituals and how it has been performed through the labour of many--patrons and performers-- and other labour which are mostly not visible. Thus, it travels through discussing major characteristics of Theyyam rites, its relationship between hosts and the dancers, a detailed descriptions of the time and its preparatory rites and its meaning, costuming of Theyyam and how it has made it up according to the nature of the concerned deity, its rituals, properties, the transformation aspects of dancer's body and its possible transcripts of cognitive content of the songs and rites accompanying the possession. It is, in turn, a narrative that depicts the labour process of Theyyam dancing and consequent socio-cultural and emotional underpinnings of the cult, which is continually changing according to the time-space alterations and its dynamics.
While we were discussing the changes and variability in the kaavu in terms of its social and spatial changes, we get a sense of Theyyam that are not socially fixed or static in the way it existed in the past. Though it has continuities in many ways and are so stable on some part of its rituals, the spatiality of the kaavu and the Theyyam in its making-up also has adopted a sense of stepping down from the kaavu premises and slowly enters the market. These aspects of changing vicissitudes of Theyyam, its entering in the market and the political economic aspects form a critical point of discussion in the following chapter.