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Deprivation of Keralite Folk Performing Arts in Kanyakumari District

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Abstract

A survey of folk performing arts throughout Kanyakumari district shows that, out of 74 folk performing arts in Kerala, *Margam Kali, Kuthiyattam, Koodiyaattam, Chakyarkoothu, Pulavapattu, Thiruvathirakali, Thiyattu, Kaakkassi Kali, Chavittunatakam* and *Avaiyarkali* had been performed here and there in Kalkulam and Vilavancode taluks in the early 1950AD, but at present *Kuthiyattam, Thiruvathirakali* and *Thiyattu* are performed only in a few temples on a particular festival day while *Koodiyaattam, Chakyarkoothu, Kaakkarissi Kali, Chavittunatakam* and *Avaiyarkali* are found to be alive only in cultural festivals. This paper highlights the deprivation of keralite folk performing arts in Kanyakumari district.

Keywords: Folk performing arts, Keralite arts, Malayalees, Kanyakumari district, festivals, deprivation, entertainment.

Introduction

Kanyakumari district was once popularly known as South Travancore in the Travancore Princely State under the sovereigns of the Maharaja of Travancore who ruled the country with Malayalam as the official language and Malayalees, especially Nairs and Vellalas who had dominated the other communities, as the chief administrators in every department. Therefore, folk performing arts which were performed by Nairs and Vellalas had been well-appreciated for hundreds of years of ancient era, but this situation became quite different when the Europeans entered the Travancore State and interfered with administration of the country because of the raison d'être that the Travancore Royal family was always hand -in-hand with the British Residents, in Madras, who were rather lenient towards oppressed communities who are not even allowed to stand before the high caste Hindus like Nairs and Vellalas, and were taking attempts to introduce English Education and Christianity among the oppressed people, which certainly created much violations and riots between caste Hindus and oppressed castes that has to be settled by the effort of the Government. After a series of continuous struggles between the Travancore Tamil National Congress (TTNC) and Malayalees, finally the Government of India had passed the State Reorganization Act of 1956 on 1st March, according to which Malabar of Madras Presidency was merged with Travancore and renamed as Kerala state while Agasteeswaram, Thovalai, Kalkulam and Vilavancode taluks of Travancore were together named as Kanyakumari district and merged with the Madras state on the 1st November 1956.[1] All sorts of caste and language struggles in this land came to end on that day of the birth of Kanyakumari district. Owing to the serious struggles between different castes and awakening of people through Christianity and English Education, there were many changes, in the culture, that lead to deprivation of many traditional Keralite folk performing arts in this district. Being a part of Tamilnadu, this district is now bound by Tirunelveli district on the North and East sides, the Gulf of Mannar on the South-east side, the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea on the South and South-west sides, and by Trivandrum district of Kerala on the West and North-west sides. It has a total area of 1672.4 square kilometers, which is, for administrative convenience, divided into four taluks namely Agasteeswaram, Thovalai, Kalkulam and Vilavancode taluks, of which Agasteeswaram and Thovalai taluks are often jointly known as Nanchilnad. There is a total inhabitants of 2984356 people

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(1500936 males and 1471914 females) belonging to the main religions such as Hindus (859307), Christians (745406), Muslims (7360), Jains (76), Buddhists (26), Sikhs (31) and other religions (827).[2] This paper presents a detailed picture of ancient folk performing arts that have been executed and different measures taken for the promotion of those arts in this district.

Keralite Folk Performing Arts

Kerala - a unique land that has endowed with longstanding tradition and language for its own- is predominant with *Malayalees* who are zealous devotees of the Lord Guruvayrappan and Goddess Bhagavathi-for whose recital actually folk performing arts are being executed- and thousands of converted Christians and Muslims, whose culture does not allow the recital of folk arts. The Kerala Saheethya Academy, Trivandrum, states that in the early 1102 A.D to 1600 A.D., there are about 74 well-known folk performing arts in Kerala[3]:*1) Kaikotti Kazhi, 2) Mudiyettu, 3) Kudam Thullal, 4) Sangha Kazhi, 5) Jeevatha, 6) Brahminipattu, 7) Dappu Kazhi, 8) Kolkazhi, 9) Vattakazhi, 10) Poikkalu Kazhi, 11) Kakkarissi Kazhi, 12) Kothamoori, 13) Panna, 14) Poothanum Thiraum, 15) Sarpam Thullal, 16) Vellichappaadu Thullal, 17) Kuravar Kazhi, 18) Ayyan Villakku, 19) Velakazhi, 20) Purattu, 21) Kampadavu kazhi, 22) Pulayar Kazhi, 23) Kalayum Kudaum, 24) Chattankali, 25) Poorakali, 26) Kavadiyottam, 27) Padrakali Thullal, 28) Thookkam, 29) Pooppada, 30) Avaiyarkali, 31) Ethamuthukali, 32) Padayani, 33) Parichamuttukali, 34) Bhootham Thullal, 35) Pentharumo Nirutham, 36) Thiyattu, 37) Theyyam, 38) Panarkali, 39) Thumbi Thullal, 40) Parayanthira, 41) Kanniyarkali, 42) Vituchoriyal, 43) Parunthaattam, 44) Kurathiyaattom, 45) Kummi, 46) Villadichampattu, 47) Thappumelakali, 48) Kollam thullal, 49) Kaduvakali, 50) Pakkanarottam, 51) Oppana, 52) Arjuna Nirutham, 53) Margam Kali, 54) Kuttiyottam, 55) Kummatti, 56) Cherummar Kali, 57) Thirayattom, 58) Aadi Vedan, 59) Kuthirakali, 60) Kottamoriyattom, 61) Kozhiporukali, 62) Thidambu Nirutham, 63) Tholppavakoothu, 64) Garudan Thilkam, 65) Cholikkali, 66) Charadu Pinni Kali, 67) Thalamkali, 68) Ammaanaatam, 69) Theyannam, 70) Thekkanum Thekkathiyum, 71) Nagachuthu, 72) Maiyattam, 73) Pallukali* and *74) Malayan Kettu*.

Folklore researchers suggest that the lion's share of these performing arts might have executed in the district as well in the ancient and Medieval era when this area was colonized by long-established *Malayalees* following actual Keralite culture in which small deities had been reverenced with their own folk arts,[4] and that this tradition had changed slightly when Nadars and some other caste people following typical Tamil culture were brought to this area from the adjacent Pandya Kingdom in the 16th century, chiefly from Madurai so as to elevate the population of Travancore and to convert the forest areas into cultivable areas for increasing the food production, as a consequence of which there was a great amalgamation of typical Keralite and Tamil cultures that led to gradual downfall of Keralite folk performing arts and implementation of Tamilian folk performing arts in this area.[5] A survey of folk performing arts in the last few years reveals that, out of 74 folk performing arts in Kerala, *Margam Kali, Kuthiyattam, Koodiyaattam, Chakyarkoothu, Pulavapattu, Thiruvathirakali, Teyaattu, Kaakkassi Kali, Chavittunatakam* and *Avaiyarkali* have been performed here and there in some places of Kanyakumari district, but the others have hardly been seen elsewhere in this district.

1. Margam Kali

In the early 52 A.D, when the Syrian Apostle St. Thomas first came to this land, he pre-supposed that the settlement of Christianity itself in Travancore was not so easy unless certain ritual performances were connected to Christianity for ensuring the sustenance of new believers who actually did not know about Jesus Christ and to attract new people

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towards Christianity.[6] Having realized this circumstance and necessity of people's tradition to attract people to embrace Christianity, he insisted the believers to perform their wedding ceremony in an innovative way to divulge their identity in the society by performing convincing songs that narrated their faith, dictums and idioms in a didactic fashion while dancing, which gradually became the marriage custom of Christians in the later years. At some point in nuptials function, the Guru came ahead and lighted the time-honoured bronze lamp called *Nilavizhakku*[7] in the centre, whereupon each recitalist came frontward to lay a hand on the flame of the lamp and touched their chest and forehead with enthusiasm as a way to adore the holy flame of the lamp. Henceforth, twelve performers - men in *Mundu* on waist and *Thuvarthu* on head and women with *Mundu* on waist and *Thuvarthu* on chest - with reverence, touched their hands to the feet of the Guru and got together into a circle and disposed themselves sequentially by clapping their hands while dancing and singing a song called *Margamkali Pattu* that narrates the life and work of St. Thomas in Travancore.[8] It is believed that *Margam kali* had originated from the mixed version of *Thiruvathiraikali* and the martial art form called *Parichamuthu*.

The works of Perter Maffe (1558 A.D) and Coria Amandar (1564 A.D) account on the popularity of *Margam Kali* that divulges the adventures of St. Thomas in Travancore during the early days of Portuguese influx,[8] from which it is presumed that albeit this fine art had arisen long back, it could be fashionable among the Christians during wedding ceremonies in 1500 A.D. However, in the early 1800s this fine art was not much in practice even if it existed hither and thither in some places of South Travancore because of the insight among the Christian converts that stand-in alongside the Biblical thoughts would be a way of recital against Christianity since such performances are found nowhere in the holy Bible, and in the first quarter of 19th century it was nowhere to be found in this land.[9] In the current scenario, *Margam Kali* is acted upon only by Christians in Colachel of Kanyakumari district during the youth and cultural festivals, but instead of wearing traditional *Mundu* the performers are in archangel costumes and instead of singing Biblical songs they recite cinematic songs to capture the eyes of spectators, which is yet again not in favour of the early versions of *Margam kali* specially designed for teaching the doctrines of Christianity to the native people who had inadequate intelligentsia to understand the words in the Bible.

2. Kuthiyattam

Another Keralite folk performing art that has been at the verge of deprivation in this district is *Kuthiyattam,* which seems to be a ritualistic depiction of human sacrifice to the Goddess *Shakthi,*[10] being performed as an offering to the Goddess *Kali* in Kuzhithurai, *Bagavathi* in Karungal and Kollancode, and to the Goddess *Mutharamman* in a temple at Thikkilaanvilai village in Kanyakumari district. The Holy Scripture *Devi Mahatmiyam* states that the Goddess Kali, who had sprung forth from the forehead of *Durga,* was in infuriated mood even after fight with and defeated the *Asura,* and hence the devotees had poured their blood to her feet in order to cool down her temper, which is the motivation behind the performance of *Kuthiyattam*. Young boys of 8-14 years, who are interested to perform *Kuthiyattam*, proceed a penance life by eating vegetarian foods, fruits, vegetables and milk alone during fast and staying aloof in a secluded room all the time for a period 48 days prior to the *Bharanni* star on which the temple festival has to be conducted. On the concluding day, in the early morning of *Bharanni* day, the boys are gathering before the portrait of deity, whereupon one priest pierces the boy's body with a silver wire, with which a lemon fruit was tied around the neck and a knife whose distal end is fixed with an areca nut is kept high over his head, and every boy is bejeweled with the jewelry of different kinds obtained from people of nearby houses and flower garlands. In the twelve

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noon, all the boys are taken procession to the temple by dancing in their own way with the musical accompaniment of beating drums (*Miruthangam*), pipe instrument (*Nathaswaram*) and cymbals, the beauty of which is enhanced by holding a multihued parasol over the head. All through the way of procession to the temple, water of tender coconut is poured on their body by devotees so as to purify the performers before reaching there. In continuation of this event, the boys stand at a position facing the idol of the deity and dance vigorously until someone gets excited to perform *Samiyaattam* and go round the temple 3 or 5 times. Finally, the priest drags the silver wire from their body whereby some drops of blood are allowed to ooze out from their body; whereupon the priest applies the holy ash called *Viboothi* on the wound. Nonetheless, in Kollancode and Kuzhithurai temples, this art has been performed by devotees as well as by *Kuthiyattam* performers from Kerala.[11]

It is certain that veneration of *Kali* and *Bhagavathi* dates back to the 6th or 7th century, so that *Kuthiyattam* might have originated at least in the 7th century but there has hardly been any documented proof for this assumption. From the available literatures, it is however clear that in the temples at Kollancode and Kuzhithurai, *Kuthiyattam* has been conducted right from the early half of 18th century AD[12] owing to the sway of *Malayalees* in the Kalkulam and Vilavancode taluks whereas in Thikkilaanvilai temple it has been performed from 1950 onwards because of the people's trust on this religious ritual in the worship of *Mutharamman*.[13] For the reason that *Kuthiyattam* is purely a temple performing art in Kanyakumari district, no one school or training centre has been started to teach and promote it in this district.

3. Koodiyaattam

Yet other Keralite folk performing art wiped down from this district in the beginning of 20th century is *Koodiyattam*, which had been customarily executed by *Chakyar* and *Nangaiyar* jointly for over 2000 years in some temples of Kerala[14] and because of its antiquity the *Sangeeth Natak Academy* of India (New Delhi) has started to teach this fine art to students from 1970 onwards[15] and the UNESCO has taken essential steps to promote it at the international level in 2000 AD with the intention of preserving India's cultural heritage[16]. In actual fact, *Chakyars* and *Nangaiyars* were sons and daughters of *Devashisis* who gave birth to them during their conjugal life with Namoodiris who were high caste Hindus performing regular puja in temples, suggesting that *Koodiyaattam* had been performed in temples until 1929[17] when *Devadhasi system* was legally banned by a royal proclamation in Travancore. It is presumed that the King Cheraman Perumal had developed *Koodiyattam* in his Palace at Kodungallur based on *Bharathanatya Sasthram* written by Rhisi Bharathan. In Kanyakumari district *Koodiyaattam* had been performed in Siva temples at Aramanai (in Kalkulam taluk) and Maruthankode and Munchirai (in Vilavancode taluk) during festivals from in 1925s but it was altogether abandoned after that Royal Proclamation. Its specialized forms such as *Krishan attam* and *Nangaiyarkoothu* have been performed at the *Aathikesawar* temple in Thiruvattar every week when this district remained with Travancore. In Kerala, Painkulam Ramachakyar took the first bold step in 1957 to bring *Koodiyaattam* beyond the walls of temple for public entertainment and after that the *Kerala Kalamandalam* has accepted it as an ancient folk performing art that has to be preserved and opened a *Koodiyaattam* department to train students[18]. But, in this district, even if some people are interested to view the performance, there has hardly been any institution to teach *Koodiyaattam* to beginners.

Koodiyaattam, which was the popular *Aariyakoothu* mentioned in Tamil literatures, is a dramatized dance based on Sanskrit theatre to propitiate the deities in temples and it was popular in the Chera Kingdom. Further, inscription of *Thiruvaduthirai* temple states

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that the people of Kanthaloor village had donated some rice and land to Sreekandan for performing *Aariyakoothu* in that temple during the festival in *Purattaasi* month of Tamil calendar,[19] suggesting that *Koodiyaattam* was once very popular fine art in Tamilnadu also. In this dance, costumes of dancers seem to be similar to those of *Kathakali* performers, which of course displayed the portraits of the heroes like *Arjuna, Ravanna, Rama, Sita, Soorpanagai, Vaali, Krishna, Kali, Amman, Yama, Asuras* and others described in Puranas, but the plate on the face is in white colour and there is a small white globe on the nose. By their concert, the artists articulate the scene of play to viewers by means of suitable facial expressions, *abinayas* and *bhavanaas* without much dialogue, which is most often associated with musical accompaniment of *mizhavu*, *kuzhithalam*, *etkka*, *kurumkuzhal* and *sangu*, the traditional musical instruments.[20]

4. Chakyarkoothu

The epic *Silappathikaaram* that reveals early traditions of the Chera, Chola and Pandya dynasties, makes known from its *Arankettu kaathai* that *Chakyarkoothu* was performed in Tamil speaking regions from 200 A.D onwards and some inscriptions clearly depict that it was once recited throughout the Tamil speaking land (Tamilagam) in 12th century AD, so that the study area could not be an exception for that. A stone inscription in *Kamarasavalli-Kodaka Eeswarar* temple at *Udayarpalayam* states that *Vikiramacholan* donated land to *Chakai Marayan* who was a teacher in *Chakyarkoothu*, for performing *Chakyarkoothu* during *Thiruvathirai* festivals in the months of *Karthigai, Vaikaasi* and *Markazhi* in Tamil calendar.[21] *Chakyarkoothu* was performed by *Chakyars* in *Aathikesava Perumal* temple at *Thiruvattar* until 1800 A.D and then it gradually faded away. Now that *Chakyarkoothu* is nowhere to be found in Kanyakumari district because of the more influence of *Tamilians* who think of that it is a Keralite folk performing art, but it seems to be a popular theatre art in Kerala even today.

Chakyar who has fluency in Sanskrit and Malayalam wears traditional costumes -a *Vetti* on waist, streaks white lines on his body and face with holy ash, *Kumkum* at several places along with the ash, a golden crown on his head, a red cloth on its top, bold black line around the eyes and a large moustache on his face - and performs his dance in temple theatre called *Koothambalam* to the accompaniment of *mizhavu* and cymbals.[22] He narrates a story from puranas or epics while making the dance steps and at the same time he mimics, wits and innuendoes to attract the listeners in front of the theatre. Most often he says creaking jokes to entertain the audiences in the middle of the story, though the main theme of the story- *Birth of Rama* or *Marriage to Sita* or *Visit of Hanuman to Srilanka* or *War of Rama with Vaali* or *Krishna Leela* or *Draupathi Suyamwaram* or *War with Dhuriyothanan* or *Arjuna's Pasupathaasthiram* - is taken from puranas. Folk artists who are well versed in this fine art say that *Chakyarkoothu* belongs to *Thaandavam* type of dance in India.[22]

5. Pulavupattu

Among the Namboodris there has been a longstanding tradition to worship the Serpent God- Naga Devatha- by reciting *Pulavupattu* in their Serpent Grooves or other temples having serpent cults to propitiate the deity during festivals and almost every family has its own anthill to represent as the idol of the serpent deity, whose adoration is exclusively under the family. Since *Pulavupattu* is mainly concerned with serpent worship of Namboodiris, it is presumed that it might have originated instantaneously after the ascendancy of Brahmins in Travancore region nearly in 10th century A.D,[23] and that people of other communities do not participate in this ritual, as a consequence of which this traditional fine art gradually got neglected from the folk culture of Kanyakumari district. In

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the veneration, people pledge the serpent god deity's floor drawing on a raised platform decorated with flower carpets and leaves as thanksgiving if they were cured from dreadful diseases or a problem was solved.[24] The people of *Pulluva* community who serve as priests and singers sing the devotional song called *Pulluva Pattu* to the enthusiastic rhythms rising from the *Pulluva Kudam* (a pot with strings attached), the whining of *Naga Veena* (one-stringed instrument like a violin) and the clanging of *kuzhi thalam* (cymbals).[25] Musing on the events of that day, *pullavas* begin the poetic text that invokes the serpent God and then sing about the elucidation of the benefits of serpent God worship and the perils of neglecting them. The male priest plays the lute and sings two lines and his female counterpart repeats the same lines while playing the stretched strings that are tied to the mouth of a large vessel, popularly known as '*Pulluva Kudam*'. This musical concert is continued for about half an hour and brought to a halt when the *pullavas* come to the end of a particular verse. When the song is going on, the chief priest saunters around the stage many times, sits at particular point in front of the floor drawing and goes through the rite of pooja in a formal manner. He throws rice grains, Thulsi leaves and water to the floor drawing by chanting mantras for about fifteen minutes.[26] This long tradition has not been seen anywhere in this district except among Namboodiris, around Padmanabapuram, who have simply adored the Serpent God with simple pooja before the deity by offering pongal, plantain fruits, betel leaves, areca nuts and others.

6. Thiruvathira Kali

Nairs who live in joint families commemorate *Thiruvathrai* day of ***Thai*** month (17th Dec-14th Jan) of Tamil calendar in the form of ritual ceremony called *Thiruvathirai* festival in memory of the day on which the Lord Siva engaged Goddess *Parvathi* to make his consort.[27] On that day, in the early morning, women decorate the floor with beautiful rangoli and flower carpets before houses and temples; thereupon in the evening they wear green or red blouse and white Sari with golden boarder, and the hair is knotted above the head and adorned with jasmine. Afterward they perform a ritual dance around the temple as well as in the street by making fast rhythmic jumps and body movements accompanied with some solo music to simple devotional songs about Siva; this is the trendy *Thiruvathiraikali* of Kerala. In Kanyakumari district, it has been performed by *Nairs* and *Ezhavas* in Sasthakavu, Colachel, Arumanai, Melpuram, Maruthankode and Methukummal. In Travancore, Nairs had conquered high priority during the period of Marthanda Varma (1729-1758 A.D)[28], so that it is presumed that *Thiruvathiraikali* might be popular in Colachel and other areas where Nairs settled in the early part of 18th century A.D. In temples of the lord Siva at Sasthakavu, there is a tradition of performing *Thiruvathiraikali* every year, but in recent years artists from other areas are invited to perform before audience, not by the folks.

7. Thiyaattu

Thiyaattu- one of the famous rituals in Bhagavathi temples of Kottayam, Pathanam and Thirupannithurai of Kerala during festivals - has been performed in the Bhagavathi temple at Mandaikaadu in Kanyakumari district for several centuries. Since the Bhagavathi temple of Mandaikaadu was established in the second half of 7th century A.D, it is assumed that *Thiyaattu* might have conducted in that temple at least in the 8th century.[29] On the 8th day of annual festival in the *Maasi* month (March) of Tamil calendar, *Thiyaattu* is performed in the evening in a specially decorated shed called *Pandal*, whose floor is bedecked with colourful floor drawings called *Kolam* and a *Nilavizhaku* in the centre. Having drawn a rangoli floor drawing of *Kazhi* in front of the temple using tinted powders and flowers, a grand *pooja* is performed to the floor drawing by offering a dump of boiled rice, plantain fruits, sugarcane, coconuts, incense sticks, vegetables, different fruit items,

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betel and areca nuts. Some priests pray holy songs about *Kazhi* who had defeated *Tharagasura*, a demon King, so as to bring up a spiritual situation in the *Pandal*. In the meantime, in a separate place, the performer is decorated with costumes that look more like *Kathakali* costumes like large crown, large teeth in the face, black streaks around eyes, red cloth over his body and a huge sickle in one hand. The artist, who is in trance mood, holds a traditional fire torch called *Pandam* made of sticks dipped in coconut oil and dances energetically to the music of *chendai melam*, *ethalam* and cymbals, representing the scene of war between the *Kazhi* and *Asura*.[29] He holds one *Pandam* in each hand and runs hither and thither around the *Kazhi Kolam* and throws some inflammable powders on the fire to give the image of strong thunder and lightning. When the artist whirls up, circles of flame come out from the *Pandam*, giving a beautiful view to the audience. Lastly, the performer dances enthusiastically in the crowd to express the joy of *Kazhi* after killing the *Asura* and the pooja is over when the performer gets off from his trance mood. The performer as a final point erases the *kolam* of *Kazhi* with coconut leaf and then issues holy ash to devotees.

8. Kakkaarissi Kali

Kuravas- people belonged to a scheduled tribe- in Colachel area once had a habit of performing *Kakkaarissi Kali* during temple festivals of caste Hindus to collect some money by entertaining people, which is more like *Kuravan-Kurathi* aattam being performed at some stages of cultural festivals in Tamilnadu and like in cultural dance in stages of Kerala.[30] As they earned some money to run their life, instead of begging, it was called *Kakkaarissi Kali*, meaning the dance for rice. To play this dance, man and woman of *Kuravar* community wear their own simple traditional dress with slight makeup and come to the simple stage of raised platform which is lighted with a few oil lamps. They dance with rather crude steps by narrating simple stories known to them, but it is very vociferous owing to the shouting of audience and wild beating of *Parai* and *Veekan chenadi*, which are primitive drums made from leathers of animals obtained from forests. It is accepted that *Kakkaarissi Kali* might have originated somewhere in South Travancore in 8th century A.D, but at present, *Kuravas* do not execute *Kakkaarissi Kali* in Colachal during festivals because of they cannot magnetize people as the modern amusement media can and they execute *Kakkaarissi Kali* on request from the people of other villages.

9. Chavittunatakam

The Portuguese version of folk drama executed in the Colachel area of Kanyakumari district is *Chavittunatakam* that is intended to present the Biblical theme to local people on behalf of churches in Kerala.[31] Performers, who have dressed like Portuguese soldiers, execute some dance steps on wooden platform to the tune of songs about Europeans, Christian saints, Apostles, Captains, Napoleon and other war heroes and drum music, following the rhythmic stamping of feet of performers on the platform, which adds a stylish beauty to that dance. Such a folk performing art might have originated immediately after the colonization of Christians in South Travancore in the early 1503 A.D[32] and they have even been performed in churches in Colachel area during festivals because the people are absorbed by the unique style of expressions. Nevertheless, *Chavittunatakam* has been gradually fading away from this district after the advent of modern entertainment media such as radio, Television programs and cinema, in early 1956, which remains as an event of cultural program now.

10. Avaiyarkali

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This is somewhat a metaphysical conception of *Asari, Moosari* and *Kallasari* communities from the life of *Avai*, the Tamil poetess of Sangam age (3rd century), being expressed in the form of a simple dance for public entertainment during joyful occasions and temple festivals in Kalkulam and Vilavancode taluks. For this, a simple stage was erected before the temple and festooned with oil lamps to bring out some brightness to the stage; subsequently, women and men, who were in traditional costume and holding a long stick in one hand, came to the stage and executed a vigorous and powerful dance by singing a song. While they swayed the stick to the left and right and swirled it all around, the twinkling of bells attached to the stick added some music and charm to the dance whose most striking feature was that the dancers touched their feet rhythmically on the stage while stick struck the ground in apt time for giving a skillful variation in the musical note.[33] *Avaiyarkali* was performed in temple festivals in Narikal (near Colachel) until 1955s, but at present it is nowhere to be found in this district.[34] It is alleged that people had started to perform *Avaiyarkali* after the death of *Avai* during the Sangam age (3rd century).

Promotion of the Folk Performing Arts

One interesting point to be noted here is that an aberrant version of *Thalaikol*- a way of dancing around temples by keeping a colourful umbrella in hand - has been followed during temple festivals in Kanyakumari district and Kerala. It was once executed around the Royal Palace when the King goes round around the palace on the day of cultural importance; while the dance was going after the King, this event mimicked the marching of the King after defeating his enemy. Now, this performing art is known as *Aaraattu* and it is performed, on the final day of festival, in almost all the temples managed by the devaswam board, but in actual fact it is a mimic to offering respect to the King.[35]

The real credit goes to the Maharajas of Travancore for the preservation and promotion of Keralite folk performing arts in the whole of the Travancore State, in which Kanyakumari district seemed to be a part, as they were serious devotees of Gods and cultural traditions. The Maharajas encouraged the eminent dancers and musicians by inviting them to perform those arts in the special stadium of the Royal Court and by offering gifts either in the form of meals or money or both. In the Travancore state, there was tradition of giving globules of boiled rice called *Undaikkatti* every day to the artists and money called *Padipanam* every month, for which the artists needed to show their performance regularly before the Royal family and in temples. Further, in temples at Suchindrum, Padmanabhapuram, Kumarakoil and Thiruvattar, there was a separate theatre called *Koothambalam*[74] to execute such performing arts before the audience and devotees who arrived to worship God and *Devadhasis* were chief dancers, who were ordered to execute folk performing arts such as *Sathir* and *Mohiniyattam* in the temples so as to bring out a spiritual mood inside the temples. In 1926, when *Devadasi* system was abolished in Travancore through a Royal Proclamation, such dances were stopped in temples and *Devadasis* were sent out of the temples; consequently, folk performing arts were conducted only during temple festivals to entertain people.

In 1930, with the intention of promoting Keralite folk performing arts throughout Travancore, the *Kerala Kala Mandabam* was established at Trichur by the Mahakavi Vellathol with the financial assistance of the *Muhunda* Raja of Mannakulam, which was one of the small kingdoms under Travancore;[37] in the subsequent year its branch was started in Thiruvananthapuram. This organization has been teaching the folk performing arts to thousands of students, irrespective of their caste, and encouraging all the artists capable of showing their artistic talent on stages. Now that artists trained from this institution used to go to other villages on request and performed in the villages, which has really opened a way for those performing arts which were performed only in temples to the

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stage before the public for their entertainment. After the separation of South Travancore from the Kerala State in 1956, no special interest was given to preserve the Keralite folk performing arts in Kanyakumari district by the local as well as State Governments and hence most Keralite folk performing arts were forced to extinction. At present, those Keralite arts which are concerned with the worship of deities in temples have alone sustained here rightly for the devotional purpose associated with some entertainment, especially *Kuthiyattam, Thiruvathirakali* and *Thiyattu*, during the festival occasions while others such as *Kuthiyattam, Thiruvathirakali* and *Margam Kali, Koodiyaattam, Chakyarkoothu, Pulavapattu, Kaakkarissi Kali, Chavittunatakam* and *Avaiyarkali* are found to be alive only in cultural festivals. However, it should be noted here that the tribes of Kerala have all these folk performing arts alive in their folk tradition which is eco-friendly and based on natural customs that remain unaffected by the effect of modernization and sophistication we have enjoyed here in everyday life.

In the midst of the Keralite folk performing arts, *Kuthiyattam* has been highly appreciated by people throughout India as well as international audience in the traditional theatre, so that the *International Centre of Kuthiyattam* was started in Tripunithura of Kerala in 2001.[38] Even in Kerala it was considered a dying art that is a pale reminder of Kerala's link to the ancient past, and hence, after the designation by UNESCO signals, *Kuthiyattam* became a performing art of international importance, which has been witnessed from the pages of internet resources.[39] Many people can access the internet resources to know about texts, pictures and films of *Kuthiyattam* anywhere in Kerala. Some visual materials such as VCD and DVD are now more readily available in the market for those who are looking for examples of *Kuthiyattam* performance. Adoor Gopalakrishnan has released the DVD of *Kuthiyattam* and *Nangyar Koothuttu* through the film company *Invis*. Similar DVDs about *Kuthiyattam* are also released from the institutions such as Natana Kairali, Irinjalakuda, Margi Madhu and Kerala Kalamandalam.[40] The Kerala *Koothambalam* and Michigan State University prepared video tapes depicting one hour program of *Kuthiyattam* for helping the learners. Efficient personnel including Diane Daugherty, Nirmala Panikkar, Usha Nangyar, Margi Sathi, Kalamandalam Girija, and P.K. Narayanan Nambiar have been taking severe pains to rescue *Nangayarkoothu* from obscurity and near extinction.[41]

Conclusion

It is obvious that most folk performing arts of Kerala had disappeared in Kanyakumari district before 1950 AD, allowing only 11 folk arts to exist in the region for the worship of deities, for whose recital they had been performed before the idols. *Margam Kali* is associated with Christianity while *Kuthiyattam, Thiruvathirakali, Thiyattu, Thiruvathirakali, Koodiyaattam, Chakyarkoothu, Pulavapattu, Kaakkarissi Kali, Chavittunatakam* and *Avaiyarkali* are related to Hindus. In the present situation, those Keralite arts which are concerned with the worship of deities have alone sustained here for the devotional purpose associated with some amusement, especially *Kuthiyattam, Thiruvathirakali* and *Thiyattu*, during the festival occasions while others such as *Koodiyaattam, Chakyarkoothu, Kaakkarissi Kali, Chavittunatakam* and *Avaiyarkali* are found to be alive only in cultural festivals. *Pulavapattu* that was performed in serpent grooves is almost replaced by simple pooja before the idol. This study further confirms that most of the Keralite folk performing arts in the district had been forced to extinction due to advent of modern entertainment Medias such as TV, Radio, Cinema and others, which give

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more amusements to folks than the traditional folk arts. To preserve the original cultural heritage of this district, these vanishing folk performing arts should also be revitalized.

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