

An Overview of Kerala Dance Forms

CHAPTER 3

AN OVERVIEW OF KERALA DANCE FORMS

This Chapter explains the dance forms of Kerala. The small State of Kerala is conveniently called the apartment for confinement for all art forms. It is Kerala's own speciality, that it owns a variety of art forms. Kerala has rich and varied heritage of a variety of art forms. These heritages of art forms have developed through the ages into an indigenous style, assimilating the ancient folk traditions. The temple oriented society witnessed the emergence of several arts, performed within the premises of the temples.

Kerala is one of the most developed States in India.¹ Kerala lies between 8°17'30" and 12°47'40" north latitude and 74°51'57" and 77°24'47" east longitude. The total area of the State is 38,856.7sq.km (Census of India, 1961).² The territory included in present day Kerala was, in those days, a part of the Chera kingdom.³ It is believed that Parasurama, an iconic figure of ancient Kerala, revived this strip of land from the sea by throwing his axe from Gokarna to Kanyakumari.⁴ The event is recorded in the Raghuvamsa (Chapter IV, Verse 53), in the Tiruvalangadu plates of King Rajendra Chola (1012-1044), and in countless folk tales. As discussed by A. Sreedhara Menon, the story is "enshrined" locally in the Keralolpathi, that was compiled in Malayalam language, during the 18th or 19th Century.⁵

The name "Kerala" is originated from the word "Keram", which means, coconut.⁶ According to the Puranas, Kerala is also identified as Parasurama Kshetram. The name, Kerala, is the sanskritized version of Cheralam (Cher + alam), meaning reclamation or addition to the land from the sea. The term 'Cher' or 'Cheranta', means "added" and

¹ Vilanilam, J.V., Antony Palackal and Sunny Luke, *Introduction to Kerala Studies*, Vol. I, International Institute for Scientific and Academic Collaboration, USA, 2012, p.522.

² Singh, K.S., *People of India Kerala*, Vol. xxvii part one, Anthropological Survey of India, New Delhi, 2002, p.11

³ Nirmala Paniker, *Nangiar Koothu, The Classical Dance-Theatre of the Nangiar-s*, Natana Kairali, Thrissur, Kerala, 1992, p.1.

⁴ Vilanilam, J.V., Antony Palackal and Sunny Luke, Vol. II, International Institute for Scientific and Academic Collaboration, USA, 2012 *Op. cit.*, p.1262.

⁵ Ronald M. Bernier, *Temple Arts of Kerala*, S. Chand & Company Ltd., New Delhi, 1982, p.1.

⁶ Vilanilam, J.V., Antony Palackal and Sunny Luke, Vol. II, *Op. cit.*, p.1262.

‘alam’ means “region”.⁷ On November 1, 1956, Kerala was constituted as a State under the State Reorganisation Act 1956. It is the smallest State of the Indian Union, occupying only a little above one-eightieth of its area (Census of India, 1961).⁸

Kerala Dance Forms and Traditions

Kerala, the land of charity, is wealthy in folk culture, visual arts and festivals. Different religions, groups and communities, in their historical evolution, have subscribed to the growth of a dreamlike panorama of dance and visual art forms in this region. Some of them are religious, highly ritualistic, but incorporate dance, music, colours and light.⁹ Art forms of Kerala reflect the customs and traditions that are native to Kerala. The State has numerous art forms, which represent a rich repertoire of performing arts, reflecting man’s intense relationship with nature and his constant desire for communication with the unknown.¹⁰

The dance traditions can generally be divided into five categories, viz, tribal dances, folk dances, classical dances, neo classical dances and modern dances. Both the dance and dance movements are especially rich and variegated.¹¹ As far as the Caturvidhabhinaya is concerned, we can find a significant role of classical principles, canons, ideals and traditional concepts, in the dance forms of Kerala. The Angikabhinaya strictly follows the principles laid down by the ancient texts like Bharata’s Natyasastra, Nandikeswara’s Abhinayadarpana, the anonymous Hastalakshanadipika and the 18th century text, Balaramabharatam. The much use of Mudra-abhinaya is not found in Krishnanattam. Kutiyattam Hasta mudras are slightly different from the other classical arts.¹²

The 108 Karanas are not used in the dance forms, though many of them are employed as such or with some modifications. Angaharas, Charis, Gatis etc. are used

⁷ Vilanilam, J.V., Antony Palackal and Sunny Luke, Vol. II, *Op. cit.*, p.102.

⁸ Singh, K.S., *Op. cit.*, p.11

⁹ Kurup, K.K.N., *Theyyam A Ritual Art Dance of Kerala*, Department of Public Relations Government of Kerala, March 2000, p.11.

¹⁰ www.keralatourism.com

¹¹ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.5.

¹² Sharma, V.S., *Dance and Music of South India*, International School of Dravidian Linguistics, Thiruvananthapuram, 2007, p.32.

according to the context. The Aharyabhinaya is different, for different forms. Except in Mohiniyattam, the costume-make-up is done by considering the nature of the character and the Guna. Pacha, Kari and other veshams of Kathakali, Krishnanattam etc. are designed on the basis of the nature and characteristics of each individual person of the story. The Vachika aspects are either by Sanskrit or Malayalam compositions, sung in suitable Ragas set to some Tala of the dance pattern, as we find in the kalasams of Kathakali or Krishnanattam and Adavus of Mohiniyattam. The Vachika is presented by the orchestra men or women, along with musical instruments according to the form of dance. The Satvika abhinaya is related to the Rasabhinaya. The nine rasas are depicted in the dance.¹³

The classical dance and drama forms of Kerala, such as the Kudiyyattam, Kathakali, share this characteristic feature of stylised make-up of the face. We may be led to conclude that Kathakali assimilated some features of the Pulayarkali and Velakali movements on the one hand and the colour symbolism of the make-up of the Bhagavati cult dances on the other. In deep contrast to these other-worldly awesome dances, which invoke spirits and end in trances, are the social dances of the women of village communities in Kerala. One such dance is the Kaikottikali.

The sculptures in the temples of Trikkodithanam and Trivikamamangalam (11th and 12th Centuries A.D), which depict women dancers performing the Kudakuthu (pot dance) and Kudaikuthu (umbrella dance) indicate that dancing had achieved a high level of perfection in those days. One of the postures in these panels has been identified with Bharata Natya. Meanwhile, the 'Gita Govinda' of Jayadeva, the Bengali saint of the 12th century, found its way into Kerala.¹⁴ From very early times, the temples of India had been the centres of the performing arts like Kuthu, Kutiyattam etc of Kerala, which were presented in temples only.¹⁵ Sangam literature also refers to a group of dancing girls called 'Viralis', who danced Kuravakkuttu and Tunankakkuttu with the heroes.¹⁶

¹³ Sharma, V.S., *Op. cit.*, p.32.

¹⁴ Priyan C Oomman, *Tourism Directory of Kerala*, Global Communications (P) Ltd., Trivandrum, 1995, p.70.

¹⁵ Sharma, V.S., *Op. cit.*, p.10.

¹⁶ Shovana Narayan, *Folk Dance Traditions of India*, Shubhi Publication, Gurgaon, 2004, p.235.

The most interesting among the dances of Kerala are the dances of exorcism, of invoking of spirits of heroes and deities and of falling into trance. These are known to many groups, but particularly to the Parayans, the Velans and Pulayans. Majority of dances derive their names from the tribe or community, which performs the dance and the suffix, kali (or play) or attam, is added. Thus we have the Parayankali, the Pullavarkali, the Panivarkali, the Pethivarkali, the Puliattam, Tiyattam and the Paravanthira, Panankali etc.

Devadasis

Women dedicated to the Lord, also performed many pleasant duties like keeping the temple premises clean, beautifying them with decoration, making garlands for the Lord and singing and dancing for Lord's joy. They were recognized as Devadasis, the servants of the Lord.¹⁷ Devadasi was known by the common name, Tevidichi, which means literally "a woman who serves at the feet of god". (Tevidichi= teva+ adi+ achi. Teva=god, adi=feet, achi= woman). Devadasi dance came to be called Tevidichiyattam or Tevidichi Koothu. According to the Tiruvalla inscription (in Sasana No.1), for four Tevidichis, twelve idangazhis (a measure of quantity) of rice should be given throughout Avani Onam festival.¹⁸

As the Devadasis were presumed to be the spouses of god, they would never become widows. To see a Devadasi when one sets off on a journey or business, was considered to be favourable. When a king set out for some significant purpose, Devadasis were purposely posted at his door so that he might have their favourable sight at the time of coming out. When the Maharaja of Travancore went on a tour, the Devadasis of each village had to receive him as he entered the village and accompany him in his "progress" through that village. In the well-known Athachamayam festival at Tripunithara, the Devadasis had a special place in the procession. This custom was popular till very recent times.¹⁹

¹⁷ Moosad, C.K., *Mohiniyattam A Classical Dance of Kerala*, Dept. of Public Relations Government of Kerala, Trivandrum, 1986, p.11.

¹⁸ Nirmala Paniker, *Op. cit.*, p.13.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.11-12.

The major occupations of the Devadasis were music, dancing and play acting. But as the Devadasi system degenerated, the Devadasis became symbols of moral bankruptcy and their dance bordering on the erotic side of life, was not considered very respectable in the later period of Kerala history.²⁰ In Kerala, Dasiyattam was at the height of its glory during the Perumal regime round about A.D 209.²¹ At Thripunithara, till about 55 years ago, the Devadasi dance was performed in the temple at dusk and it was called Tevidichiyattam or Thevidissi Koothu.²² The British, during their occupation, were forced to ban Dasiyattam in areas under their control. In Travancore, during the Regent Maharani's regime Dasiyattam was banned.

Art of the classes

As communities began to form and people moved to their own profession-related lifestyle, there emerged a clear demarcation between folk and classical art forms. Stylisation in performance, structuring of texts and creating a mix of worship and relaxation, materialised in performances that were based on Sanskrit plays. Theatre in the region even predates the Malayalam language, revealing the strong influence of Sanskrit and Tamil plays. Temples belonged to the rulers or landlords and the performers were part of the symbols, representing the might of the overlord. This explains the formation of troupes (Kaliyogam), supported by patrons.²³ The influence of the Christian and Muslim art forms came from Europe and the Middle East. These dance traditions were not merely living traditions but cultural documents that reflected the representation of a cumulative experience.²⁴

Kerala Folklore

Kerala folklore is unique in its richness and variety. The origin of temples in Kerala throws light on several interesting aspects of folk culture.²⁵ Kerala has developed

²⁰ Sreedhara Menon, A., *Cultural Heritage of Kerala*, D C Books, Kottayam, 1978, pp.112-113.

²¹ Moosad, C.K., *Op. cit.*, p.29.

²² Nirmala Paniker, *Op. cit.*, p.14.

²³ Shanavas, P.N., *Kerala*, Stark World Publishing Pvt. Ltd., 2006, p.313.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.316.

²⁵ Priyan C Oomman, *Tourism Directory of Kerala*, Global Communications (P) Ltd., Trivandrum, 1995, p.76.

through the centuries, its own typical art forms, particularly folk dances which are highly expressive of the way of living and outlook of the people.²⁶ Our folk art forms are famous for their vibrant and insightful glance at the stories, legends and traditions of the past.²⁷ There are some folk dramas, that are not associated with the rituals or even the artistic traditions of Kerala. Their plot structures, manner of presentation, linguistic expressions and characters, show the influence of Tamil culture and are they popular in those Districts, that lie close to Tamil Nadu.²⁸ There are more than sixty seven well known folk dances in Kerala.²⁹

Tribal Dances

The aborigines of Kerala are scattered in the jungles and hills of Weastern Ghats. There are about thirty five different types of tribals. Some tribes have songs to accompany their dances. Either the dancers themselves sing or the spectators sing and thus participate. The costumes of the dancers range from scantily clad to full attire, with ornaments, which are extremely colourful and gaudy.³⁰ Dances are an important item in the tribal life and it has its decisive role in their rituals and festivals. The style of presentation of a particular dance differs from one community to another. Tribal dances, unlike non-tribal dances, are always found not only with the active participation of both men and women dancers but also with the men beating the drum and playing the flute.³¹

Aadi Vedan

Aadi Vedan is an ancient folk art, prevalent in certain areas of Kannur District. Aadi and Vedan represent Parvathy and Siva. All the characters, that enact these two roles, normally belong to two different communities. It is performed during day time.³²

²⁶ Sreedhara Menon, A., *Op. cit.*, p.106.

²⁷ www.keralatourism.org

²⁸ *Essays on the Cultural Formation of Kerala, Kerala State Gazetteer*, Vol. IV, Part II, Government of Kerala, 1999, p.40.

²⁹ Sathi Devi, D., *Role of Music and Instruments in Patayani*, Kerala Kalamandalam University, Cheruthuruthy, 2012, p.3.

³⁰ *Kerala an Authentic Handbook*, Information Public Relations Department, Government of Kerala, 2010, p.350.

³¹ Devan, P.K., *Tribal Folklore an Introduction*, Information & Public Relations Department, 2005, p.43.

³² *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.52.

Ammanattam

Ammanattam is a hollow, metallic ball, which contains numerous metallic pieces inside. Women perform the Ammanattam dance, using four to twenty four Ammanas, which are thrown up and caught deftly, missing none. The juggling of the twisting and turning of the plates, stuck to the palms, with a pot full of water on the head and plates carried on the palm, a variety of dances are also exhibited.³³

Arabana Muttu

The dance form, special to the Muslim community of Kerala, is Aravanamuttu (also called Arbanamuttu), the origin of which can be traced back to the Arabs. It is still accompanied by Arabic music. Aravanamuttu is also called Duffmuttu. The name is credited to the use of an instrument called duff or tap. Duff is a round percussion instrument, with one side covered with hide and it is used to create rhythm. While performing, the chief of the group sings the lead while the others form the chorus and move in circles. The songs are frequently tributes to martyrs, heroes and saints. Like Oppana, Duffmuttu is also staged as a social event, throughout festivals and nuptial ceremonies. Duffmuttu is performed by the male members of the community.³⁴

Arabanamuttu is an art form, played by using an instrument named 'Arabana'. It is an instrument, used in olden days. It is a skin instrument, made up of the skin of goat and it is wider than a 'duff'. An ornament beed named 'chilambu', is stitched around the instrument to make the sound. Arabanamuttu is a traditional dance form of Muslim community. They perform this art at the time of important occasions like marriage, sunnath, kuthuratheeb and their religious festival like Ramzan. The dance groups perform their item in all houses where a ceremony is going on. A movement of the players and their rhythm is so impressive to the audience. Mostly, youth would perform Arabanamuttu. This art form has its origin in Arabian culture but now it has its relevance among the Muslims of Kerala.³⁵

³³ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.56.

³⁴ Vilanilam, J.V., Antony Palackal and Sunny Luke, Vol. I, *Op. cit.*, p.246.

³⁵ Philomina, K.V. *Folk Arts of Kerala*, Financial Assistance from the Southzone Cultural Centre, Tanjavore, Tamilnadu, 2009, pp.13-14.

Arjuna Nrittam

Arjuna Nrittam, which is also known as Mayilpeeli Nrittam, literally means the Dance of Arjuna. Arjuna, one of the five heroes of the epic, The Mahabharata, was a renowned singer and dancer, said to have propitiated the goddess Bhadrakali, with a devotional dance wearing costume made of peacock feathers (Mayilpeeli means peacock feathers). This art form is popular in temples, dedicated to the goddess Bhadrakali and it is mostly seen in Alleppey and Kottayam Districts, where it is presented either singly or in pairs, performed all night on specially made wooden platform. The strictly rhythm-based songs are called Kavithingal. Their themes, which are based on different subjects from the Puranas-(Hindu scriptures), follow a specific and traditional pattern. Before a song begins, the performers explain its particular intricacies and how its rhythms will be translated into dance. Many of the complex dance steps are influenced by the movements of Kalaripayattu, Kerala's martial art form. The performers wear a particular type of headdress, cover their faces in green makeup and use a costume, made of peacock feathers.³⁶

Arjuna Nrittam is an art form, which emerged out of Arya-Dravida blending. An important feature of the Arjuna Nrittam is its presentation by the dancers by singing and dancing, accompanied by the rhythmic instruments, songs and vaytharis or oral rhythms. Chenda (drum), Valmthala, Ilathalam (cymbal), Makutam (crown), Maddhalam and Kombu (clarion) are the chief musical instruments used for this art.³⁷ The presumption behind the Arjuna Nrittam is that after the battle of Kurukshetra, Arjuna propitiated the Bhadrakali, by the dance performance. It is further presumed that Kunthidevi prayed to conduct human sacrifice, to remove their troublesome period. After the war, as instructed by sage Narada, the Goddess Bhadrakali demanded Kunthi the Bali from. Arjuna with his suited dress and ornaments, reached before Bhadrakali as the Bali. But the Kali did not murder Arjuna. Pleased with this, Arjuna performed dance to propitiate the Bhadrakali.

This is the folktale behind the Arjuna Nrittam. This is performed by one or two persons at night and the illumination is done by the traditional lamp called Nilavilakku.

³⁶ Menon, C.A., *Kerala Festival Message-2007*, A Directory of festivals in Kerala with glossary of Kerala festivals, Chembakassery Publications, Thrissur, 2006, p.15.

³⁷ Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, pp.91-92.

Arjuna was proficient in dance among the Pandavas and he is supposed to have danced and sung, praising Bhadrakali.³⁸ Traditionally, the Arjuna Nritham is performed by the Vilkuruppan communities. Dance is performed in front of a heightened floorlamp during night extending into the dawn. The performers, face are coated by green colour and wear a crown on his head. On his waist, there is a coat of peacock tail. Colour of the dress is red. He wears Katakam (bracelet) on his hand and anklets on his legs. On his hand, there are bow and arrow, as a weapon. Dance is performed as per the rhythm of songs. Such songs are called Chatil Kayatti Anayikkal and it is usually conducted before the departure of the dance group to the temple. Today, this ritual dance is rarely performed.³⁹

Aravanakali

The Aravanakali of the Muslims, seen in the Kondotti, near Kozhikode area, was imported from the Persian Gulf area.⁴⁰ Aravana is a dance which the Muslims of Kerala had borrowed from the Arabs. The music that accompanies it is also Arabic. The rhythm is played on an instrument called 'daf' or 'tap', a round percussion instrument, with one side covered with hide.⁴¹

Ashtapadiattam

This was a popular dance form, based on the 'Gita Govinda' of Jayadeva. It was more of a dramatic representation of the famous lyrical play. In total, there are only five characters, Krishna, Radha and three females. This form is now almost extinct instruments like Chenda, Maddalam, Elathalam, Chengala were used.⁴² The folk and tribal musical forms were absorbed into a system of music, which could be easily adapted for the singing of Geet Govindam, at the sanctum of the temple. The music gave rise to the dance called 'Ashtapadiyattam' which later became extinct.⁴³

³⁸ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.49.

³⁹ Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, p.92.

⁴⁰ Priyan C Oomman, *Tourism Directory of Kerala*, Global Communications (P). Ltd., Trivandrum, 1995, p.77.

⁴¹ Kavalam Narayana Panikkar, *Folklore of Kerala*, National Book Trust, India, New Delhi, 1991, p.150.

⁴² *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.67.

⁴³ Kavalam Narayana Panikkar, *Op. cit.*, p.134.

Bootham Thullal

This is a ritual dance, performed in connection with Vela, Pooram, Thalapoli etc., which are special festivals in Kerala temples. Mannamars are generally allowed to perform this dance, and very rarely by Panar and Pulaya. The idea is that the devil- aides (Bhoothams) of Lord Shiva visit and enjoy the temple festival. The make-up of the Bhoothams consists of particular costumes, at once colourful and captivating. Large headgears, projecting rounded eyebells, high-ridged noses, protruding tongue, flowing black hair behind the pleated skirts and overcoats, all conspire to make the dancers appears completely supernatural. Each dancer has a girdle of bells. Anklets are also attached to the legs and every dancer holds a shield and club in his hands. A variety of dances are performed to the rhythm, set by an instrument, called thudi.⁴⁴

Chakyar Koothu

Koothu and Kudiattam are considered to be the earliest theatrical art forms of Kerala. Koothu is a mono-act, in which a single actor, the Chakiar, acts the role of all the characters to the accompaniment of the mizhavu, played by the Nambiar and the cymbals by the Nangiar.⁴⁵ The term, Koothu, literally means dance, which may be taken as an index of the significance attached to dance in the original form of the art. As a matter of fact, the actions and facial expressions and the signs and gestures, employed by the actor in Koothu, are said to approximate most closely to the principles laid down in the authoritative Sanskrit treatise on the subject, Bharatha's Natya Sastra. Koothu, presented as a single person item by a Chakiyar, is also known as Prabhandha Koothu. Infrequently, it is presented by a Nangiyar woman, when it is called Nangiyar Koothu.⁴⁶

Koothu is a more light-hearted performance mode, akin to contemporary stand-up comedy and it is an ancient art, at first confined to temple sanctuaries. It was afterwards popularised by Mani Madhava Chakyar.⁴⁷ Natyacharya Vidushakarantnam

⁴⁴ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.37.

⁴⁵ Priyan C Oomman, *Tourism Directory of Kerala*, Global Communications (P) Ltd., Trivandrum, 1995, p.72.

⁴⁶ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.61.

⁴⁷ Vilanilam, J.V., Antony Palackal and Sunny Luke, Vol. I, *Op. cit.*, p.492.

Padma Shri Guru Mani Madhava Chakyar, a visionary and virtuoso of this art, took Koothu and Koodiyattam outside the temples of the common people. He performed Chakyar Koothu, for All India Radio and Dooradarshan for the first time, which popularised this traditional art form among the common man.⁴⁸

Chakyar Koothu is normally performed by a small clan of artistes in Kerala, called “Chakyars”, who specialise in this form of performing art. It is a unique art form of Kerala, where spontaneous humour, ready wit, immaculate storytelling, mimicking capabilities and biting sarcasm are the essence. The beauty of Koothu lies in the fact that it is easily intelligible and enjoyable for a wide spectrum of people. Kids or grown ups, men or women, all enjoy this art form, which transcends barriers of caste, language, religion and creed.⁴⁹

Koothu is a classical art form, performed even now, by members of the Chakiyar community in a Koothambalam. The movements and facial expressions, signs and gestures used are believed to almost exactly duplicate principles evolved and codified centuries ago. Wearing a headdress and makeup, the Chakyar begins by offering prayers to the presiding deity of the temple where he is performing. Speaking first in Sanskrit and then giving explanations in Malayalam, he enlivens his epic-based themes with dance and gestures. The stories come from the great Hindu epics and Puranas. Koothu is famous for the often biting wit the Chakiyar intersperses into the narrative drama of the story. No opportunity is missed to make comments on political and social situations and its critical summary of contemporary events ensures its popularity.⁵⁰

Nambiar expounds Puranic stories, drawing parallels from contemporary life, in order to emphasise a point or relate a moral form the stories he is narrating. It is the Chakiars, privilege to crack jokes even at the expense of the dignitaries present in the audience. If the person, who is the target of the attack, were to resent, the Chakiar will wind up the performance and leave the theatre.⁵¹ The Silapadikaram, the Tamil epic of

⁴⁸ Sudhakar Rao, M. and Raghvendra Reddy, V., *Encyclopedia of South India*, Kerala and Lakshadweep, Vol. III, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, pp.250-252.

⁴⁹ Geeta Radhakrishna, *Prakruti Nrityam The Dance of Nature*, G.R Menon, Mumbai, 2003, p.14.

⁵⁰ Menon, C.A., *Op. cit.*, p.21.

⁵¹ Priyan C Oomman, *Tourism Directory of Kerala*, Global Communications (P). Ltd., Trivandrum, 1995, p.72.

the post Sangam age, refers to the performance of Koothu by a Kutta Sakkiyan of Paraiyur, in order to entertain the Chera king, Senkuttuvan and his queen. This attests the fact that Koothu was an ancient art form.⁵²

Chathankali

Chathankali is prevalent in a lot of areas of Ponnani and Tirur Taluks in Malappuram District. In the garb of Chathan, a village deity, they dance to the accompaniment of percussion instruments like the Chenda etc. In both hands, the dancers of Kolams carry two short sticks. They click these sticks jointly to the rhythm. Each specific dance sequence takes about ten minutes. A specific type of chenda is used as background rhythm. Usually, this is performed during daytime. A linon cloth and ringing bell round the waist and heavy clanking anklet and on the head, a headdress made of arecanut fronds base and tender coconut fronds. A face mask of arecanut frond base, with an inflated nose. These form the costume.⁵³

Chavittunatakam

A theatrical art, which developed under the auspices of the churches in Kerala, is the Chavittunatakam, which is now almost defunct. It was evolved as a Christian alternative to the Hindu Kathakali. It is because acting and stamping form important element in Chavittunatakam, that it has come to be called so- chavittu means stamping with the feet and natakam means drama.⁵⁴ It is a kind of drama that prevailed in olden times, among the Christians from Kodungallur to Ambalappuzha. Mostly it is performed by Latin Christian community. Chavittunatakam is rarely presented in connection with pallipperunal (church celebrations) and other annual celebrations.⁵⁵

Chavittunatakam is a Christian art form, that evolved at the end of the 16th Century when the Portuguese were a present in Kerala.⁵⁶ Hence in the 16th and

⁵² Sreedhara Menon, A., *Op. cit.*, p.108.

⁵³ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.31.

⁵⁴ Priyan C Oomman, *Tourism Directory of Kerala*, Global Communications (P) Ltd., Trivandrum, 1995, pp.72-73.

⁵⁵ Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, pp.50-51.

⁵⁶ Menon, C.A., *Op. cit.*, p.17.

17th Centuries, the leaders of the church, in close collaboration with the Portuguese missionaries, evolved a new theatrical art called Chavittunatakam, with the objective of presenting Christian or Biblical themes for the sake of Christian audience.⁵⁷ The Portuguese influence was responsible for the Chavittu Natakam, based on European heroes like Charlemagne. It intergrated the movements of the military drills characteristics of the time.⁵⁸ The theatre settings like the introduction of curtains, costumes, masks etc, indicate the effect of the West.⁵⁹

Chavittunatakam is a heroic form of opera, connected with warfare. Kalari rules are excessively used in Chavittunatakam. The whole story of Chavittunatakam is in the form of song. There is no prose in it. It is called Cholliyattam as it is performed by singing with steps. Many heroic stories are used in Chavittunatakam for its presentation. A peculiar kalari (gymnasium) was arranged, for the training of Chavittunatakam. Its Azan or teacher is called Annavi. There are twelve orders and they are represented as twelve irrattippukal, twelve adantha, twelve kalasam, twelve kavitham, twelve idakkalasangam etc. Heroes must be undaunted and men of good qualities.⁶⁰

Although it is performed in a colloquial mix of Tamil and Malayalam, it bears many traces of the popular medieval European form of Christian Miracle Plays. The actors wear Greco-Roman costumes and even the stage props suggest a foreign influence. The musical drama is generally performed either on open stages or very occasionally, inside a church.⁶¹ In Chavittunatakam, the actors not only speak or sing but also stamp on the wooden platform with their feet, to the tune of songs and beating of drums. The movement of the actors on the stage are more lively and vigerous than graceful or artistic.⁶²

⁵⁷ Priyan C Oomman, *Tourism Directory of Kerala*, Global Communications (P) Ltd., Trivandrum, 1995, pp.72-73.

⁵⁸ Singh, K.S., *Op. cit.*, p.66.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.500.

⁶⁰ Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, p.50.

⁶¹ Menon, C.A., *Op. cit.*, p.17.

⁶² Priyan C Oomman, *Tourism Directory of Kerala*, Global Communications (P) Ltd., Trivandrum, 1995, pp.72-73.

The Chavittunatakam begins with an invocation. Then there is the entry of a clown called 'kattiyan'. Afterwards, the story of Chavittunatakam continues. In the end, all actors come to the stage and sing the auspicious song. Important characters have body garments and crown similar to that of the Greeco-Roman kings in olden times. They polish their faces and make moustache, and dress settings which appeal to the audience.⁶³

Chavittunatakam is a great art form, performed by the actors, varying in number from forty to sixty and completed from three to seven days. It is performed in an open stage, measuring of thirty feet length and hundred feet breadth. Planks are arranged in such a way to make a loud noise in the course of making footsteps. Female characters are presented by men. For both female characters and male characters, romantic dance steps (*lasya*) are adopted. Separate steps characterised good characters and villain characters. Chief accompanying musical instruments are drum and cymbal. The presentation of Chavittunatakam needs a harmonious blend of music, dance, dialogue, acting and the tempo of rhythm. Some elements of Chavittunatakam can be seen in Parasunatakam and Allieesnatakam.

The whole play is performed through musicals. The major characters sport breeches, headdress and crowns. The soldiers sport hats, fitted with quills. The bell and drum are two instruments for used background music.⁶⁴ Genoa, Caralman Charitham, Nepoleon Charitham etc., are some of the important plays.⁶⁵ It had its debut at Mattancherry where two Tamil Christian scholars, Vedanayakam Pillai and Chinnatampi Pillai, contributed much to its development in the formative stage. The expert actors in Chavittunatakam used to undergo massage, applying medicinal oils, to tone up their system.⁶⁶

A lot of alien elements can be seen in Chavittunatakam. Owing to the increasing financial expenses, lack of practical and congenial circumstances, advent of modernisation in the field of art, voluntary attempts have been taken by Krupasanam

⁶³ Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, p.51.

⁶⁴ Sudhakar Rao, M. and Raghvendra Reddy, V., *Op. cit.*, pp.261-262.

⁶⁵ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.77.

⁶⁶ Sreedhara Menon, A., *Op. cit.*, p.119.

Pouranika Ranga Kala Peedam in Alappuzha, to take up the task of regenerating the study, training and research, since 1987. As a part of the Kala Peedam, various institutions like museum, archives, stay home research library, permanent play grounds for west coast arts and a training centre are still functioning. This is the only such institution in Kerala itself. Attached to this, an institution called Annavi Welfare Foundation is also functioning, to give financial aid to the treatment of diseases and health care for the age old artists. At present, its director is Rev.FR.Joseph, Valiya Veettil.⁶⁷

Cherumakali

It is popular in Malayalam District. This is performed by the Pulaya community. This entertainment is presented during temple festivals or during Onam, Vishu and such other festive days. When the performers stand in a circle, the chief of the troupe recites two lines of a song. The others repeat the lines. After doing this two times, they dance in a circle, with hand gestures, to a peculiar kind of rhythm. When the song nears the finish, the tempo of the dance rises. Mostly the rhythm remains unchanged. But the steps could be circular and crosswise. No percussion instruments or illumination effects are used.⁶⁸

Cherumarkali

This is a mixed dance of the Cherumar community (mainly agricultural labourers) of the Malabar area of Kerala in which both men and women participate. They dance holding arms together, connected in a back-lock. The dance develops into a variety of pleasant pattern, in which the men and women change their positions, with amazing rapidity,⁶⁹ resembling wave like movement. The costumes of the dancers are peculiar with conical caps called Pala Thapi, dhoti and red sash. Sandal paste is smeared all over the body and face and garlands of red chethi flowers are worn. Percussion instruments like Veekan chenda, karu, maram are used. The dance is usually performed after harvest and in connection with marriages and festivals. A few of the dances are kind of dance

⁶⁷ Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, p.51.

⁶⁸ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.53.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.50.

drama, using masks and headgears.⁷⁰ It is a harvest dance in which the dancers, both men and women, move in a swift rhythm, connected in a back lock or holding arms. The costumes are in attracting red and white.⁷¹

Dappu Kali

Dappu Kali is named as Dappu Kali because “dappu”, a kind of musical instrument is used in the dance. Dappu Kali is a category dance of the Moplals of Malabar. The performers for this dance must be in even numbers, since they have to form two rows. They beat on the dappu, which each dancer holds in his left hand and dance with graceful movements of the body and astonishing co-ordination of rhythmic steps, flexing the body and playing the dappu.⁷²

The Dappu Kali performers form two rows of ten to twenty. They beat on the dappu which each dancer holds in his left hand and dance with exquisitely symmetrical swaying of the body and astonishing co-ordination of rhythm steps, flexing of body and timing of dappu.⁷³

Duff Muttu

The Muslim tradition mingles, with the tradition of Kerala culture. Mappila art is a mixture of Kerala art and Arabian art. The Arabian life has influenced many of the Mappila arts of Kerala and the best example is Duffmuttu. Duffmuttu is mainly seen in north Kerala. The instrument ‘duff’ is also known as Thapittu and Deep. In Duffmuttu performance, the performers dance and knock on the duff. There are twelve members and a leader in every group. Leader sings and dances and the members follow him. The performance begins with a prayer. Early times Arabic songs were used for duff. But later on, linguistic changes have occurred.

⁷⁰ Shovana Narayan, *Op. cit.*, p.245.

⁷¹ Sudhakar Rao, M. and Raghvendra Reddy, V., *Op. cit.*, p.265.

⁷² Menon, C.A., *Kerala Festival Message-2009-2013*, A Directory of five years festivals of Kerala with a pictorial glossary of Kerala’s art forms, Chembakassery Publications, Thrissur, 2008, p.17.

⁷³ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, pp. 23-24.

Duffmuttu is a religious art and it was popularised by religious leaders. In earlier times, it was performed in the mosques. It was considered as a ritual art known as Deppurathabhi and Kuppurathabhi. It was performed in connection with circumcision, marriage etc. But later on it was performed as cultural entertainment on public stage. Kuthurathib was performed to satisfy the religious spirits. In the case of Muhiyuddin and Rifae, their aims are to recover from illness, purification of house, marital needs etc. Arabana is also used with Duff. There is a religious story behind Duffmuttu. When Prophet Muhammad was exiled from his native place, he reached Madeena. The people of Madeena, knocking duff and singing Baith, welcomed the Prophet. With a Salahath, usually duff begins. In mosques and houses when Kuthurathibs are performed, duff is used as an instrument, along with the song Baith. It is conducted in the light of the traditional lamp. Formerly, Duffmuttu was performed only in mosques and other religious functions. Now it can be seen while conducting religious performances, public functions and as competition.⁷⁴

Edaya Nritham

It is the dance of the tribal shepherds. Both men and women participate. One of the shepherds sings. It is repeated in chorus by all the rest. As the singing is going on, one of them imitates the usual sounds of shepherds driving their sheep. The dance as such consists of someone of the group successfully chasing the wild animals, that try to attack the sheep and also the thief who tries to rob them while the other members of the group very adeptly bring out the terror on the faces of the lambs and their mournful wailings.⁷⁵

Ezhamathukali

This is a form of social satire, performed as domestic amusement by members of the Variar and Pisharady communities. A group of people gather round on oil-lit lamp before which is a copper pot placed upside down. It is by beating on the vessel with the hand, that the rhythm is created. One from the group stands up and asks a question in the form of a song to another in the group. Those, who fail to answer, have to enact a variety

⁷⁴ Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, pp. 16-17.

⁷⁵ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.15.

of roles. Though without much dance element, this humorous play gives plenty of scope for buffoonery and clowning, which is done with great agility and gusto. This dance is almost extinct now.⁷⁶

Gaddhika

Gaddhika is a sorcery ritual, practised by the Adiyans of Wayanad. It is also known as Nattu Gaddhika. The aim of Gaddhika is to eradicate the evil influence of spirits and ghosts in village, ancestral family, houses and household members. Gaddhika is of two types, namely, small Gaddhika (Cheriya Gaddhika) and Pooja Gaddhika. Pooja Gaddhika has more rites. Bloody sacrifice of cock is to be conducted. Adiyans still believe that troubles like disease and evil influences can be eliminated through this ritual art. To propitiate the deities like Malakkari, Kuttichathan, Kutuyan, Mari etc. is the aim of Gaddhika. The performer of Gaddhika, robed in peculiar dress and ornaments, trembles as if possessed and, laughs boisterously. A red cloth is laid out and it is on this cloth that the dance is performed. He visits, house after house, accompanied by instruments. While singing each deity's song, he trembles. Normally, this sorcery ritual art is performed once in a year after harvest.⁷⁷

This art form is meant to cure ailments. The performance is also done as part of a rite for having a safe delivery of child. Gadhika begins with the principal performer, summoning by magic, Lord Siva for his help, to cure the patients. Central to the ritual is the belief that a person falls sick when the gods are angry. The prayers are in an unfamiliar dialect, which has a pronounced Kannada diction. Once Lord Siva was brought down to earth he was pleased by invocations of the worshippers. The other gods and goddesses were also included by the performance. These include Chamundi, Maniamma, Malankali (Siva) and Karimkali. At the same time other actors, dressed in colourful costumes, also move into the centre stage which is titled with a small structure, that resembles a temple. The participants include men dressed as women, whose function is to welcome the gods and goddesses, responding to the summons from Siva. Gadhika is generally performed during the month of Mithunam, which falls in June-July period.

⁷⁶ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, pp.34-35.

⁷⁷ Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, pp.18 -19.

The participants go to houses from which they had accepted invitations, conduct rituals, collect the oblations and offer them to gods at a ceremony conducted on the banks of a river.⁷⁸

Ivarkali

The Ivarkali is the most popular dance art form in the central part of Kerala. Ivarkali is performed in Bhagavathi temples, during festive occasions. Different opinions exist with regard to the origin of the art. As five communities such as Asari, Moosari, Velukuruppu, Karuvan, and Thattan (goldsmith), who belong to the Kammala, play and sing, it is named Ivarkali. According to K.P Karuppan, it is called Ivarkali as it was the play of five monkeys.⁷⁹ Ivarkali literally means the play of the five. It is often staged during temple festivals like Velela, Thalapoli etc.⁸⁰

According to the legends, the Pancha Pandavas, in order to propitiate the Bhadrakali, conducted dance and music and hence it is called Ivarkali. The legend also testifies to the fact that this art was known as Pandavakali in former times. Ivarkali is performed at 'Malayarayas' temples in festival days. This art form brings to our mind 'Sreekrishna' and 'Pandavas'. Ramayana and Mahabharatha stories, together with Pandava stories. Form the subjects of the song. Minimum five persons are required. The artists stand in the 'paidi'. 'Paidi' is a long rod, with stout belts at its end. Playmaster starts with 'elathalam'. Play is performed under bamboo tents, decorated with tender coconut leaves. Lighted lamp stand is the symbol of 'Sreekrishan'. The belief is that this art generated with the instruction of 'Sreekrishna', to get protection from the rage of 'Bhadrakali' and 'Pandavas'.⁸¹

Kalaripayattu

Kalaripayattu is Kerala's centuries old martial art form and probably one of the oldest in existence.⁸² With the advent of the British and the use of firearms and other

⁷⁸ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.16.

⁷⁹ Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, p.56.

⁸⁰ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.34.

⁸¹ Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, pp.56-57.

⁸² Menon, C.A., *Op. cit.*, p.19.

forms of modern warfare, Kalaripayattu has lost its ancient importance. But of late, there is an awakening among people, to revive this ancient martial art of Kerala.⁸³ Many traditional art forms such as Kathakali, Koodiyattam, Theyyam, Thira and even Kerala's contemporary theatre have incorporated Kalaripayattu into their movements. There are two styles of this martial art form-the Southern and Northern styles. Nowadays, there are many institutions where training can be undergone and demonstrations of its speed, grace and powers are popular.⁸⁴

The ancient martial art, peculiar to Kerala, is taught in a specially constructed gymnasium called Kalari. Kalari is a specially constructed gymnasium where Kalaripayattu is taught.⁸⁵ The practice of Kalaripayattu is done in an atmosphere of sanctity and piety. This atmosphere was prescribed in kalaris from very early days, probably because the ultimate aim of training in Kalaripayattu was to achieve maximum skill in the wielding of deadly weapons.⁸⁶

History

According to some historians, it was during the Sangam Age (circa BC 200-600 AD), Kalaripayattu evolved and developed. Tamil literature and anthologies explain the warring tribes of that period. The word, kalari, is used for a battlefield and a place for training in weaponry. The tribals (men and women) were trained in wielding weapons, including the sword (Val), spear (vel), bow (vil) and shield (khedam) and they were ferocious in battle. The period, between the 7th and 9th Centuries, was the Brahmanical Age in Kerala. The Brahmins established their supremacy and influenced every sphere of the society. They set up centres, called Salais, for teaching the vedas and warfare.⁸⁷

The Perumals (or Cheras) ruled Kerala from the 8th Century to the 11th Century. The Chera rulers patronised kalaris and established a fighting force, with a core group of one thousand Nayar (or Nair) captains. Each captain had ten well-trained soldiers

⁸³ Balakrishnan, P., *Kalaripayattu The Ancient Art of Kerala*, Poorna Publications, Calicut, 2003, p.iii.

⁸⁴ Menon, C.A., *Op. cit.*, p.19.

⁸⁵ Chirakkal T. Sreedharan Nair, *Kalaripayattu The complete guide to Kerala's ancient martial art*, Westland books Pvt. Ltd., Chennai, 2007, p.262.

⁸⁶ Balakrishnan, P., *Op. cit.*, p.15.

⁸⁷ Chirakkal T. Sreedharan Nair, *Op. cit.*, pp.xi-xii.

(or Chekons) under his command. The Cheran rule (8th to 11th Century) overlapped a part of the Brahmanical age (7th to 9th century). Throughout the Cheran rule, Salai continued imparting martial training to Brahmin students while kalaris groomed soldiers belonging to the other castes and groups. Brahmins, after having consolidated their domain, chose to remain landlords and priests. They ceased preparing themselves in martial arts, but the Salai continued imparting Vedic education. Eventually, the Salai vanished from Kerala. But the kalaris continued to function as payattu. The long rule of the Perumals in Kerala came to a close in the early years of the 12th Century. The appearance of a number of kings and chieftains, wielding almost total control over Kerala, resulted in the disintegration of Kerala into principalities called Swarupam.

The political and administrative machinery in Kerala had more or less collapsed under the continuously feuding kings and chieftains. One such was the Zamorin (Samoothri) of Calicut (Kozhikode). He had a well-structured army under his control. There are records of the armies maintained by the Raja of Pazhashi, the Kolathiri royal family and a small number of others in Malabar, and others in the southern parts of Kerala. The battle readiness of those armies, the valour of the warriors and their expertise in payattu and the exploits are graphically described in history books and ballads. The ballads of North Malabar are supposed to have been written between 1500 and 1700. They contain detailed narratives of feuds, variety of techniques used by the experts of payattu and document the royal patronage enjoyed by payattu. These ballads also the Thekkan Pattukal, which are the ballads of Southern Kerala and they are replete with interesting stories of the expertise and exploits of payattu stalwarts like Mathiloor Gurukkal, Tacholi Othenan, Payyamballi Chandu, Aramal Chekavar, Unni Archa, Chengannuradi, Itanatan and Iravikutty Pilla. Tacholi Othenan, the undisputed exponent and all time great of Kalaripayattu, was born in 1584. After his death at the age of thirty two, the people of Malabar made a cult hero of him and ultimately deified and worshipped him as a demi-god.

Payattu, as a highly evolved form of martial art, reached the acme of its popularity in Kerala, between the 14th and 16th Century. Throughout this period, in some parts of Kerala, especially in the Malabar region, if the king or chieftain could not satisfactorily settle a dispute between two groups or families, it was settled by an ankam. An Ankam

was an armed fight in full view of the village, grouping between two hired payattu experts. The dispute was settled in favour of the group or family whose mercenary emerged victorious. Many thrilling stories of Ankam and Poithu combats, which were fairly common then, are poetically narrated in Vadakkan Pattukal.

Under the support of the royal families of Malabar, a number of kalaris were established in each and every village, and each of them functioned under the direct supervision of a guru. Irrespective of caste, community, sex, religion and social status, the people of Kerala learnt the art of payattu. The ballads of North Malabar tell stories of experts in Kalaripayattu, going to Tulu Nadu to learn and hone their skill in some of the more advanced techniques of sword fighting. The State of Karnataka, of which the Tulu Nadu is a part, had a well- developed type of martial art called Garadi. Upto a century or so ago, that martial discipline was widely practised. There must have been regular interaction between the experts of Payattu from Malabar and those of Garadi from Tulu Nadu.

Kaalayum Kudayum

It is a dance of the Pulayar community. This is performed after the harvest. Models of oxen and horses are made out of bamboo and forest branches and decorated with white clothes. Umbrellas of five to seven storeys are also likewise constructed and decorated with tender coconut fronds, flowers etc. The bearers perform very simple dance, moving the legs to the left and right, front and back.⁸⁸

Kadar Nritham

Only women partake in this primitive dance of the Kaadar tribes of the forests of Kochi area. The performers arrange themselves in a semicircle. They hold the tip of their clothes in their hands to the level of the waist and wave it to different rhythms of the dance. It is a very simple but graceful tribal dance in slow steps.⁸⁹

Kakkarasi Natakam

It is a folk art form in which we can see the harmonious beauty of musical dramas (Sangeetha Natakam) and Porattu Natakam. This is mainly presented in

⁸⁸ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.31.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.11.

Thiruvananthapuram District. The theme of the play is that Lord Siva and Parvathi had lived on earth as Kuravan and Kurathi (Kakkalan and Kakkalathi). Dance, music, acting etc. are harmoniously blended in the play. Mridangam, ganjira and ilathalam are the musical instruments used. This artistic performance begins with 'Vandanasloka' or devotional songs. After that, Kakkalan would enter by holding a pantham (flambeau), with rhythmic steps. The story goes on with the answering of Kakkalan to the questions of Thambran. In the next scene, we see Sundarakakkalan fainting, due to snake bite. There would be some changes in Kakkarassinatakam according to the regional differences. The aim of this play is to criticise the evils of the society.⁹⁰ Widespread among the Kuravas of Thiruvananthapuram District, this group dance is very noisy because of the shoutings of the participants and also the wild beatings of primitive drums like para, Veekan chenda etc.⁹¹

Kali Thiyyattu

Kali Thiyyattu is very similar to Ayyappan Thiyyattu, except that it is performed in Kali temples, by a section of the Thiyyattu Unni community known as Antharala.⁹²

Kaliyootu

The Kaliyootu is a folk drama in which dramatic and ritual elements are harmoniously blended. This art is related to the epic heroine, Kali. Its background is the murder of Darika. It is believed that the goddess Kali was born out of Lord Siva's hair. The most attractive scenes of this art are the war challenge against Darika, the travel of Kali in search of Darika and the murder of Darika. The Kaliyootu also possesses other regional names like Paranettu and Kaliyattam, that are still surviving. It is performed in Thiruvananthapuram District. Kalam kaval, Uchabali, Dikbali, Paranettu and Vellattamkali are the respective customs. This art includes the programme, extending from nine to eleven days. Dressed in the form of Bhadrakali, the Vathis conduct the rite called kalam kaval. On the first day, there is the Bhagavathi ezhunnelliippu (arrival of Bhagavathi). Uchabali is conducted during Bhadrakali Yama. The Devi is seated in the balikkalam,

⁹⁰ Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, p.96.

⁹¹ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.25.

⁹² Menon, C.A., *Op. cit.*, p.19.

facing north. The three vathees are seated on a coconut leaf and sing songs with accompanying musical instruments.⁹³

The trembling Devi throws the rice, areca flower and ashes. Sometimes there is blood sacrifice. Darika sends a soldier to destroy the sacrificial effigy. The Kali makes the soldier to fall, with a spear. Then this soldier is placed in a mat and rolled and taken out. Thus the Uhabali is concluded. Soon the Dikbali is conducted, which is having the same rites as Uhabali. On the third day, there is the presentation of Narada. Then it is followed by the presentation of Kavalutaya Nair, Olambally, Ugramballi, Kaniyar Devi with tiger, Mutiyuzhichil and the enquiry of Darika on each respective day. In the course of her house after house to search of Darika, the family members receive the Kali with raw rice and lighted floor lamp. After concluding seven battles, in the sky, on the eighth day, Darika's head is chopped out. This is also known as Paranettu. Then it is followed by Mutiyettu and Gursi. In order to convey the victory of Devi, the hosts of spirits conduct the Vellattam Kali. Thus the Kaliyootu is a music dance play, in which the whole village is involved.⁹⁴

Kampadavukali

A war dance that is performed in circles wherein the dancers utter wild war cries as it gathers momentum. The group formations are many and varied. The striking of sticks closely resembles the movements of the sword and the shield in ancient duels in Kerala. This dance is performed by Nairs.⁹⁵

Kanikar Nritham

This is a group dance of the Kanikkar tribes. The dancers faultlessly synchronise with the waving of the hands and the beating of the drums.

Kathakali

Kerala is today internationally known most for its powerful Indian classical dance style, called the Kathakali. But Kathakali is not the only stylised dance form of Kerala.⁹⁶

⁹³ Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, p.97.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.97.

⁹⁵ Shovana Narayan, *Op. cit.*, p.241.

⁹⁶ Kapila Vatsyayan, *Traditions of Indian Folk Dance*, Indian Book Company, New Delhi, 1976, p.258.

Kerala is the birth place of the classical dance form, Kathakali, which is the greatest and the most complex of all art forms and it has a history of three hundred years. Kathakali traces its origin to the 17th Century Kerala.⁹⁷ Kathakali literally means, “story play”.⁹⁸ Kathakali is a beautiful combination of Natya and Nritta.⁹⁹ Kathakali, the dance-drama of which Kerala is so proud now, evolved out of Krishnanattam and Ramanattam, both responses to the Bhakti cult and its most powerful literary expression, the Gita Govinda of Jayadeva.¹⁰⁰

It is a dance form, with heavy make-up and splendid costumes. Kathakali is a form of dance-drama in which subtle facial expressions and mudras or hand formations play crucial roles in infusing life to the characters. Kathakali is also known as the king of the performing arts as it combines five main fine arts such as painting, literature, acting, music and dance. It combines with itself aspects of ballets, opera, pantomime and masque. The themes of Kathakali are generally mythological, and they are centered around Ramayana and Mahabharatha.¹⁰¹ The actors of Kathakali do not speak, but enact dialogue called ‘padams’, sung by singers from behind. The acting is done through facial expressions and ‘hasthalakshanas’ popularly known as ‘mudras’ (hand gestures).

Rooted in a rich four hundred year heritage, Kathakali is Kerala’s present to the sphere of performing arts. It was Kootayathu Thampuran, the Raja of Kottarakkara, whose four classic oeuvres are prized as the holy grail of Kathakali, who defined the important form and content. The next phase saw the evolution of regional styles-the northern Kallatikkotan shaped by Vellath Chathu Panikkar and the southern Kaplingatan, chiseled by Kaplingatat Narayanan Namboothiri. In Kannur, Kozhikode and Vatakara areas, the Katathanad style germinated as a regional deviation of the Kallatikkotan. Pioneered by Nallore Unniri Menon, the Kalluvazhi Chitta, an integration of the Kallatikkotan and Kaplingatan styles, flourished in the Palghat District. Kathakali is a

⁹⁷ Vilanilam, V., Antony Palackal and Sunny Luke, Vol-II, *Op. cit.*, p.1304.

⁹⁸ Menon, C.A., *Op. cit.*, p.19.

⁹⁹ Sharma, V.S., *Op. cit.*, p. 25

¹⁰⁰ Singh, K.S., *Op. cit.*, p.65.

¹⁰¹ Vilanilam, V., Antony Palackal and Sunny Luke, Vol-II, *Op. cit.*, p.1304.

classical art form, which is always modern. Kathakali defied the much debated Aryanisation that coloured numerous other South Indian traditions.¹⁰²

Kathakali has come to be recognised by connoisseurs all over the world as a distinctive and rare art, representing the peak of excellence in its synthesis of all that is best in the fields of drama, dance and music.¹⁰³ The 18th and 19th Centuries saw great development and activity in Kathakali. During this time the dance-drama was at the height of its achievement and collected an immense repertoire of plays.¹⁰⁴

In recent times, there have been some changes in the Kathakali technique, with a view to making the performance meet the needs of a reformed and changing society. Instead of being an all night affair, it is now performed for three or four hours or even less. Women have also been given freedom to act on the stage. Some of these changes have helped Kathakali in modern times to save itself from the risk of extinction and develop itself on progressive lines as a popular art.

Kavadiyattam

Kavadiyattam, which is of Tamil origin, is a votive offering to temples, dedicated to Lord Subramania. Those making the offering, wear bright yellow and smear their bodies with bhasma, sacred ashes. They carry the Kavadi, a heavy decorated structure resembling the gateway of a temple, on their shoulders, steadying it with their hands. As they dance and twist, the Kavadis tower above the crowd. The tempo gradually increases to the rhythmic beat of various percussion instruments and occasionally, the nadaswaram is also used.¹⁰⁵ The Kavadi is the other most important form of ritual procession, dedicated to the worship of Lord Muruga or Subramanya, son of Shiva.¹⁰⁶ There are several types of Kavadis carried by the pilgrims and in the bamboo frame, there are pots of milk or rose, whatever other offering, which the pilgrims are taking for the Lord Muruga. Hundreds of pilgrims, carrying these Kavadis, visit the shrines at Palani and Thirupparakundrum, dedicated to Lord Subramanya.

¹⁰² *The Hindu*, 4/11/2016. p.4.

¹⁰³ Sreedhara Menon, A., *Op. cit.*, p.106.

¹⁰⁴ Reginald Massey, *India's Dances*, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 2004, p.115.

¹⁰⁵ Menon, C.A., *Op. cit.*, p.19.

¹⁰⁶ Kapila Vatsyayan, *Op. cit.*, p.237.

Kollam Thullal

Kolamthullal is a ritual dance form in connection with Kaliseva. It is also known as Kanithullal. It is performed in stages, mainly in Southern parts of Kerala. It is performed even in Bhagavati temples, along with Padayani. In order to solace the rage of Kali, who killed Darika, the hosts of spirits were asked to propitiate Kali and only after that, Devi's anger is abated. In memory of this, the Kolamthullal is being conducted. Different forms of kolams are played, as a part of Padayani, to exorcise the ghostly influence in women and this is played ritually at houses. The important kolams or figures in relation to Padayani are Yekshi, Birds, Maruta, Madan, Pisachu, Bhairavi, Kalan etc.

Kolam is performed in the specially built stage in the houses. It is the Ganaka communities that conduct this ritual. The possessed women are asked to take seat at the centre, where the figures of Yakshi, Gandarva etc. are drawn, using five coloured powders. The Ganakas would sing, in accordance with small drums and udukus, in a certain order. In certain cases, the haunted woman would tremble. When Kolamthullal is done, the kolams of Yakshi, Pakshi, Pisach, Madan. Kolam of Iswara, Awalohitheswaran, Ayiramanian etc. are mounted on the head. There would be Thalapoli and Velichappadu when kolam jumps in homes harmonized with the sounds of chenda, drums, ilathalam, chengila, udukku, thimila and kombu. Kolamthullal ends with the sacrifice of a cock.¹⁰⁷

The Kollam Thullal dance is also a Bhagavati cult dance but with a difference. Here the deity is heralded by the characteristic musical accompaniment like the Panchavadyam. The stage is richly decorated with banana stem and lampsteads. Two filled measures of grain-one of rice and the other of paddy, called Nirapara, represent welcome. The Kolams are now escorted to the area, by a retinue of young girls, clad in the traditional dress of mundu and kavani.

This ritual offering is generally performed, to get rid of the troubles caused by evil spirits. Here a number of characters, with very ugly make-up and flat big head-gears, dance to the accompaniment of primitive percussion instruments. The costumes of the dancers are highly decorative and rich in colour and brightness. There is no accompanying song.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, pp.100-101.

¹⁰⁸ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.48.

Kolkali

Kolkali is a folk art, performed in the northern area of Kerala. The dancers move in a circle, striking small sticks and keeping rhythm with special steps. The rhythm of this dance is set by a harmonious synchronization of tapping of the feet to the striking of sticks. The accompanying music gradually rises in tone and the dance reaches its climax. Though the dancers break away to form various patterns, they never miss a beat. In Malabar, Kolkali is more common among Muslim men.¹⁰⁹ Kolkali dance, performed by Hindu as well as Muslim communities, is the tandava version of Kaikottikali. Here the performers are men. Instead of clapping hands, they strike the kol (stick).¹¹⁰ Many of the body postures, choreography and foot work of the Kolkali characters have been taken directly from Kalaripayattu.¹¹¹

Kolkali, with its fast bodily movements and corresponding vocal expression, is a form of entertainment, very popular at the time of social gatherings, such as marriage. The players acting in pairs, strike the Kols (rods) in the hands of other players in a systematic manner, in tune with the songs sung in a captivating style. The movements of the players gain momentum with the crescendo of the Pattu and Vaythari (singing in Kolkali) and with the abrupt stopping of the Pattu and Vaythari, the movements of the players also stop abruptly. In the course of the fast movements, the players change places and strike the kols of the second and third players in quick succession. This change of places is called Korkkal. In the last stages of the play, the movements of the players are so fast that it will be difficult to identify individual players.¹¹²

The Kolkali troupe usually contains sixteen to twenty players. The teacher is called Kurikkal, who leads the play with the Vaythari. One of the players will sing and it will be repeated by the others. Kolkali, like Kalaripayattu (art of fencing) require continuous and exhausting bodily training for many years to attain perfection. Kolkali was an important item in social gatherings, like marriages, nerchas, etc. but just like other

¹⁰⁹ Vilanilam, J.V. Antony Palackal and Sunny Luke, Vol. II, *Op. cit.*, p.1306.

¹¹⁰ Singh, K.S., *Op. cit.*, p.93.

¹¹¹ Sudhakar Rao, M. and V. Raghvendra Reddy, *Op. cit.*, p.261.

¹¹² Vilanilam, J.V., Antony Palackal and Sunny Luke, Vol. I, *Op. cit.*, p.400.

folk arts, Kolkali has also lost its popularity, owing to changes in fashions and tastes. Kolkali is a mixed dance in which both men and women participate.

Koorankali

Koorankali is one more tribal dance, which is similar to Mankali. Here one man takes the role of a wild bear, with one more enacting the role of a hunting dog. The movements are faultlessly timed to the rhythmic beats of primitive drums. While this is going on, the large number of onlookers who form a circle round the two dancers, shout wild cries of joy with occasional clapping of hands and jerky dances.¹¹³

Kothamooriyattam

Kothamooriyattam is a ritualistic folk art performance in North Kerala, in association with land worship. It was 'Godavariyattam', which changed in to Kothamooriyattam. Both Kothamoori and Kothari are commonly used regionally. Kothamoori is a small figure in which an artificial cow face is attached in the middle of the body. Kothamooriyattam is performed after the 10th day of Thulam (Thullappatt). Kothamooriyattam is accompanied by two or three marippaniyas. The Paniyans wear a funny costume, made of tender coconut leaves, swathed around the waist with an artificial ear. In this art form, Paniyans and the instrumentalists who form a group, visit house after house for dancing.

The songs, meant for Kothamooriyattam, are known as Kotharipattukal. Of these songs, the most important is the story telling about the mother goddess, Cherukkunu Annapooreswari. These are the traditional songs of Malayas and Panas of North Kerala. A boy is usually dressed as Kothamoori. Along with this, there would be writing on face, with peculiar type of hair and other beautifications. Artificial cow face is either made of skin or wood or other articles. It is a traditional belief that when the Kothamoori and Maripaniyans are conducting dance and music, there would be prosperity such as growth of wealth, food grains and cow wealth. It is indicated from the humorous talks and dances that Kothamooriyattam has a close relationship with the character of farce or Porattu. Their performances of dance drama include both thought provoking matters and vulgar matters. They used to sing songs, pertaining to the social criticism, in accordance with the

¹¹³ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, pp. 14-15.

age. Even at present, their ritual art performance is conducted on 10th day of Medam (Pathamudayam) in Madayikkavu, Annapoorneswari temple etc. in Kannur District.¹¹⁴

This is a dance widespread among the Malavans of North Kerala. Models of oxen are made up with leaves and twigs, and carried on shoulders behind which many dancers with crude facial marks and skirts made of tender fronds of coconut, dance in exotic jubilation to the accompaniment of instruments like chenda and kinni (a bronze plate).¹¹⁵ The practice of such fertility rites, holding a magical spell over the religious beliefs and practices of people, for keeping the structure of social life intact, is found again in the folk-art of 'Kotamuri'. In this practice of 'Kotamuri', (Godavari) the cow, is held as the symbol of prosperity of the village. The vegetative cult finds its identification with the social context in the form of a ritual in which a young boy is made up as 'Kotamuri'. A protruding wooden cow-face is built on a frame, tucked into the boy's waist. A couple or so of persons who joke by wearing masks, painted on green sheaths, dance to the rhythm of the songs by the accompanying singers. They crack jokes on social themes of instant relevance. The party visits houses in the village and collects grain and other presents, in the name of the cow of wealth.¹¹⁶

Krishnanattam

Krishnanattam was improved by a Raja of Kottarakkara. After having heard about the Krishnanattam dance, developed by the Zamorin, the Raja of Kottarakkara requested the ruler of Calicut to send his troupe to his kingdom in South Kerala, to enact Krishnanattam for the benefit of the people. The request was rejected by the Zamorin, with the cynical remark that the southerners did not have the talent to appreciate this art. The Raja of Kottarakkara, who felt humiliated, immediately conceived of Ramanattam as an alternative of Krishnanattam. He composed a regular 'Attakatha' in Malayalam, in eight cantos, with Ramayana as its theme for the purpose of staging a new dance form. This came to be known as 'Ramanattam', which has since been recognized as the immediate progenitor of Kathakali, the famous dance drama of Kerala.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, p.23.

¹¹⁵ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.26.

¹¹⁶ Kavalam Narayana Panikkar, *Op. cit.*, pp.51-52.

¹¹⁷ Priyan C. Oomman, *Tourism Directory of Kerala*, Global Communications, (P) Ltd., Thiruvananthapuram, 1995, pp.70-71.

Krishnanattam is the modernised form of Ashtapadiyattam. In this art, the performers act on the stage in accordance with the background music. Songs are sung on Sopana style. It is presented in eight parts such as Avatharam (incarnation), Kaliyamardanasm, Kamsa Vadham, Rasacreeda, Swayamvaram, Banayudham, Vividayudham and Swargarohanam. It is staged during the night time. The Kelikottu makes the beginning of the play. Lord Krishna, the pivotal role of this art, has peculiar costumes, ornaments and make-up. About seventy five songs are used in this art contextually. Different ragas like Natta, Pati, Kedar, Gaula, Sankarabharanam, Kambhoji, Todi and Bhairavi are chiefly used in it. Chief instruments are chengila (gong), elathalam (cymbal), maddhalam (drum), sankhu (conch) and idakka (musical drum). At present, Krishnanattam is performed only in the Guruvayur Temple in Trissur District.¹¹⁸ Krishnanattam was based on the Krishnagiti Kavya in Sanskrit written in Malayalam by Kottarakkara Thampuran in the 17th Century.¹¹⁹

Krishnanattam was introduced by the Zamorin Manavedan as a refinement of Ashtapadiyattam.¹²⁰ It was written in the late 16th Century, by one of the Zamorins of Calicut, the former rulers of Malabar. Until the 1950s, when social changes dismantled both the feudal system and the ability of rulers to support cultural troupes, Krishnanattam was confined to the Zamorin's palace.¹²¹

This dance drama is based on the Sanskrit text, Krishna Gatha', where the whole story of Lord Krishna was cast into a drama-cycle, which would need eight for performing. Many of the characteristics of the earlier ritual folk dances such as Thiyyattam, Mudiyyettu and Theyyam are seen in Krishnanattam, especially in painting the face in intricate patterns and the use of masks and colourful, gorgeous costumes and crown. The actors exhibit a mimetic expression along with ballet elements, and the stress is always on group movements and group compositions. In no other dance could be seen so many characters performing the same dance with the same facial expressions, eye

¹¹⁸ Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, p.65.

¹¹⁹ Sharma, V.S., *Op. cit.*, p.24.

¹²⁰ Vilanilam, J.V., Antony Palackal and Sunny Luke, Vol. I, *Op. cit.*, pp.495-496.

¹²¹ Menon, C.A., *Op. cit.*, p.21.

movements, gestures, foot-work (nritya) and grace, e .g., Mullapoothal in Rasalila (Sree Krishna with Gopies) Kaliyamardana Nritham etc. Maddalam, elathalam and chengala are the musical instruments used.¹²²

Kudai Koothu and Kuda Koothu

Kudai= umbrella, Koothu=dance. Kuda=pot, Koothu=dance. The umbrella dance and pot dance respectively of the 11th Century, had achieved a high degree of perfection in dancing. The Trikkodithanam Temple assigned to the 11th Century A.D, contains two stone panels, depicting both these dance forms and also the temple at Trivikramamangalam, assigned to the 12th Century A.D. These dances belonged to the Nritha of Bharatha Natya and had no melody or story.¹²³

Kudiyattam

Kudiyattam is the earliest form of dramatic art in Kerala and it seeks to present full- fledged Sanskrit drama or select portions thereof. It literally means, “dancing together”.¹²⁴ Koodiyattam is an ancient temple art form in which Sanskrit dramatic act is combined with the Natyasasthra style of dance. It is a unique art form, that expresses the glory of Indian arts tradition. Koodiyattam is a genuine histrionics, based on the fourfold acting known as Vachikam (verbal), Angikam (gesticulatory), Sathwikam (virtuous) and Aharyam (artificial). It also gives importance to the acting of different moods or expressions. The plot of the Koodiyattam is extracted from the Sanskrit dramas. Hither to, extractions from the works like Swapna Vasavadatham, Prathijna yougandharayanam, Ascharyachood amani and Nagananda have been adopted. The mizhavu (drum), kuzhithalam (cymbal), itakka (musical drum) and sankh (conch) are its chief instruments.¹²⁵

Koodiyattam is said to be the forerunner of the dramatic arts in Kerala. The original form of the Sanskrit drama, according to the tenets of Bharata, had been introduced into Kerala as far back as the Sangam Period and the reference to the

¹²² Vilanilam, J.V., Antony Palaackal and Sunny Luke, Vol. I, *Op. cit.*, pp.495-496.

¹²³ Sreedhara Menon, A., *Op. cit.*, p.107.

¹²⁴ Menon, C.A., *Op. cit.*, p.21.

¹²⁵ Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, pp.63-64.

Chakkiyar in the classic Silappathikaram is well-known. But it had to acculturate by adopting a prologue in Nambiyar Tamizh, the slangy Malayalam interpretations by the vidusaka, which have now become the most popular part.¹²⁶

At the time of performance, the Koothambalam is decorated with plantain bunches, clusters of coconuts and decorative arrangements of coconut leaves. On all auspicious occasions, a nilavilaku, a standing oil lamp, is lit and a container of paddy, suggesting plenty is placed beside it, with a spray of coconut flowers to complete the arrangement. The performing Chakyars are accompanied by men of the Nambiar community, drumming on a large copper pot, called a Mizhavu and Nambiar women known as Nangiyars, playing small cymbals (elathalams) and occasionally chanting verses.¹²⁷

The impresario entering on the stage, makes dance, which is known as kriya Chavittuka (Making foot steps) and it is followed by the practice of ‘Arang thalikkuka’ (sprinkling the stage) by the Nambiar. The prescription of costume for Koodiyattam is based on Natya Sasthra and various colours are used for this such as manayola (red arsenic), chayilyam (vermilion), neelam (indigo) kari (charcoal), manjal (turmeric) and abhram (mica). In addition to these various flowers, plantain fibers and swathe of areca are used. It has a resemblance with Kathakali dress. Koodiyattam is performed by the Chakkiyar, Nambiar and Nangiar, for seven days, in the Koothu temple, adorned by tender coconut leaves. On the first day, the Chakkiyar’s performances, on the second day, the recitation of God’s hymn called Akkitham and dance by impresario (Soothradharan) and on the third day, performance by the four purusharthas (the four objects of life). The actual Koodiyattam begins on the fourth day which continues for three nights. On the seventh day with the practice of Ankam muti, the play comes to a close.¹²⁸

Kudiyattam is a form of Sanskrit drama or theatre and a UNESCO designated Human Heritage Art.¹²⁹ The Sangeet Natak Akademi has begun to take keen interest in

¹²⁶ Singh, K.S., *Op. cit.*, p.65.

¹²⁷ Menon, C.A., *Op. cit.*, p.21.

¹²⁸ Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, p.64.

¹²⁹ Vilanilam, J.V., Antony Palackal and Sunny Luke, Vol. I, *Op. cit.*, p.492.

Koothu and Kudiyattam and the encouragement and assistance that they are offering to preserve and promote these arts, are generous and praiseworthy. The organization SPIC-MACAY is also making valiant efforts to popularise Kudiyattam and Nangiar Koothu, by organising several performances all over India.¹³⁰

Kuthambalam

In some of the important temples of Kerala, a theatre hall is specially built for the performance of Kuttu and Kudiyattam. This temple theatre is called Kuthambalam.¹³¹ In the Koothambalam, only such temple arts as Chakyar Koothu, Nangiar Koothu and Kudiyattam are usually performed. It seems that in the days of the Devadasis, their dance also was performed in the Koothambalam. It is built on the right side the deity in the temple.

Koothambalam is usually rectangular shape. When seen from outside, its most dominant feature is its steep low roof, which covers up a major part of the super structure and looks like a mountain cave. The roof is covered either with copper plates or with flat tiles. The roof is supported by beams, resting on rows of pillars and trellis-walls. In most of the Koothambalams, there are two entrances to the auditorium and the larger sides are meant for the public. There are two narrow entrances through the shorter sides for the actors. The pillars inside the Koothambalam are either of wood or of stone and wood. The stage is a raised platform, with a roof of its own (Rangamandapam) at one end of the hall, facing the deity of the temple. There is a square frame work in the ceiling of the stage. Inside this framework, figures of the eight Dikpalakas, with the figure of Lord Brahma in the centre, are installed. At each corner of the stage, there is a wooden pillar, built to support the roof the stage. This stage roof, which is highly ornamental, is a roof within the main roof of the Koothambalam.¹³²

A person sitting in any part or corner of the auditorium, can hear every word uttered on the stage perfectly. Usually, a large Nilavilakku, with three wicks, is placed on

¹³⁰ Nirmala Paniker, *Op. cit.*, p.25.

¹³¹ Venu, G., *Documentation of Kudiyattam Series No.1 Production of a play in Kudiyattam*, Natanakairali, Ammannur Chakyar Madhom, Thrissur, 1989, p.4.

¹³² Nirmala Paniker, *Op. cit.*, p.25.

the stage and it is lighted. The nepathya or dressing room is behind the stage. There are two doors leading from the dressing room to the stage. The stage is usually decorated with fruit bearing plantain trees and tender coconut leaves. In temples where there is no Kuthambalam, Koothu and Kudiyattam are conducted, either in the Valiambalam or Ottupura.¹³³ The musical aspect of these dance forms is indigenous and the concept is rooted in Vedic music, which is based on the Svara theory. Svarita, Udatta and Anudatta are the three notes, which became the basis of all Svaras. There are twenty Svaras, employed in Kudiyattam, according to be thematic context.¹³⁴

Kummi

Kummi is women's dance, widespread in Kerala. The dancers move in a circle and the hand gestures mean reaping and harvesting. One of the women leads the singing with a favourite song while the rest take up refrain. Each performer renders a new row in turn and the dancing steps when all get tired. In local modifications of the kummi dance, men also participate. Here the man, with small sticks in their hands, form a circle, inside which stand the women in a smaller ring. The beating of the sticks by men and the clapping of hands by women, are perfectly synchronized with the steps that they make and also with the rhythm of the songs.¹³⁵

Kurathiyattam

Kurathis are a set of gypsies, who go about from place to place telling fortunes. In this dance called Kurathiyattam, two Kurathis first enter dancing, in the guise of characters representing the wives of Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva. Then they stage a controversy through songs over the exploits of their own husbands. The favourable point in one's favour becomes the butt of ridicule at the other's hands and while one praises profusely, the other condemns ironically. This is explained with fluent mime and brought out in picturesque postures. The gestures, bodily flexions and foot-work, show faultless coordination and rhythmic elegance. After this, Kuravan (male) and Kurathi enter and enact a mock argument. Though lacking in dramatic element, the technique is skillfully

¹³³ Venu, G., *Op. cit.*, p.5.

¹³⁴ Sharma, V.S., *Op. cit.*, p.66.

¹³⁵ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.47.

exploited and the exposition of different moods like suspended chastity, injured innocence, disappointment and the joy of reconciliation, are of a high artistic level. Maddalam, Kaimani etc., are the instruments used.¹³⁶

Kuravankali

A dance called Kuravankali is prevalent among the Kuravas in the Central Travancore region¹³⁷

Kuravarkali

Kuravars belong to the former untouchable class of people, who were not permitted to enter the precincts of temple. The Kuravarkali dance is generally performed outside the temple walls, in connection with festivals. The costume of the dancers consists of conical caps called 'pala thopi', white dhoti and red sash. Sandal paste is smeared all over the body and face and garlands of red chethi flowers are worn. The Kuravars circle round a traditional lamp and dance to the rhythm, set by percussion instruments like Veekkan and chenda.¹³⁸

Kurumbar Nritham

Wayanad District had different types of hill tribes, of whom the 'kurumbar' and 'kattunayakar' are the most prominent. They perform a special kind of dance, which is staged during marriages. Before marriage, the members of the families of both the bride and bridegroom and after marriage the newly wedded couple, perform this dance. After the bridegroom goes back with his bride to his family, all the members of his household and the newly wedded again repeat the dance.

Kuthirakali

This is a ritualistic art, widespread in Malappuram District. A horse is fashioned with bamboo splints of tender fronds of the coconut palm. This horse is lifted and carried

¹³⁶ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, pp. 46-47.

¹³⁷ Priyan C Oomman, *Tourism Directory of Kerala*, Global Communications (P). Ltd., Thiruvananthapuram, 1995, p.77.

¹³⁸ Shovana Narayan, *Op. cit.*, p.239.

on the shoulders of performers, who dance to the rhythm of chenda and to the escorting of songs sung by them.¹³⁹

Kuthiyottam

Kuthiyottam is a ritual art form, conducted in the Bhadrakali temples, during the month of Kumbham. This art, like narabali, is performed in the southern districts like Alappuzha, Kollam and Thiruvananthapuram. It is performed as an offering rite. Kuthiyottam is presented as an offering and a remedy for the child diseases. The rites of Kuthiyottam are significant. All practices of rites are done, by undergoing vows for fortyone days, in a purified manner, avoiding fish and meat.¹⁴⁰

This is in vogue in Thiruvananthapuram District, performed commonly in Devi temples. A performer, wearing a crown, like that used by the ‘Ottanthullal’ artiste, and three other characters, with three dissimilar facial make-ups, dance rhythmically to the background of percussion instruments. The songs glorify Durga, Padapattu and Kalaripattu and songs to glorify deities.¹⁴¹

The pandal meant for Kuthiyottam, is decorated. Holy seat is arranged for the mother goddesses, Devi. On the backside of the pandal, the sword of Devi is installed on the red cloth covered stool. In front of this, a tapering plantain leaf and a niranazhi are placed. Nivedyam or offering is prepared by thengin pookkula (florescence of coconut) of broken coconut, kadalai fruit and beaten paddy, jaggery and sugar candy. In front of this pandal, the children are given training for dance. In these temples (Devi sthaanams), there is the practice of deeparadhana, (lamp worship), song and feast. The training for this Kuthiyottam is given to the children, aged between seven and twelve.¹⁴²

Malayankettu

This art form is in fashion all over Kannur District. This is completely ritualistic in scope. This is generally performed for the sake of those women, who suffered

¹³⁹ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.52.

¹⁴⁰ Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, p.99.

¹⁴¹ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.50.

¹⁴² Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, pp.99- 100.

miscarriages and who are advised by the astrologers to undergo this ritual. Under a beautiful 'Pandal', Kalams are drawn with the help of rice flour, charcoal powder, and turmeric powder. The pregnant woman sits in front of this kalam. Actors are dressed in the stated way of deities like Raktheswari, Gulikan, Yakshan, Yakshi and they dance in front of the Kalam.¹⁴³

Man Kali

This tribal dance is of two types. One version is based on the Ramayana episode, in which Sita is being enchanted by Maricha, in the style of a golden deer and it is enacted in graceful movements. In the second type, one man takes the role of a deer while one more that of a hunter. The deer hops and jumps around. The hunter follows close on its heels and his movements and gestures suggest drawing the bow, aiming it, hurling the lance, brandishing some wooden log, etc. The entire dance is performed to the rhythm of wild percussion instruments.¹⁴⁴

Margamkali

Margamkali is a Christian folk-dance, performed mainly by women during marriage and other festive occasions. The performers, dressed in typical traditional Syrian Christian fashion, wearing the chatta and mundu, move in a circle. The Margamkali songs are well known for their message, which is the Margam (way) of Christian life, believed to have been taught by Thomas, the Apostle.¹⁴⁵ Margamkali, which meant 'Play of the True Faith', was originally performed by men but it is now a dance form, practised by women, who move in circular formation, similar to Thiruvathirakali.¹⁴⁶ This entertainment art form was performed on occasions like marriage.¹⁴⁷

Margamkali is a popular form of social entertainment, among Kerala's Christian community, especially the Syrian Christians of Kottayam District. It is believed to have originated somewhere between 1600 and 1700. Margam Kali is performed by twelve

¹⁴³ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.58.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.14.

¹⁴⁵ Singh, K.S., *Op. cit.*, p.94.

¹⁴⁶ Shanavas, P. N., *Op. cit.*, p.316.

¹⁴⁷ Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, pp.69 -70

men, who represent Christ's disciples. They group themselves around a standing Nilavilakku, an oil lamp, that represents Christ and burns eleven wicks. Each man wears a simple dhoti and has a cloth wrapped around his head, with a peacock feather pinned onto it. The first part of the performance consists of dancing and singing songs about the life of St. Thomas, the apostle who is said to have come to Kerala after the Crucifixion and converted people to Christianity. The second part, called Parichamuttukali, is a vigorous display of martial arts, using swords and shields based on Kalaripayattu, Kerala's martial art form. No musical instruments are used and performances, which are done after dusk, are usually three or four hours long.¹⁴⁸ By the end of 19th century, Margamkali was on the verge of decline. Though the Margamkali is a martial art, it is at present performed and presented by girls in school and during college competitions.¹⁴⁹

Mayilattam

This dance derives its name from the peacock. Donning the costume of a peacock, with painted faces, beak, headgear and wings of peacock feather, the dancers do this ritualistic dance offering. As a rite, it continues to be practised in the Travancore region.¹⁵⁰

Mohiniyattam

Mohiniyattam is a characteristic dance form of Kerala. It literally means 'the dance of the enchantress'. It is the 'lasya' ingredient that is dominant. The origin of Mohiniyattam is traced to the Dasiyattam in Kerala temples in the past.¹⁵¹ 'Mohini', the temptress, is a returning character in Hindu mythology. 'Attam' means dance. The music is classical Carnatic. As the name implies, it is dance of the charmer. Its origin is a matter of conjecture, but it retains a lovely fusion of the parallel streams of dance in the eastern and western regions of South India.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Menon, C.A., *Op. cit.*, p.23.

¹⁴⁹ Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, pp.69-70.

¹⁵⁰ Shanavas, P. N. *Op. cit.*, p.329.

¹⁵¹ Priyan C Oomman, *Tourism Directory of Kerala*, Global Communications, (P) Ltd., Thiruvananthapuram, 1995, p.71.

¹⁵² *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.74.

This is a classical dance that adopts a mean between the two parallel streams of classical dance (Bharatanatyam of Tamil Nadu and Kathakali of Kerala) in technique and style, both fixed according to 'Natya Sastra', the scripture of the Indian classical tradition. Solo performances are done only by women. The performance will be on an especially put-up stage and it is presented in association with temple festivals. Literally, 'Mohiniyattam' means 'dance (attam) of the temptress (Mohini)'. There are several institutions, spread all over Kerala, who are imparting this unique dance form of Kerala, which is very popular along with Bharatanatyam.¹⁵³

The repertory of Mohiniyattam, as it is presented now, consists of 'cholkettu', 'varnam', 'padam', 'thillana', 'kaikottikali', 'kummi' and 'swaram'. The predominant mood of Mohiniyattam is 'sringaram'.¹⁵⁴ The dance involves moving of broad hips and the gentle movements of erect torso, from side to side. There are approximately forty different basic movements, known as 'adavukal', in Mohiniyattam. The dance follows the classical book of Hastha Lakshanadeepika, which has elaborate description of mudras.¹⁵⁵

It may be noted that during the period of Sri Karthika Thirunal Rama Varma Maharaja (1758-1798 A.D.), one of the forerunners of Sri Swati Tirunal, Mohiniyattam was given its deserving place. His monumental treatise, Balaramabharatam, lays down the tenets of the dance techniques of Kerala, in a very elaborate and authentic manner. It will not be out of place to mention here that the year, that followed Sri Swati Tirunal's demise, witnessed the birth of another great artist (1848), Raja Ravi Varma, whose oil paintings rooted in a foreign tradition of realistic concept, earned wide popularity throughout the world. When we try to identify the inter-relationship between the dance and music of a region, the most fascinating system of the lasya dance of Kerala, namely, Mohiniyattam, is to be viewed as the visual interpretation of the action music that had developed in the region.¹⁵⁶ Sri Swati Tirunal, apart from his Krittis in Carnatic style, composed padams, using the musical mould of Kathakali and improved and even recreated such existing formats. These padams were exclusively meant to be enacted in Mohiniyattam.

¹⁵³ Menon, C.A., *Op. cit.*, p.23.

¹⁵⁴ Vilanilam, J.V., Antony Palackal and Sunny Luke, Vol-I, *Op. cit.*, pp. 494-495.

¹⁵⁵ Sudhakar Rao, M. and Raghvendra Reddy, V., *Op. cit.*, pp.249-250.

¹⁵⁶ Kavalam Narayana Panikkar, *Op. cit.*, p.137.

Swati Tirunal, who was a generous patron of all fine arts, extended his patronage of Mohiniyattam as well. In spite of the encouragement given by Swati Tirunal, Mohiniyattam did not win much respectability as an art form. It was left to Malayalam poet, Vallathol, to extend his patronage to this art by including it in the syllabus of the Kerala Kalamandalam. The exponents of this art form, at Kalamandalam, include Chinnammu Amma and Kalyanikutti Amma and they evolved a typical Kalamandalam style for staging Mohiniyattam, even the costumes and the makeup having a distinctiveness of their own.¹⁵⁷

Moplah Kali

The Moplahs, mostly Muslims of Kerala, are a class apart, living on the coasts. The Moplah's songs are full of vigour and verve and they are known by the generic term, Moplah Pattu. There are a variety of Moplah songs and dances, each deriving its name either from the song or the sticks they hold in their hands or the musical instrument called Thappu which is a kind of Daph. In the Thappa Kali, men hold thappus in the left hand, standing in two rows and playing the instrument with their right hand. The daph is used almost like lexim in Maharashtra and it is beaten by the dancer while holding it at different levels, such as the knee, waist, shoulders, head, etc. In the Kolkali or Moplah Kali, sticks are held instead of daph. ¹⁵⁸ Only males only participate in this dance. The dancers require basic martial training.¹⁵⁹ This is very similar to Kolkali and it is a powerful folk-dance of the Muslims of Malabar.¹⁶⁰

The dancers perform to the accompaniment of a song, sung by the leader first and repeated by the dancers in a Chorus. The songs are full of gusto, the steps large and clear, with very definite steps and knees and even toe heel movements are common. The language of the accompanying song includes a great deal of alliteration and contains many Arabic, Urdu and Tamil words. Unlike the dancers of some other tribes, these are

¹⁵⁷ Priyan C Oomman, *Tourism Directory of Kerala*, Global Communications (P) Ltd., Thiruvananthapuram, 1995, p.71.

¹⁵⁸ Kapila Vatsyayan, *Op. cit.*, p.253.

¹⁵⁹ Kavalam Narayana Panikkar, *Op. cit.*, pp.149-150.

¹⁶⁰ Shovana Narayan, *Op. cit.*, p.238.

pure, joy dances, where songs are sung in the praise of the sea, sometimes the harvest or retell an old romantic story.

A close counterpart of the Moplah dances, with the musical instrument Thappu, is the Thappumelakali. This dance is also performed with the Thappu and it is noted for its swift footwork, hops, squatting positions, swirling movements and jumps. The drums accompany the dance and gradually rise to a crescendo, where the more skilful among the Thappu players weave an extraordinary variety of rhythmical patterns on the Thappu. It has been observed that the Kalanadis perform a similar dance called Thapollan.

Mudiyattam

Mudiyattam, also known as Neeliyattam, is a tribal dance in which only women partake. The women stand on small wooden blocks and the dance begins with slow and simple movements of the body, which end in graceful movements of the head. The messy hair of the participants, flow down and swing in rhythmic waves. The musical instruments used are 'karu', 'maram', 'para', 'kokkaro' etc.¹⁶¹

The song and orchestration of Mutiyattam are done by the male artists. This art still exists in places like Idukki, Kollam, Ambalapuzha, Kasargode, and Changanassery etc. Madhalam, Para, Kokkara etc. are the instruments, used in the orchestra. When the song and orchestration start, women, in their dance, shake the upper part of their neck and whirl their heads and hair in a circular way. They also walk in circular manner, with rhythmic steps and dance. This art performance is being done by Pulayars.¹⁶²

The Mudiyattam Kali is folk dance in which female artistes unlock their hair and engage themselves in frantic dancing, to the accompaniment of folk songs.¹⁶³ The most common group dance by women is the Mudiyattam, in which they start with a slow rotatory movement of their head, with their loosened, uncombed hair, flowing in cascades around them. As the dance gains momentum, the hair whirls around each dancer.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Vilanilam, J.V., Antony Palackal, Sunny Luke, Vol. I, *Op. cit.*, p. 497.

¹⁶² Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, p.28.

¹⁶³ Priyan C. Oomman, *Tourism Directory of Kerala*, Global Communications, (P). Ltd., Thiruvananthapuram, 1995, p.77.

¹⁶⁴ Singh, K.S., *Op. cit.*, p.93

This is a community entertainment, performed by the women dancers of Malaveda tribes of Pathanamthitta District. This is one of the few folk dances, which are exclusively performed by women folk. When the fight between Siva and Arjuna went on, Siva, who was very much tired, happened to fall down. Parvathi appeared there as a Malavedathi, with her untied hair. This myth is preserved through Mudiyyattam.¹⁶⁵

Mudiyyettu

Mudiyyettu is one of the ancient forms of dance drama of Kerala. Mudiyyettu presents a dramatized special form of something made of the Puranic story of Darika Vadha. Mudiyyettu is generally performed in the Bhadrakali temples of Central Kerala. The story of Bhadrakali and Darika is a representation of the good and evil tendencies in man and a picture of the everlasting fight between dharma and adharma in the world around us. Siva, Narada, Darika, Danavendra, Bhadrakali, Kooli and Koimbidar are the seven characters in Mudiyyettu. Chayilyam, Manayola, Mashi, Manjal, rice paste, caustic lime, indigo and other ingredients are used for the makeup on the face. The head gears and ornaments are made of wood and they are carved, gilded and jewelled, with artistic positioning of glass pieces, peacock feathers and even the shells of beetles. The musical instruments, used in Mudiyyettu, are Uruttu chenda, Veekku chenda, Ilathalam and Shankh. The literary composition, which forms the text for the performance of Mudiyyettu, is a blend of prose and verse. The language is a combination of archaic Malayalam, Sanskrit and Tamil. Previously, the text was not written but used to be orally handed down from teacher to disciples. Naturally, it underwent changes with each generation. The songs are sung in the distinct Sopana style of Kerala.¹⁶⁶

It is performed by the Kurup community of Travancore side and Marars of Cochin. The theme is the legendary epic of Bhadrakali's fight against the demon, Darikan, ending with her victory. Performances begin with the drawing of a kalam, a drawing done in five earth colours and depicting the Goddess in her fiercest mood. Once the kalam has been ritually sanctified, offerings are made and the dance begins. A Mudiyyettu troupe consists of at

¹⁶⁵ *Essays on the Cultural Formation of Kerala, Kerala State Gazetteer*, Vol. IV, Part II, Government of Kerala, 1999, pp.50- 51.

¹⁶⁶ Venu, G. *Puppetry and Lesser Known Dance Traditions of Kerala*, Natana Kairali, Thrissur, 2004, pp.39-40.

least sixteen people, actors as well as assistants and musicians. Each character is elaborately costumed and wears intricate makeup to stress and heighten their superhuman qualities. The performance, which is accompanied by cymbals and Kerala's powerful drum, the chenda, begins soon after dusk with the world of men and deities separated by two men, holding a curtain that is raised and lowered as the action requires.¹⁶⁷ Mudi yettu is traditionally performed by the Marar community, who come under the class of Ambalavasis, who Ambalavasi can be broadly divided into two classes a higher class, wearing the sacred thread and a lower class, who do not wear a sacred thread.¹⁶⁸

Mudi yettu is a ritual art form, conducted by the Kurups. Mudi yettu in its pure authentic style. To please the Bhadrakali is its main motto. It is also known as Mutiyetuppu. The fierce face, the matted hair and the crown made of either wood or metal, form its outfit and the Kali performs the dance, wearing the crown (Thirumuti) on head. The performer used to wear the crown from the temple. The crown is decorated by red cloth, pearl and the peacock tail feather. As in the Kathakali, it needs facial make-up, costumes, ornaments and crown. The performance starts in front of a lighted floor lamp. In a decorated pandal, the figure of Bhadrakali is depicted with five coloured dust. After having conducted the Kalam pooja and Kalam pattu, Thiriyuzhichil is performed. The whirling or rubbing is done to remove the evil influences. After the whirling, the kalam is wiped out. Following, this the Mutiyettu is performed.¹⁶⁹

The face of the Kooli is marked with rice powder and lime. A heavy crown, made of tender coconut leaves, is put on its head. But a small crown is needed for the character of Darika. In it, the prominent factor is the war between Darika and Kali. At the outset, Siva and Narada appear on the stage. It is followed by the setting out (Puraapadu) of Darika. Soon Darika and Kali start war cry. Then there is the coming of Koimbadaru. In the course of the mighty war, Darika is defeated and killed and Kali enters the stage with his chopped head. This is the last scene. Then the performers leave the stage singing hymns of Lord Siva. Mutiyettu is usually presented after sunset.

¹⁶⁷ Menon, C.A., *Op. cit.*, p.25.

¹⁶⁸ Venu, G. *Op. cit.*, p.49.

¹⁶⁹ Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, p.71.

The characters are all heavily made up of gorgeous costumes, intricate and complicated and with conventional facial paintings, tall head gears etc. Attired and adorned exotically with a unique weirdness and hideousness, the characters seem absolutely supernatural. Their mien and array make them colourful, imposing and fearful in the extreme. The dance is performed by a set of people known as kuruppanmar, mainly in Bhadrakali temples. In the dance, a kolam of Kali is first made up to which floral offerings and other rites are made. Then it is taken round the temple to the accompaniment of drumming instruments. The kolam is then installed in a appropriate place. The dance proper is then enacted. Chenda and elathalam are the instruments used.¹⁷⁰

Nagachuttu

Common in Thiruvananthapuram and Chirayinkizhu Taluks and in Kilimanoor, Pazhayakunnummal and Thattathumala regions, this form of dance is in vogue among Vedars, Parayars and Kuruvar tribes. Eight persons for the dance and two to play percussion instruments, in all ten persons, are wanted for staging this dance. From among the eight performers, two each twin around each other like serpents and rising up, fight it out with sticks. The techniques are repeated several times. Sandalwood paste on the brow, a red towel round the head, red silk around the waist and bells round the ankles, form the costume. This is a combination of snake worship and Kalaripayattu.¹⁷¹

Nangyar Koothu

The women from Chakyar community, namely, 'Nangyars', are active participants in their theatrical performances of Kudiyattam and their dance developed separately as 'Nangiarkoothu',¹⁷² which has only lady characters. It is performed by female performers called Nangyarammas and they belong to Nambiar caste¹⁷³.

¹⁷⁰ Vilanilam, J.V., Antony Palackal and Sunny Luke, Vol. 1, *Op. cit.*, p. 498.

¹⁷¹ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, pp. 57-58.

¹⁷² Kavalam Narayana Panikkar, *Op. cit.*, p.139.

¹⁷³ Sudhakar Rao, M. and Raghvendra Reddy, V., *Op. cit.*, p.252.

In Nangyar Koothu, the 'Nivahanam' also is performed by the Nangyar. The Nangyar Koothu therefore, needs a highly versatile talent¹⁷⁴. Unlike Devadasis, these women had a happy married life and they used to cooperate with their men in life and art.¹⁷⁵

When the Devadasis degenerated into a society of harlots, the larger society ceased to honour and supports them. Nangiars, way of life was different from that of the Devadasis.¹⁷⁶ In the feudal society, these women dancers used to enjoy considerable status and they were allowed to sit along with the feudal chiefs and ruling kings. Whether Mohiniyattam had its roots in Nangiarkoothu or not, the music that is sung by Nangiars in the Kudiyyattam performance, called 'Akkitta', has the same traits of Sopanam music, with its folk and Vedic overtones. The heroines of the Manipravala poetry, like Uniyadicharitham of the 12th-13th Centuries A.D, were dancers belonging to the Nangiyar community and the authors of these works were mostly Chakyars. The poetry in these works was written in the musical style of the region and it includes dandaka (a structure in which the emotions are tied into a rhythmic pattern, to create an emotional outflow), rhythmic prose which would be sung musically, etc.¹⁷⁷

Nangiarkoothu is staged, as a rule, in the Kuthambalam of a temple but in the absence of a Koothambalam, Nangiar Koothu may be conducted in the Uttupura or Valiyambalam. Only on one special occasion can this Koothu be conducted outside the temple precincts when an Agnihotri or Akkithiri is cremated.¹⁷⁸ In Kerala, there are even today a small number of actresses known as Nangiars, who have chosen the profession of dancing, acting and singing. It has been their hereditary occupation for some centuries. Unfortunately, the tradition of Nangiars and Nambiars is fast becoming extinct because of the rapid changes, that have come about in patronage and promotion in recent times and they can no longer live on the meagre income from the practice of their arts. Today, the number of Nangiars, who still follow their traditional profession, has dwindled considerably.

¹⁷⁴ Ronald M. Bernier, *Op. cit.*, p.90.

¹⁷⁵ Kavalam Narayana Panikkar, *Op. cit.*, p.139.

¹⁷⁶ Nirmala Paniker, *Op. cit.*, p.16.

¹⁷⁷ Kavalam Narayana Panikkar, *Op. cit.*, p.139.

¹⁷⁸ Nirmala Paniker, *Op. cit.*, pp.21-22.

Naikarkali

This is well-liked by the tribes in Wyanad and Malappuram Districts. It is more ritualistic than entertainment oriented. This is performed as pooja to family deities and during marriages. When the instruments, Thappu and Kuzhal, start playing, the Naikars start their performance. With jingling anklets round their legs, they dance round in clock-wise and anti-clockwise movements, to the accompaniment of the instruments. In between, they shout ‘Hoy Hoy’¹⁷⁹

Customs and practices are inextricable parts of the Adivasi community. They perform dance in order to share their joy and experiences with others. Naikar is a tribal group, seen in Wayanad and Kozhikode districts and Nilambur region of Malappuram District. Naikarkali is a popular ritual art, prevalent among the Naikar people. They perform this art in association with the worship of their tribal gods and on other festive occasions. This art is performed, extending up to a full day, including a day and a night. This is an attractive game. More than fifteen participants are involved in the game. The footsteps of the dance are according to the rhythms of Thappu (a small drum) and Kuzhalvili (trumpet blowing) and according to the rhythm, the game is started by singing songs by the performers. The make-up of the performers consists of Mundu (dhoti) with large side lines, Vattakettu (round knots) in the head, colourful costumes and chilanka (anklet) on their legs. All the songs, dances and other art performances of the tribal people, express the sincerity and genuineness of their pristine minds.¹⁸⁰

Onakkali

The Dravidian communities developed their own forms of folk-dancing to mark festive and ritualistic occasions, like Onakkali and snake dance, as part of worship.¹⁸¹

Oppana

Oppana is a form of social entertainment, executed by Kerala’s Muslim community. Although known all over Kerala, it is especially popular in the Northern Districts of

¹⁷⁹ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.15.

¹⁸⁰ Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, p.28.

¹⁸¹ Singh, K.S., *Op. cit.*, p.65.

Cannanore, Calicut and Malappuram.¹⁸² Oppana is a popular art of the Mappila community. It is the most attractive and peculiar audio visual art form.¹⁸³ Oppana is a Muslim folk-dance, performed by the womenfolk, prior to the nikah (marriage) ceremony. The dancers wear the typical Muslim dress with mundu, the kuppayam (full-sleeved blouse) and the thattom (the veli pulled over the hair). The performers form a circle round the bride, who is dressed in her best. The dance starts with the Oppana Pattu (song). While dancing, they gracefully bend inwards and outwards with every step.¹⁸⁴

Very often it is performed during marriage occasions. In addition to this, its presence can be seen at the time of circumcision, puberty, ceremonial bath on the 40th day, receptions, and other ceremonial functions.¹⁸⁵ Harmonium, tabala and gangira are the musical instruments used. The songs are based on Mappilapattu.¹⁸⁶ It is a form of music, accompanied by clapping of hands. Both men and women participate in it. In marriages, the women go in a circle and receive the bride while men stand aside, singing songs and receive the bridegroom.¹⁸⁷

Ottanthullal

The Ottanthullal is a poor man's Kathakali. The Ottanthullal literally means running and jumping and it is performed by solo dancers, in costumes which resemble the Kathakali costumes.¹⁸⁸ Ottan Thullal is a typical solo-dance, in which the humorous element from Kuthu and the musical element from Kathakali, are combined. In Ottan Thullal, a single actor wears colourful costumes as in Kathakali and recites Thullal or dance songs to the accompaniment of acting and dancing. At Lakkidi, there is a place called Killikurissimangalam, the birth-place of Kerala's famous poet, Kunjan Nambiar, the father of the traditional solo dance, Ottan Thullal.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸² Menon, C.A., *Op. cit.*, p.27.

¹⁸³ Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, p.32.

¹⁸⁴ Singh, K.S., *Op. cit.*, p.94.

¹⁸⁵ Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, p.32.

¹⁸⁶ Vilanilam, J.V., Antony Palackal and Sunny Luke, Vol. I, *Op. cit.*, p.500.

¹⁸⁷ Kavalam Narayana Panikkar, *Op. cit.*, p.150.

¹⁸⁸ Kapila Vatsyayan, *Op. cit.*, p. 258.

¹⁸⁹ Priyan C Oomman, *Tourism Directory of Kerala*, Global Communications (P) Ltd., Thiruvananthapuram, 1995, p.72.

The dance was created about 150 years ago, by Kunchan Nambiar, who was piqued at his exclusion from a performance at the princely court. To avenge himself, he began to perform to the common people in public streets. His biting but spontaneous humour and the effective criticism of the Brahmanical priests and the feudal aristocracy, won him a place in the hearts of the people and his art became more and more popular.

The word 'Thullal' means 'caper' or leap or jump about playfully'. This art form entered in the 18th Century.¹⁹⁰ Thullal is classified into three various types-Ottan, Seethankan and Parayan, based on the difference in costume, dance and also the metre and rhyme of the Thullal songs. Of all Thullal dances, the Ottanthullal is the most common. The costume is peculiar and impressive.¹⁹¹ Symbols and gestures, used in Kathakali, find a place in Ottan Thullal also. A single actor plays a lot of parts and the acting is accompanied by his own singing, unlike in Kathakali. Nevertheless, in Ottan Thullal, a musician stands behind and gives the lead to the actor and another plays on the 'maddalam' or elongated drum and a third keeps the rhythm with a pair of cymbals. The fame of Ottan Thullal, as a dance form, has continued undiminished to this day.¹⁹²

Thullal needs no particular stage or curtain. It is generally presented by three persons. Four types of acting like Angika, Vachika, Aharya and Satvika, are well blended in the Thullal. But at the same time, the form is attractive to common man. The dance form, as a whole, represents vigour and amusement. Thullal has the folk touch. The merit of the Thullal rests more on its oral narration than on its other aspects. It instructs the audience as it delights them. This art form is masculine and realistic. For the Thullal, minimum costumes are used by the artists. Even the palm leaf decorations are used as ornaments by the Parayan Thullal performers. Ottan Thullal is the most refined form of the Thullal, both visually and in literature. The poems are composed in Dravidian metres. For the stage presentation, the dancer and two musicians take part. The song depicts many Puranic stories, taken from the Mahabharatha, Bhagavata and Ramayana. In recent times, modern poets have chosen contemporary subjects too. The distinctive

¹⁹⁰ Vilanilam, J.V., Antony Palackal and Sunny Luke, Vol. I, *Op. cit.*, pp.244-245.

¹⁹¹ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.73.

¹⁹² Priyan C Oomman, *Tourism Directory of Kerala*, Global Communications (P) Ltd., Thiruvananthapuram, 1995, p.72.

characteristics of Thullal poetry is the satire. The poem has the colour of contemporary life and the poet criticises everybody without distinction of class or creed. Thullal dance attracts large audience, who enjoy it thoroughly and the poems can stir the public mind effortlessly.¹⁹³

Padayani

Padayani is the traditional performing art form of Kerala, prevalent in central Travancore. The term, Padayani and Padeni, are interchangeable. The word Padayani had been evolved by combining two dissimilar terms, pata and ani, both having more than one meaning. The traditional martial culture of Kerala has influenced Padayani but it is fundamentally a ritual and not a martial art. Padayani receives social validity and relevance, with situations slightly changing here or there.¹⁹⁴ The ritualistic dance, Padayani, literally means an array of common people.¹⁹⁵ Padayani fulfills the aspirations of a people, their value systems and sense of beauty. It represents the social ethos and solidarity. It is formed out of a classless and casteless society, that is fundamentally tribal in nature.¹⁹⁶

It is a traditional folk-dance form of Kerala. It is one of the most colourful and spectacular ritual arts, associated with the festivals of certain temples in Kerala. It is a marvelous combination of music, dance, painting and satire. The Padayani is conducted during the months of February, March and April.¹⁹⁷ Padayani is performed in Alappuzha and Pathanamthitta Districts of Kerala.¹⁹⁸ The Padayani is dedicated to goddess Bhadrakali.¹⁹⁹ Padayani is a proletarian art form of Kerala. It is also symbolic of the victory of light over darkness and the good over the evil.²⁰⁰ It is the folk art form, which

¹⁹³ *Folk India*, Vol. 11, Sundeep Prakashan, New Delhi, 2004, pp. 219-221.

¹⁹⁴ Raja Varier, *The Legacy of Padayani*, Information and Public Relations Department, Government of Kerala, 2005, p.9.

¹⁹⁵ Kavalam Narayana Panikkar, *Op. cit.*, p.34.

¹⁹⁶ Raja Varier, *Op. cit.*, p.64.

¹⁹⁷ Vilanilam, J.V., Antony Palackal and Sunny Luke, Vol. II, *Op. cit.*, p.1306.

¹⁹⁸ Raja Varier, *Op. cit.*, p.35.

¹⁹⁹ Sudhakar Rao, M., Raghvendra Reddy, V., *Op. cit.*, p.256.

²⁰⁰ Raja Varier, *Op. cit.*, p.19.

is presented during Padayani Utsavam. It is celebrated with Kolamkettu and Kolam Thullal, a kind of ritual dance performed by carrying the effigies. The chief kolams displayed are of Shiva, Bhima, Ravana, elephants etc and the songs, which are sung to the accompaniment of Kolamkettu or Kolam Thullal, are also known as Padayani.²⁰¹

There is no clear evidence to pinpoint the time and place of the origin of Padayani. It is mentioned in the works of Kunchan Nambiar. There are some studies that consider the origin of it as having some connection with a journey some Meemamsaka like Bhattacharya and Banabhatta, took to seek help from the Perumal for defeating the Buddhists. There are definitely some influence of the martial arts, still discernible in Padayani and the preparation for the performance is called Kachakettu, which is a term taken from Kalari. There is the worship of God Surya, who is responsible for the growth of grains, fruits, etc. and the timing of the Padayani festival falls in the interim period after the harvest and before the next sowing. The burst of fireworks, the noise pandemonium of the percussion instruments and song and dance performances, keep away wild animals from fields.²⁰²

Padayani has survived the rapid urbanization also. The Kolams, which dance into a frenzy in the stage of Padayani, are the main characters of the highly theatrical story. The most significant of the kolams, usually presented in a Padayani presentation, are Bhairavi (kali), Kalan (god of death), Yakshi (fairy), Pakshi (bird) etc. The Kolams are traditionally painted by the members of the Ganaka community and the dance is performed usually by Nairs, who, in olden times, had regular physical exercises and elaborate training on the model of Kalaripayattu but without the use of weapons. Padayani may be clearly seen in the more well-known theatrical dance drama of Kerala, viz, Kathakali.²⁰³

The Padayani songs are the continuation of a great oral tradition. Neera Shankhu, Perumpara, Chammatti, Veena, Perundalan, Chinnam kooal, Veeku chenda, Idakka, Udukku, Thudi, Para, Thavil, Thappu, Kaimani, Madhalam, Chenda, Kombu, Vilu,

²⁰¹ *Folk India*, Vol. 11, Sundeep Prakashan, New Delhi, 2004, p.214.

²⁰² Raja Varier, *Op. cit.*, p.19-20.

²⁰³ Vilanilam, J.V., Antony Palackal and Sunny Luke, Vol. I, *Op. cit.*, p.499.

Kumbhm and Kinnam are the musical instruments used for Padayani.²⁰⁴ Bhagavathy songs, Thottam songs, songs for exorcism and devotional songs for Kali, are used in Padayani. Padayani songs are rhythmic, expressive and they are tuned according to the physical movement of the characters.²⁰⁵

Pakkanarattam

This art form is performed, to send away evil spirits, from homes. It is supposed that Pakkanar and his wife visit houses. They dance in tune with the beat of dissimilar drums. Commonly, this art form is performed during Onam festival.²⁰⁶

Palappetti Koothu

The Palappetti Sri Bhagavati Temple, near Guruvayur, is one of the nineteen major Bhagavati shrines in Kerala. The Palappetti “Koothu” (some sort of pantomime with dolls) is famous. Dolls, made of leather, are portrayed in various roles of mythological stories and made to dance to the accompaniment of instrumental and vocal music. Legend has it that once some devotees from northern Kerala, who were on their way back after participating in Kodungallore Bharni festival, worshipped Palappetti Bhagavathi and as it was too late in the night, they decided to spend the rest of the night in the temple premises itself, singing stories from Sri Ramavathara upto Ravanavadha from “Kamba Ramayana”. When the songs were over, they heard a divine voice from inside the temple.²⁰⁷

Palliyar Kali

The Palliyar Kali is performed by the Palliyars of Kottayam, who trace their origins to Valli, the spouse of Lord Subramaniam.

Pampu Thullal (Snake Dance, Sarpam Thullal)

Serpents form, according to the folklore, a group of highly benevolent and divine spirits. There exist in Kerala a few Namboothiri families, which wield control the serpent gods and goddesses. ‘Pampummekkavu’, which means the supreme grove of serpents, is

²⁰⁴ Raja Varier, *Op. cit.*, p.52.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.56.

²⁰⁶ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.48.

²⁰⁷ Ronald M. Bernier, *Op. cit.*, p.33.

the name of the most well-known Namboothiri family in Kerala, which holds the rights to the serpent gods and goddesses. 'Pampinthullal' is conducted for propitiating the serpent gods. This ceremony takes place during the Malayalam months of Kanni, Thullam, Kumbam and Medam. The Ayilyam on which falls the birthday of serpents is held auspicious for the serpent dance ceremony.²⁰⁸ The serpent dance, called Pampu Thullal in the South and Nagakanni in the North, are connected with the snake worshiping cult called Naga Cult.

The Dravidian communities developed their own forms of folk-dancing to mark festive and ritualistic occasions, like Onakkali and snake dance formed part of worship.²⁰⁹ Numerous ancient family houses in Kerala, have special snake shrines, called Kavuvu. Sarpamthullal is generally performed in the courtyard of houses, having snake shrines. This is a votive contribution for family wealth and happiness. It is performed by members of a community called Pulluvar.²¹⁰

The Pulluvan is the leader priest, who officiates at the ceremony and sings about the serpents, to the accompaniment of instruments played by males and females. The ceremony starts in the morning, with songs to glorify Ganapathy at the place where the kalam is to be made. By noon, the pictures of serpents would have been completed on the floor. The musical score is executed in front of the kalam, where the 'Piniyal' is seated. There may be more than one 'Piniyal', known as 'Kappum Kanyavum' (one boy and one girl) sitting, each with a petal of the areca flower, as recipients of the blessings of the serpents. They get possessed and dance with the flower in hand, to the accompaniment of the music of the 'Pulluvas', the tempo of which goes in arithmetical progression, reaching the maximum pace. The 'Piniyal' enters the kalam and rubs the figure of the nagas, with the flower bunch. The faith in serpents is thus rooted deep in the rituals of Kerala from time immemorial and continues to influence the Malayali's mind, albeit only to a much lesser extent.²¹¹

²⁰⁸ Kavalam Narayana Panikkar, *Op. cit.*, pp.52-55.

²⁰⁹ Singh, K.S., *Op. cit.*, p.65.

²¹⁰ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.27.

²¹¹ Kavalam Narayana Panikkar, *Op. cit.*, pp.52-55.

This is a magical ritual, practised by the Pulluva caste, for the prosperity of the family. Apart from songs in praise of snakes, particular offerings are given to the snake deities. It was practised all over Kerala in olden times. This ritual is known as Sarppakalam or Pampinhullal. A Sarppakalam is drawn in the courtyard of the house which is decorated properly. Nagayakshi and Ashtanagakettu are some of the figures in the Kalams.²¹²

Panan Kali

The Panan Kali is performed by the Panans. At the end of the ritual dances, there are simpler social dances and some are of a mimetic character.²¹³

Paniyarkali

The Paniyars belong to one of the most powerful Adivasi sects of Wayanad. It is believed that their tribal seat is at Ippimala in North Wayanad. Paniyarkali is an ancient art form, conducted by the Paniyars at the time of marriage and other festive occasions. It is a dance form, where the body is moved in a peculiar manner. Thudi (a small drum) and Kuzhal (carian) are the chief musical instruments. It is performed by both men and women, by singing and dancing in accordance with the song and rhythm. Simplicity of Adivasi life and the valour of the rhythm of forest can be seen in this art.

Paniyars are one more set of tribals, inhabiting the hilly forests of Waynad District. Their dance is highly masculine and only men contribute. Here the dancers, numbering about eight or ten, stand in a circle, with hands linked together. They move around with rhythmic flexions of the body and while moving, stamp the ground in faultless rhythm to the loud beat of the primitive percussion instruments called Karu, Para, Udukku etc. As the dance gathers momentum, the circle is quickly expanded and contracted and the dancers utter peculiar cries which gradually run up to a high pitch.²¹⁴

²¹² *Essays on the Cultural Formation of Kerala, Kerala State Gazetteer*, Vol IV, part II, Government of Kerala, 1999, p.53.

²¹³ Kapila Vatsyayan, *Op. cit.*, p.256.

²¹⁴ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.13.

Panarkali

Panarkali is a mirthful dance of the Panar of Malabar area. Here two characters, a male and a female, called Thekkan and Thekkathy respectively, stage a mock quarrel as in Kurathiyattam. But the songs, which are in the nature of questions and answers between husband and wife, show the suspending husband's inquisitive queries and the clever replies of an intelligent wife. A jester, who criticises and makes fun of the customs and manners of the members of the upper strata of society, also participates in the dance at a later stage. In a few places, instead of Panars, the Kakkalans perform this dance and hence it is known as Kakkariissi Natakam.²¹⁵

Parayan Kali

The Parayan Kali is a Bhagavati cult dance of the Parayans. Each village has a Bhagavati shrine where these dances are performed. Many of these culminate in a trance dance.²¹⁶

Parayanthira

This is a ritual dance, performed before Bhagavathi temple, during festivals. The concept is that the devil-aide of goddess Bhadrakali, performs this dance after the death of Darika. The costumes of the Thira are colourful and fascinating. The big headgears, projecting eyes, high-ridged noses, protruding tongues, flowing black hair behind the pleated skirts and overcoats, all make the dancers completely supernatural. For every dancer, there is a girdle of bells. Anklets are also tied to the legs. A variety of dances are executed to the rhythm set by dissimilar folk drums. The dance is usually performed by Parayas.²¹⁷

Parichamuttukali

Parichamuttukali is a martial dance form of the Travancore Christians and it is believed to have evolved while Kalaripayattu was at its peak in Kerala. The performers, dressed like warriors and with fake swords and shields in their hands, move in a circle.

²¹⁵ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.43.

²¹⁶ Kapila Vatsyayan, *Op. cit.*, p. 256.

²¹⁷ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.44.

The dance is like a mock fight. A song about Thomas the Apostle is sung throughout the performance.²¹⁸ It is performed by the Thandan community. It is usually conducted during marriage occasions. Now its performance is rarely seen. Only gymnasts can perform this. Now it is presented in school, college youth festivals as competitive items, irrespective of caste, creed and religion. Dance is performed in daytime. Bear hunting stories form the subject matter of songs. With this form of entertainment, the people of forest give a great message to the next generation on how to save themselves from wild beasts. According to them, this art is meant for the safety and protection from the attack of the wild animals. It also provides an opportunity to the younger generations to know more about this moribund art.²¹⁹

Martial songs are sung throughout the performance and the cymbals chime in perfect unions with the steps and the striking of swords against the shields. In the Malabar region, this dance is performed by Thiyyas and in the Travancore region, by Christians.²²⁰

Parichamuttukali

Parichamuttukali (weastern style) is seen only in Alappuzha and Kochi (Ernakulam) Districts. It evolved out of Portuguese military tradition. It is based on folk songs and original church festival songs (Palliperunal Pattu). There is the role of a Portuguese soldier, wearing a pant and coat. Two swords are used. Of the two swords, one is made of wood and the other is out of metal. Similarly, there is a wooden shield and a metal shield. Compared to other Parichamuttukali styles, this art has slow steps. The Asan (teacher), standing at the centre of the stage, sings songs according to the rhythm of jalara. Only twelve artists are accommodated there in this Parichamuttukali. They represent the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ. This art form has evolved out of the Christian military gym and existed in the 16th Century.²²¹

²¹⁸ Singh, K.S., *Op. cit.*, p.94.

²¹⁹ Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, p.75.

²²⁰ Vilanilam, J.V., Antony Palackal and Sunny Luke, Vol. I, *Op. cit.*, p.499.

²²¹ Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, p.106.

Parunthattam

Triumph of the good over the evil is the concept behind Parunthattam. The subject of the dance revolves around great heroes of ancient times. The art form is prevalent in the Central Travancore.²²²

Parvallikali

It is a varied dance of the aboriginals of the dense forest of Travancore area, in which both men and women participate. They dance holding arms together, linked in a back lock posture. The dance develops into a variety of agreeable pattern, in which men and women change their positions with amazing speed. The entire group of dancers sing songs and move in swift rhythm in a circle. The connected arms swing to the rhythm in a fascinating wavelike movement.²²³

Patakam

Patakam is another dance form, similar to the Koothu in its technical content. But here the dance element is almost given up and the narration is done through alternating prose and song sequences. A new literary form called 'Champu', which accommodated more of Malayalam idiom and vocabulary, is used as the text for Patakam. Literally meaning dissertation, Patakam is performed by Nambiyars outside the temple precincts. The dancer has a red head-dress and on the wrist red silk. There are garlands on the neck and sandal paste lines across the forehead.²²⁴

Pentharumo Nritham

Pentharumo Nritham graceful group dance of women, performed only very rarely today. The girls link their arms and form two lines. In front of each other, they move forward and backwards to the rhythm of songs. The head and body sway in perfect unison, with the dissimilar steps executed. The ease of movement and supple elegance, furnish an experience of rare beauty and enjoyment. The song is in the form of questions

²²² *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.46.

²²³ *Ibid.*, p.14.

²²⁴ Vilanilam, J.V., Antony Palackal and Sunny Luke, Vol. I, *Op. cit.*, p.495.

and answers, in which one party requests the other to give them a girl. The request is promptly refused, but is repeated along with offers of a variety of rewards and turned down time and again. In the finish, a mock war is executed between the two groups.²²⁵

Poorakali

Poorakali is a temple festival in the northern areas of Kerala, held in the Bhagavathy temples, extending for nine days in the Malayalam month of Meenam. Poorakali combines in itself the rich elements of dance, music, martial art, literature, poetry and philosophy. In a particular section in its repertoire, known as ‘Andum Pullum’, it is described how Shiva and Parvathy, in the guise of Pallan and Pallathy, approach Indra, the celestial ruler, and procure the land and seeds for cultivation on earth. It also portrays how Indra magnanimously showers rain for a rich crop. All this speak of the extensive images of fertility²²⁶.

It is presumed that in the beginning, Poorakkali was performed by women. But at present, there is preponderance of men. When the Poorakkali is performed as Maruthukali (competitive play), Panikar, who is the Asan of the Poorakkali, is invited and entrusted with the supervision of the play and thus begins the Poorakkali. In the play ground, the Panikar has to recite the auspicious hymn and to conduct betel gift. It is followed by the ‘pandal pravesam’ or ‘pandal entry’. This is the part in which Panikar and his disciples enter the ground, wearing kachila and chura. In Poorakkali, various scenes can be seen such as plays with singing Pooramala, Ganapathippattu or hymns of Ganapathi, Saraswathi and Sree Krishna. Stories of Ramayana and Mahabharatha, Ankham, Patachayal, Parunthattam, Saivakkoothu, Sakthikoothu, Yogi, Andu, Pallu etc. In the concluding stage of Poorakkali, with the singing of Polichupattu, Poorakkali is drawing to a close comes to a close.²²⁷

A folk dance, prevalent among the Thiyyas of Malabar, is usually performed in Bhagavathy temples. Poorakali requires specially trained and highly experienced dancers, quite thorough with all the techniques and feats of Kalarippayattu, a system of physical

²²⁵ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.38.

²²⁶ Kavalam Narayana Panikkar, *Op. cit.*, p.52.

²²⁷ Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, p.34.

exercise formerly in vogue in Kerala. Standing around the traditional lamp, the performers dance in to different songs and rhythm, each phase being called a Niram.²²⁸

Poorakali is a traditional dance ritual, performed by men during the nine day Pooram festival in Bhagavathi temples, across Northern Kerala. The Poorakali dance itself is performed by a troop of young men, decked in lion costumes, around a huge multitiered, lit lamp, also known as a “Nilavilakku”. The dancers commonly observe a month of abstinence and undergo strenuous practice before the performance. The majority of the songs are hymns from the Ramayana or the Bhagavata. The performers come from different castes of society like Maniyani, Thiyyan, Mukkuvan, Meyon, Chaliyan, Asari, Moosari, Thattan, Kollan etc. The basis of Poorakali essentially is the recall of memories of Vasanthapooja, performed by inmates of different worlds like heaven, earth etc. Poorakali spreads knowledge and entertainment. The show bewitches the hearts of viewers, with melodious songs and befitting body movements. Payyanur, Vengara, Trikaripur and Aravath are among the places in Kerala, which are famous for this art form. Panikkars are well known names in the world of Poorakali and they have contributed much to the continued existence and expansion of this art form.²²⁹ Men participate in this dance, which is performed in a circle.²³⁰

Poykkalukali Kali

Also known as Marakkalattam, this is a dance on stils, performed in connection with temple festivals. Theme songs are about the fight of the goddesses, Durga on stilts, against the Asuras who attacked her in the guise of snakes, scorpions etc. The rhythm is kept by percussion instruments.²³¹

Pulayarkali

Pulayas were mainly agricultural labourers. Pulayarkali is their group dance, noted for its rhythm, vigour and beauty. Women also participate in this dance which is generally performed after the harvest season. The songs are based on topics relating to

²²⁸ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, pp.31-32.

²²⁹ Sudhakar Rao, M. and Raghvendra Reddy, V., *Op. cit.*, pp.263-264.

²³⁰ Shobana Gupta, *Dances of India*, Har-Anand Publications, New Delhi, 2002, p.62.

²³¹ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.25.

incidents in mythologies like Mahabharatha and Ramayana. Instruments like Para, Veekan Chenda, Karu etc., are used.²³² This Harijan dance is known as Pulayarkali.²³³

Pulikali (Kaduvakali)

Pulikali, also known as Kaduvakali, is a street performance done primarily in Thrissur, on the afternoon of the fourth Onam day. Groups and tableaux are presented by youngsters dressed as tigers, usually by covering themselves with yellow paint, streaked with red and black markings. The tiger dance is energetically accompanied by the loud beating of cymbals and chendas.²³⁴

It is a popular amusement art of Kerala. It is a dance of togetherness. This joyful dance is performed, without discrimination between castes. This folk art is performed by the members of respective locality, in a coherent manner. This animal dressed dance reminds the hunting of the ancient aboriginal tribes, which provides recreation and a means of livelihood. The artists wear caps and tail, smearing the colours that resemble the colours of tigers and leopards, on the body, perform Pulikali or Kaduvakali. Some members of the dance group also wear the figure of hunters. Chief instrument is the chenda or drum. Some other instruments are also used during this period. According to the rhythm of chenda (drum), the artists perform dance as they like. It needs good flexibility of the body to perform well. Usually, male members are the performers. Different kinds of gymnastic performances can be seen in this art. In the early days, Pulikali was a part and parcel of Islamic ritual traditions. Prior to the practice of the Panchayethukal of the Shia sect of Islamic religion, there was the customary performance of Pulikali. Later on, it was banned by the Islamic community as it was against their religion. The Pulikali is closely associated with the Onam celebrations. It has got wide popularity in Trissur.

In central Kerala, the art is called Pulikali and in the southern districts, the art is called Kaduvakali. In Pulikali, according to the nature of leopard, the artists smear their body with yellow colour, with black spots. In Kaduvakali, instead of black spots, black lines and marks are drawn and the hunting and the way in which the leopard is attacked,

²³² *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.30.

²³³ Shobana Gupta, *Op. cit.*, p.62.

²³⁴ Menon, C.A., *Op. cit.*, p.31.

are obviously expressed through the performance. The artists, who performed in the first Onam, may not be there in the fourth onam. In Trissur, there is a grand celebration of Pulikali, on the fifth day of Onam celebrations.²³⁵ This dance, also known as Pulikali, is performed throughout the Moharram season. Dancers realistically made up as tigers with appropriate costumes go about from house to house, dancing energetically to the loud beating of instruments like Udukku, Thakil, etc.²³⁶

Ramanattam

Legends have it that as an offshoot of the rivalry between the Zamorin of Calicut and the Raja of Kottarakara, the latter created the Ramanattam, the dance-drama based on the life of Rama. It was also for serial enactment on successive days. Here facial abhinaya and hand gestures were given more significance. The songs were in Malayalam. In course of time, the masks were discarded and a wealthier variety in facial make-up was developed. It was Ramanattam that was developed into Kathakali.²³⁷

A prince of Kottarakara, Thampuran, who lived in the later part of the 17th and the early part of the 18th Century, composed regular Attakathas in Malayalam, on the story of the Ramayana for staging a new art form invented by him, viz., the Ramanattam.²³⁸ It used many of the techniques of Krishnanattam, but also introduced some changes. Ramanattam too was performed over eight nights. The custom of using singers was retained as it now became more than ever impossible for the dancers to do their own singing. This was because the Chenda was added to give more volume, vigour and excitement to the drama, which meant that the dancers had to save all their breath and energy for the increased tempo and agility of the dance movements. Ramanattam gained tremendous popularity and very soon all the episodes of the Ramayana had been dramatized. Plays were written with themes from other sacred works such as the Mahabharatha, Shiva Purana and the Bhagavad Purana.²³⁹

²³⁵ Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, pp.81-82.

²³⁶ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.48.

²³⁷ Vilanilam, J.V., Antony Palackal and Sunny Luke, Vol. I, *Op. cit.*, p.495.

²³⁸ Sreedhara Menon, A., *A Survey of Kerala History*, D C Books, Kottayam, 1967, pp.326-327.

²³⁹ Reginald Massey, *Op. cit.*, pp.112-113.

Thalamkali (Thalikakali)

Thalamkali is an art form in which gymnastic skill is valorised. It is common in Malappuram District, and it is performed by the Thiyas. It is a popular performance during the celebrations of Thalickettu (a ritual in which young girls, who attain puberty, go through a mock marriage). The dancers stand in a circle and sing to a rhythm. After that, they take plates in both palms and go through intricate twisting and turning. Dancers also demonstrate a variety of types of gestures. They perfectly time the dance, with the rhythm of the Brahmani songs, sung by the performer.²⁴⁰

Thappumelakali

This is a group dance of Parayas of Malappuram District, in which the dancers strike rhythm on a small drum (thappu). It is an energetic and powerful dance and it gradually rises to a crescendo of rhythmic fervour, with the dancers swirling round their feet in steps, and hands striking perfect time.²⁴¹

Theyyam

A Theyyam art is an art, which recalls the one-time glory of the northern region of Malabar. It has its unique characteristics in its performance and presentation. Theyyam has its uniqueness in its mythical concept and ritualistic ideologies. Almost all the performers have godly appearance in their make-up and the attam (dance) is a sufficient example of their influence in the very culture of the area. All these concepts are rooted deep into the social life, especially the “lower class” life of Malabar. It consists of the totality of its presentation, the make-up, the head dress, chest writing, dresses worn and the like. The make-up and costumes are so remarkable that it makes the Theyyam a unique one in its presentation.²⁴²

The word, Theyyam, is derived from Daivam.²⁴³ The ‘Theyyattam’ denotes the dance of god and the term ‘Theyyam’ is a corrupt form of ‘Daivam’ or God. People

²⁴⁰ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.56.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.48.

²⁴² Marar, T.V.G., *Theyyam Arts in Malabar*, Samayam Publications, Kannur, pp. 60-62.

²⁴³ Priyan C Oomman, *Op. cit.*, p.76.

conduct Theyyam, based on their own faith and confidence. The cult of Theyyam is primitive in origin. The Aryan concepts and mythologies had influenced theyyam considerably and a large number of Brahmanical gods and goddesses had infiltrated into this indigenous tradition. Even at present, they exist along with innumerable folk gods and goddesses.²⁴⁴

The Theyyam performers belong to Mannan, Velan and Malayan communities. Titles like 'Peruvannam', 'Perumalayan' were bestowed on the best among them. In the above shrines, these spirits continue to be propitiated through generations. They belong to different categories based on their appearance and character, like Shaivite, Vaishnavite, serpent, human variety, etc. Some of them are wild and terrific, thirsting for animal blood. Alcohol is the offering to be made to some of them.²⁴⁵

The people, representing different Theyyam, have a special way of decorating the upper part of their body, including head and face. Normally, the differences in the head dress and paintings of each "Theyyam" are conspicuous and dissimilar. All make-ups are done only with the materials available in nature. Each theyyam has a different size of mudi or head-dress. This aspect is the exclusive art form of Theyyam. For all Theyyam the head dress is a very significant part. Mudiyettu and Mudiyrakkal are the two important ceremonies of all the Theyyam performance, whereby crowning of the head dress and lifting of the crown are done ceremoniously, with devotional respect.²⁴⁶

Historical Background

According to the legendary Keralolpathi, Parasurama sanctioned the festivals like Kaliyattam, Puravela and Deivattam or Theyyattam to the people of Kerala. He assigned the responsibility of Theyyam dance to the indigenous communities like Panan, Malayar, Velan and Vannan. These traditions give details of how the indigenous cults like Theyyam were incorporated and metamorphosed under the religious supremacy of the Brahmanism. It is performed by people of the lower castes such as Sudras, Vaishyas etc.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁴ Marar, T.V.G., *Op. cit.*, pp.11,12.

²⁴⁵ Kavalam Narayana Panikkar, *Op. cit.*, pp.26-32.

²⁴⁶ Marar, T.V.G., *Op. cit.*, pp.60-62.

²⁴⁷ Sudhakar Rao, M. and Raghvendra Reddy, V., *Op. cit.*, pp.257-259.

The first Brahmanical settlements like Payyannur and Perimchellur (Thaliparamba) in Kolathunadu, where the Brahmanical religion was spread widely through the institution of temples, mainly influenced the common folk religion, based on Theyyam and other tribal cults. Velan, one of the communities of Theyyam dancers, is referred to in the Tamil Sangam literature.²⁴⁸ Ezhimalai, described in the Sangam literature and ruled by Udayan Venman Nannan, is situated in Kolathunad, near Payyannur. For that reason, the Tamil Sangam culture, with variations, still continues in this region. The dance of Velan had taken new forms and developed into the present day cult of Theyyam, over a period of 1500 years.

Devakkooth

Devakkooth is exceptional in that the role of Theyyam is taken by a woman. It is in the Thekkumbad Koolom Temple in Mattool Panchayat, in Kannur District that Devakkoothu is performed on all alternative years. Devakkoothu is conducted, along with the Kaliyattam festival, which starts from the first day of Dhanu (December) up to eight days. The folk tale of Devakkoothu is entirely different from that of other Theyyakkolams. Usually, Devakkoothu is performed by the woman of Malaya community. Hence it is also called Malayikkoothu. There are two heirs to this art. The first heir is Vatakkankooran and second is Moothacherukkunnan.

In the Devakkooth, two women appear on the stage by holding a screen. Dance performance is done, facing towards the eastern part of the temple. Devakkolam has a slowly rhythmic dance. Prayers to Ganapathi and legend-based eulogistic songs are sung. But as in the case of other Theyyams, there is no 'uriyattu kelpikkal' (utterance) in Devakkoothu. There is no thottampattu in it. There is no special pooja in the temples, for according status. As it is not on par with other Theyyams, the practice of kooticheral (collecting together) is absent in it. After the conclusion of all Theyyams, there is the practice of wiping out the facial sketch. But in Devakkoothu, the crescent mark on the forehead is not wiped out. Even after the Koothu, the performer continues the vows in the Aniyara. It is after her home coming, crescent mark is wiped out and the vow is broken by taking fish. As the figure came from the other side of the river, she is taken there along with certain rites.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁸ Kurup, K.K.N., *Op. cit.*, p.12.

²⁴⁹ Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, pp.15-16.

Theyyannam

It is a ritualistic art, performed by the Pulaya and Kurava communities. Theyyannam is popular in Mavelikara, Pandalam and some other places in Alappuzha District. When man turned to farming, his liking and respect for agriculture began to increase. Though he cultivates various crops, he has a partiality for paddy cultivation. This is the theme of Theyyannam. Eight men plough up an area and plant seedlings. At this stage, the women folk enter, with breakfast for their men folk. In the ploughed up area, the women start replanting the seedlings. With women on one side and men on the other side, the initial work of agriculture is completed. Harvest follows and then the threshing. Thus all stages of paddy cultivation are represented. Harmonium, Daka and Tabala are employed as musical accompaniments.²⁵⁰

Theyyattam

In the erstwhile North Malabar area of which the modern Cannanore District forms the major part, this type of dance is called Theyyattam or Theyyam Thullal. The current view is that the ancient cult of hero worship gave rise to Theyyattam. A feature of Theyyattam is the use of resplendent costumes and gorgeous colours by the impersonators. It is a common annual celebration in all the major Bhagavathi temples in North Kerala. An important costume, used in Theyyattam, is the towering head gear or mudi used by the dancer (Valiathampuratti).

Theyyattam is an exceptionally vigorous dance, in which the dancer marches forward and backward every now and then, to the dismay of the surging crowd of devotees. He dances on one leg at times, raising the right and left leg alternatively. A number of long drums, Kuzhals, cymbals create the proper atmosphere for the dance. With the dancer occupying the central position, the whole audience moves along in a procession to the accompaniment of fireworks and talappoli, in which young maidens are uniformly clad in white. A large number of devotees bearing kalasams on their head also accompany the pageant. After the three circumambulations, the mudi is placed on a peedham and proclaims his appreciation of the ceremonies and the devotees later presenting themselves before him.²⁵¹

²⁵⁰ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.56.

²⁵¹ Sreedhara Menon, A., *Cultural Heritage of Kerala, Op. cit.*, pp. 114-115.

Thidambu Dance (Idol Carrying Dance)

The Thidambu Dance (idol carrying dance) is a ritual art presentation, among higher caste temple in north Kerala. It is the Brahmins who perform the dance by carrying the idols (Thitambu) on their heads. It is conducted on festive occasions like the installation day in temples. The idols of the gods and goddesses are adorned with flowers, indica (thumba) and crataeva relegiosa (koovalam) for Siva, red flowers for Bhagavathis, and white flowers for Vishnu.²⁵² This is wide spread in Kannur District and in some parts of Kozhikode District, in North Kerala.²⁵³

The Thidambu Dance is performed as Akrura had the chance of getting the darsan of the Lord dancing in mirth. The costume of the performer is a peculiar type of folding upper garment (sepular). He used to wear the turban. The chief ornaments are such as ear ornament (Kundalam), necklace and anklet. The idol or Thitambu is placed on the turban. Chenda, Cymbal, Kuzhal, Sankhu, Valanthala, Sruthi are the instruments for this art form. The Marars handle the instruments. The dance has to be performed in accordance with the rhythms like Thakilati, Champata and Panchari. The dance performance is to commence with the oracle. Trembling the whole body, this dance needs long and rigorous training and can be performed only by one who can exercise perfect control over his body. The dance has been organised, by carrying one to five idols or thidambus.²⁵⁴

The word “Thidambu” suggests the straight manifestation of the deity. Idols being carried on top of elephants during festivals and replicas beings held on shoulders while dancing to the rhythm of percussion instruments, are a common sight in Kerala. But dancing with the replicas on the heads is a unique characteristic in the north. Some Brahmins, who had migrated to the North of Kerala, at the time of Chirakkal Raja, may have introduced this dance from Karnataka, where a form of “Nritham” called “Darsana Bali” was in vogue. Replicas are made of bamboo with which a beautiful border, with complicated designs, is created. The spiritual dancer, clad in the customary style, after

²⁵² Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, pp.36-37.

²⁵³ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.53.

²⁵⁴ Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, p.37.

performing the common rituals, comes out of the sanctorum, and standing under the flag, holds up the replica, weighing about ten kg to thirty kg to his head and starts the divine dance.

Thidambu Nritham dance begins with “Kotti Urayikkal” (drumming to make the dancer possessed). The drumming, in different Talams, accompanied by scintillating music, coaxes the performer to dance to each rhythm, creating a holy atmosphere. Each circumambulation is regulated by a different Talam. Thidambu Nritham has undergone some changes in accordance with the tendency of the times. The changes are in the Talams, though the basic one remains unchanged. The novelty adds to the novelty and variety of this art.²⁵⁵

Thirayattam

Thirayattam is performed, as part of festive celebrations, in Kavus, in Central Malabar. The word, Thira, means luster and the Thirayattam dance is said to cast radiance by virtue of his gorgeous array, made all the more dazzling by the blaze of torches, made of clusters of dried coconut fronds. The performers, through appropriate costumes, assume the roles of the divinities they hold in veneration. Thirayattam is the hereditary profession of Vannan community.²⁵⁶

Thiruvathirakali

During the Thiruvathirakali dance, on the Thiruvathira festival of Kerala, women stay awake all night in order to greet the arrival of Lord Siva. The graceful dance takes place around a Nilavilakku. It marks a celebration of marital fidelity but Thiruvathirakali dance is now quite popular through all seasons.²⁵⁷ Kaikottikali, also known as Thiruvathirakali, is a popular graceful and symmetric group dance of Kerala women, which is performed during festival seasons like Thiruvathira and Onam. It is a easy and gentle dance, with Lasya element predominating. One performer sings the first line of a song while the rest repeat it in chorus by clapping hands in unison. The formation moves are clockwise as well as anti-clockwise. At every step, the dancers move either side, in order to clap.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁵ Vilanilam, J.V., Antony Palackal and Sunny Luke, Vol. I, *Op. cit.*, pp.248-249.

²⁵⁶ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.51.

²⁵⁷ Sudhakar Rao, M. and Raghvendra Reddy, V., *Op. cit.*, pp. 260-261.

²⁵⁸ Kapila Vatsyayan, *Op. cit.*, p.258.

It is a Kerala festival, meant mainly for Nayar women and this dance features performers, wearing the mundu (loincloth) and neriyathu (an elongated upper garment with golden zari fringes), with their hair worn in a jasmine-adorned bun and pushed slightly to the right. The women initially form a circle around an oil lamp. The dance starts with a song called Thiruvathira Pattu.²⁵⁹ It is one of the few forms of group dance, done exclusively by and for woman. Known to have been in existence for centuries, it has a semi-religious aura about it, often being done as a ritual to ensure a happy and harmonious married life.²⁶⁰

Thiruvathirakali occupies a pivotal position as an amusement art. It is a beautiful dance art form, symbolizing the unity of women. Thiruvathira is conducted in relation to Onam festival. A group of women, with their good clothes, take bath from a nearby tank or river. Kuli (bath), thudi (clap) and kali (play) are the chief practices of Thiruvathirakali. Besides, Gangayunarthal, Kulamthudikkal etc. are also conducted. In the midst of bathing and in the pandal also, Thiruvathira is performed both night and day. When the Athira festival starts, a floor lamp is lighted with wicks, standing around with slow rhythmic steps and movements sing the devotional song and thus the eulogistic songs. Kaikottippattu, Kummattippattu, Thalolampattu, Oonjhalpattu, Gangyunarthapattu, Parvathi Swayamvaram etc. are used to sing in Thiruvathirakali. In association with Thiruvathirakali there are several practices like Ganapathi Chuvatu, Thalolam Pattu, Pathirapoochootal, Vattikondu Varika, Kummiyati etc.²⁶¹

Thiruvathirakali is performed around a Nilavilakku or a floral decoration, particularly during onam. The dancers go in a circular mode, accompanied by rhythmic clapping of the hands, to the tune of the Thiruvathira pattu. One of the performers sings the primary line of of Thiruvathira pattu while the rest repeat it in chorus. The songs are frequently narrations from the folk epics. Thiruvathirakali has become a common dance form for all seasons and also a popular stage item.

²⁵⁹ Singh, K.S., *Op. cit.*, p.93.

²⁶⁰ Menon, C.A., *Op. cit.*, p.31.

²⁶¹ Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, pp.86-87.

Thiruvathirakali is regarded as an extremely elegant dance form as the Lasya or the beauty element predominates.²⁶² It is similar to the Kummi folk dance and the Kolattam, is dance, with sticks in hand. As the Kaikottikali dancers move with the grace of the swaying palms, the impulse of their delicate movements merges almost with the orderly steps of a classical style. The dancers move in a circle, weaving gestures, which signify the emergence of shoots and leaves, crowned by claps of the hands, to the tune of well known melodies.²⁶³

Thiyattam

Tiyattam is an ancient form of ritual, performed by the professional exorcist. The dancer dresses up as the devil (bhoota) and performs a dance until the victim is avenged and the evil spirit leaves the body of the man who plays the part.²⁶⁴ In each of the three phases of the dance, the chief dancer brings himself to a point when he falls into a trance. It is usually performed to cure physical and mental disease. The structure of the Therayattam is more complex than the Thiyattam. In the Therayattam or Tiyyatiyattam, the various forms of Kali Bhagavati are presented by the dancers in a variety of costume make-up and masks. Some characters wear masks while others paint their faces in elaborate designs.

The festival of Therayattam commences with the appearance of different characters, such as Golikan, Gurikammar, Koodangurical Bhairavan, Karnavar, Kurumba, Puttan and Kutti Chaitan etc. Each actor personifies a different demon-god and he appears dressed magnificently before the Kavu or village shrine and goes around it and he then goes to the nearest watershed. Here, he recites some mantras. Finally, he returns to the sacrificial altar which is constructed before the shrine and here he accepts the offering for the deity. Fowls are often offered to the deity. The dancer acts as a medium. The dance is full of ritual and symbolic significance and it is a test of endurance. The costuming, masks and make-up are fantastic, and elaborate. It is this make-up, which has formed the basis of the colour-symbolism in Kathakali make-up.²⁶⁵

²⁶² Vilanilam, J.V., Antony Palackal, Sunny Luke, Vol. II, *Op. cit.*, p.1306.

²⁶³ Mulk Raj Anand, *The Dancing Foot*, Publications Division, Delhi, 1957, p.15.

²⁶⁴ Kapila Vatsyayan, *Op. cit.*, p.255.

²⁶⁵ Kapila Vatsyayan, *Op. cit.*, p.256.

Thiyyattu

Thiyyattu, along with Ayyappan Thiyyattu and Kali Thiyyattu, is one of the three forms of Thiyyattu prevalent in Kerala. This one, like Kali Thiyyattu, is performed as a devotional offering to the goddess Bhadrakali. Although it is certainly very ancient, little is known about its origins. The common feature of all Thiyyattu is that it is performed in front of an oil lamp, placed before a kalam, a sanctified powder drawing of the deity done under a pandal or awning. The artist generally sits on a pedham, a heavy stool used only for ritual performances. Rituals start at dusk, with the costumed performer dancing to the music of various procession instruments.²⁶⁶

Thiyyattu is performed in central Travancore, especially in and around Alleppey, Chengannur and Kuttamperur. It is the exclusive preserve of Namboodiri Brahmins and a community known as Thiyyattu Unnis. It is usually performed in Brahmin homes and other upper caste families.²⁶⁷ Facing a traditional oil-lit lamp, the dancer in the costume and make up of Bhagavathy, with particular head gears, pleated skirts and painted face, dances before the Kolam, to the accompaniment of devotional songs. A little sized Chenda, Thimila and Kaimani are the instruments used. Sometimes, Thiyyattu is performed before the god Ayyappan, by a set of people known as Nampis. In the Ayyappan Thiyyattu, the makeup and costume of the dancer is that of Nandikeswara.²⁶⁸

Tukkam

Tukkam, which is performed as a vow in Bhagavati temples, in the erstwhile Travancore, is a typical folk art which is ritualistic in character.²⁶⁹ In Bhadrakali temples, Garudan Thookam (eagle weight) and Mayilpeelithookam (peacock tail weight) are also conducted. There are different types of Thookams (weights). Among them, most important are Pillathookam (infant weight) meant for child birth, Ammakkanakk Thookam or Amma Thookam, conducted by the Vathi of Mutippura, Pandarathookam,

²⁶⁶ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.38.

²⁶⁷ Menon, C.A., *Op. cit.*, p.33.

²⁶⁸ Shovana Narayan, *Op. cit.*, p.243.

²⁶⁹ Priyan C Oomman, *Tourism Directory of Kerala*, Global Communications (P) Ltd, Thiruvananthapuram, 1995, *Op. cit.*, p.77

conducted by the Thandan community on behalf of temple, Nercha Thookam or offering weight for marriage and for the removal of diseases and exorcising and finally, the Villozhivuthookam, for concluding ritual ceremonies. Chenda (drum), Madhalam and Elathalam (cymbal) are the chief musical instruments used in this art form.²⁷⁰

This ritual ceased to exist in this form in the 1980s. Sometimes, a performer wears a costume and makeup designed to resemble Garuda, the mythical eagle-king and mount of Lord Vishnu and he is then known as Garudan Thookam.²⁷¹ It attracts a number of spectators. It means ‘hook swinging’ and it is an act of self mortification, indulged in by a person in fulfillment of vows made by him to goddess Kali, in order to propitiate her.²⁷² The temple in which the Thookams are conducted, is called Thookkavukal (Weighing Temples). Thookam is conducted for two days, by taking seven day fast. On the first day of conducting Thookam, there is the practice of Villurappikkal (installation of bow) by the carpenter, with a rope tied on it and hanging him. Following this, on the next day, each Thookam (weighing) is conducted continuously.²⁷³

The performer has to undergo strict penance for forty one days. During this period, he abstains from animal food, intoxicants and worldly pleasures and visits the temple every morning after bath. His body is also massaged with oil, every morning, in order to make it ready for the hook. For the actual performance, a sort of car is made which will rest on two axles with four wheels. The hook, which is inserted on the back of the performer, is connected to a ring attached to the beam by means of a powerful rope.²⁷⁴

After worshipping the god, he gets over a one wheeled platform over which is the pillar-like utholakam. There is a hook at one end of the utholakam to which is attached the backside skin of the dancer. This end is then raised up. Hooked to the utholakam, the dancer is thus hung in the air almost horizontally in which posture he executes certain

²⁷⁰ Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, pp.88-89.

²⁷¹ Menon, C.A., *Kerala Festival Message-2007, Op. cit.*, p.33.

²⁷² Sreedhara Menon, A., *Cultural Heritage of Kerala, Op. cit.*, p.115.

²⁷³ Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, pp.88.

²⁷⁴ Sreedhara Menon, A., *Op. cit.*, p.115.

physical feats and dance movements and the whole platform is taken around the temple god thrice.²⁷⁵

Vattakkali

Another form of musical recital is called Vattakkali, which is staged by a group of girls around a lamp; making rhythmic movements. It is especially sung on the occasion of marriage ceremonies.²⁷⁶ It is an extremely energetic ring-dance of the Vettuvar community, in which both men and women participate. Twelve different types of steps are executed. The grace of the intricate footwork is heightened by the tinkling of anklets and bells and also by the rhythmic clapping of hands. The whirling movements become faster as the dancing reaches the climax. The dance is also called Chuvadukali.²⁷⁷

Velakali

Velakali is a martial dance form, to commemorate the victory of good over evil. The dance is performed nowadays during the procession of the deity at temple festivals. The performers, armed with fake swords and sham shields, dance with vigour in front of the deity. The traditional panchavadya provides the accompaniment.²⁷⁸ Velakali is one of the most spectacular and extremely vigorous dances, performed in Kerala. Originating among the Nairs, the traditional warriors of Kerala, this dance is now presented by other Hindu sects also. Velakali is a ritual art form, presented in a temple courtyard or in the precincts of the temple tank, or recently in the boats during the processions in the backwaters or during boat-races. The performers, numbering fifty or more, are dressed up like traditional soldiers with colourful shields and shining swords. They dance with war-like steps, in a line to the accompaniment of martial music with vigour and force. Thavil, Suddha maddalam, Elathalam, Horns and Trumpets are the instruments used for background effects. This artform was patronised by kings of Chembakssery rulers of Ambalappuzha in Alleppey District, and it is now being performed mainly in Alleppey District.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁵ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.33.

²⁷⁶ Vilanilam, J.V., Antony Palackal and Sunny Luke, Vol. I, *Op. cit.*, p.401.

²⁷⁷ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.24.

²⁷⁸ Singh, K.S., *Op. cit.*, p.94.

²⁷⁹ Menon, C.A., *Op. cit.*, p.35.

Velakali commemorates the Kurukshethra war between the Pandavas and Kauravas. The artists, robed in soldiers dress, perform the art by putting on a kacha (loins cloth) on waist and armllet, necklace and a sandal mark on the forehead and by drawing eyelashes. He would also wear a turban made of cloth. Performance is done by holding a Paricha (shield) and a churika (poniard) in hand. Rural folk also would be there, to hold flags, along with the dance performers. Musical instruments like Madhalam, Ilathalam (cymbal), Kurumkuzhal (pipe), Thappu and Kombu are used in the Velakali. It is performed in association with the temple festivals. Even at present, the Velakali is performed in Ambalappuzha Sreekrishna Temple, Harippad Subramanya Temple and Thiruvananthapuram Sree Padmanabha Temple etc.²⁸⁰

‘Velakali’, a dance evolved from the martial culture, is performed in some temples as a spectacle during festivals, in which the whole village participates. This dance originated in Ambalapuzha, which gained significance in the 16th century A.D. ruled by a Brahmin Raja having the family designation “Devanarayana”. Majority of these Rajas lived in the 18th Century and had they encouraged many poets and artists in royal court, including Kunchan Nambiar, the founder of Thullal and its rich literature. During the 17th-18th Centuries, the coastal principality of Ambalapuzha, with Purakkad as its port, had commercial contacts with the Portuguese and the Dutch. Many wars were fought in the sea, with these powers, by the Raja and his predecessors.

Velakali was conceived as a reminiscence of these armed conflicts, a re-enactment of those wars waged on the sea and on land. The dance form assumed the shape of an earlier art called ‘Naikkan Thullal’, which prevailed in the Ambalapuzha Temple. The platform, used for staging the said dance, existed in the temple premises until recently. There is a reference to Naikkan’s entry on the tattu, or platform, in Kunchan Nambiar’s Thullal. No one in the current generation knows about the details of this art. This Naikkan family, engaged in this art, originally belonged to south Kannada and they were brought down to Ambalapuzha at the instance of the Raja. This family was rehabilitated near the temple at Ambalapuzha and they were provided for by the royal exchequer. From this acrobatic dance, evolved Velakali in course of time and the original form became extinct. Velakali

²⁸⁰ Philomina, K.V., *Op. cit.*, pp.107-108.

is fundamentally a group dance, held in the open air, as an exhibition of the martial feats in front of the Raja of Ambalapuzha, who wanted to see how his soldiers had waged the battles. This show is also meant to be witnessed by the deity of the temple, which is taken out in procession to the courtyard of the temple, on a caparisoned elephant.²⁸¹

Velichappadu Thullal

It is a ritual dance, combined with Bhadrakalipattu, Ayyappanpattu and Vetaykorumakanpattu. Since it deals with trances and evil spirits, only a few are permitted to perform it. Generally, the members of the Kallathukuruppanmar enjoy this right. In the first stage of the dance, there is Kalamezhuthu, in which the form of god is drawn on the floor, with the aid of five types of coloured powders. Then prayer songs are sung to the accompaniment of Nanthuni, a musical instrument. Later the dancer, known as Velichappadu, enters, with red flowery clothes, red scarf, a girdle of bells at the waist, and a sword in hand. Slowly, he gets into a trance and executes an energetic movement, which is technically called Idumkoorum Chavittal²⁸².

Yathrakali (Sanghakali)

It is one of the traditional art forms of Kerala and it is known by different names, in different places viz. Sanghakali, Sastrakali, Chathirakali, Pannakali etc because its structure has undergone a great deal of change, at different places, at different times. It is commonly believed that Yathrakali originated in the Shiva temple and its exponents are Chathira Brahmins and Namboodiris. The theme of the drama is usually of social satire but it contains several ritualistic formalities. Each group, out of eighteen groups of participants, follows its own methods and may not exactly resemble another in all its details.

Generally, the play commences with an invocation by the group song to Ganapathi or the goddess for the successful performance of the play. The songs may either be in prose or verse and some of which have not been transcribed. This is followed by 'Keli', which is preceded by a sumptuous feast. This is followed by 'Arkkal', which is a specific type of shouting in acclamation. The groups, after shouting in acclamation, take

²⁸¹ Kavalam Narayana Panikkar, *Op. cit.*, pp.143-144.

²⁸² *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, p.28.

their seats around a large copper cauldron. They sing in rapture about the goddess, along with the beatings on cauldron with Thavis, big coconut shell handles. Two or three of them become possessed by the thrill of the rhythm and the dance movement. After the evening prayer, Nalu Padam, the most important item of the ceremony, starts. Four people move in a circle around a traditional oil lamp, singing hymns about their favourite deities.²⁸³

The well-known folk drama, Yatrakali, which is now at the verge of extinction, got its form designed by the Brahmins while living in exile, plotting against the king. The dramatic form, noted for its pungent social criticism and satire on the contemporary life, gives us a vivid picture of the social life in feudal Kerala. Yatrakali performance is taken up by all sections of Hindus like Nayars, Konkan and Brahmins etc.²⁸⁴

Basically a socio-religious dance, which was a favourite and pastime of Namboothiris, it was performed as a votive offering. The origin of Sanghakali may be traced to the many gymnasia (known as Kalaris) in ancient Kerala, where physical exercises and military training, with special stress on physical feats and swordmanship, were given. Periodic celebrations were held in these kalaris, with special displays of ability in weapons and the techniques of combat. With the permeation and stabilization of Aryan culture in the land, the Namboothiri Brahmins, the Aryan immigrants, entered these gymnasia and their participation and influence gave the celebrations a religious turn.

A number of people, with red scarfs on the head and red cloth on the wrist, get together and the performance starts with procession to the gymnasium to the accompaniment of the reverberation of the Chenda, Maddalam, Elathalam and Gong. The dance has a number of stages of ritual worship, recital of prayer songs, pure dance, comic interludes etc and they involve the Kottichakampookal, Kottiyarkal, Pana, Velichappadu, Nalupadam, Slokam, Neetuvayana, Kandappanpurappad, Poli kaimalothika Samvadam, Paradesipurappad etc. The final stage of the dance is called

²⁸³ *Folk India- A Comprehensive Study of Indian Folk Music and Culture*, Vol XI, Sundeep Prakashan, New Delhi, 2004, pp.218-219.

²⁸⁴ Kavalam Narayana Panikkar, *Op. cit.*, pp.19-20.

Kudameduppu. It is martial in nature and actually in the form of combat exercise, displaying the skill in swordsmanship and the mastery of techniques in the use of other weapons.²⁸⁵

Yakshagana

Yakshagana is one of the most important folk theatres of Karnataka and Kasrgod, which has brought fame to this region. Every village in Kasrgod Taluk is familiar with this art and there are a good number of artistes. Yakshagana was originally known by various names like Bayalata (in Kannada, Bayalata means play played in open air). The stories of Yakshagana were drawn from the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Bhagavatha and from other mythological episodes.²⁸⁶ Parthi Subba, who was born at Kumbla in Kasargod Taluk of Kerala, is hailed as the Father of the Yakshagana.²⁸⁷ The word, Yakshagana means ‘Gana of Yaksha’.

Yakshagana combines song, dialogue and dance. The Yakshagana mode of dance is called Yaksha-andolana, the swinging dance of the Yakshas. This dance style is said to be the style that the god Indra danced in his boyhood. Yakshagana actors are accomplished dancers and their movements have vigour and grace and they are light footed. Dance performed by actors, impersonating women characters, is very feeble and obviously made up.²⁸⁸

Yakshagana Bombeyata

This form of puppetry is based on Yakshagana, a folk art form Karnataka, employing song, elaborate costume and movement to relate classic stories of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Performance involves rod as well as string puppets and it can be seen in Kasargod.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁵ *Dances of Kerala*, Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Kerala, 2004, pp.22.

²⁸⁶ Menon, C.A., *Op. cit.*, p.37.

²⁸⁷ Sreedhara Menon, A., *Op. cit.*, p.112.

²⁸⁸ Ragini Devi, *Dance Dialects of India*, Motilal Banarsidas Publishers Private. Limited., Delhi, 1972, pp.133,134.

²⁸⁹ Teresa Cannon, Peter Davis, *Kerala*, Lonely Planet Publications, Australia, 2000, p.37.

This Chapter narrated the dance forms of Kerala. The story of Kerala is mirrored in the evolution of its art and culture. Kerala offers a cultural kaleidoscope in its literature, language, music, dance, theatre and rituals and the pluralist basis of Kerala's cultural mosaic is reflected in its artforms. Numerous art forms have existed in Kerala. Many of them have emerged in relation to agriculture and farming. The cultural phase lies in relation to the common folk life. The next chapter is focuses on the types of dance forms in Palghat District.