

# CULTURAL INTEGRATION OF NORTH MALABAR THROUGH RITUALS

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## Abstract:

North Malabar is an independent cultural unit, different in many respects from the rest of Kerala. The ritualistic folk dance, theyyam, is a significant socio-cultural aspect of the region. As a living cult, it has become a part of the popular religion of the Hindu community in North Malabar. Folk cult and rituals together contribute to the cultural integration of a particular geographical region. The devotees seek obeisance, blessings, and get rice and flowers as *prasadam* during the festivals of fertility and harvest. Hence, the rituals in North Malabar created a sense of solidarity within the society of different castes and divisions. This article attempts to present the synthesis of culture through rituals.

Keywords: Kavu, Theyyam, Theyyattam, Kalakam, Devakooth

## Introduction:

The people who live distinctive in style, beliefs, practices etc., are usually found together within a specific geographical area and a period of time is called a 'culture'. The customs and traditions of a particular place are also determined by the culture of that area. Generally, North Malabar is popularly known as the land of lores and looms. With the wide variety of geographical features, the distinct socio-cultural aspects differentiated the region from others. Moreover, North Malabar is a place where the people's primary occupation is dependent upon several agricultural activities. Related to these, they observed various folk rituals and agricultural festivals that contributed to the cultural integration of the region. Robert Redfield (1897-1958), an American Sociologist, introduced the terms Great and Little traditions in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to describe the cultural practices of peasant societies. He found that peasants observed many rituals and customs that emerged from dominant social categories, including priests and rulers. These he classified as

part of a great tradition. At the same time ,peasants also followed local practices that were not related with those of the great tradition.These included within the category of little tradition (Redfield,1956). Culture in a particular region is a total sum of socio-cultural-religious-biological factors of that particular region. Culture of Keralites have been closely interconnected with various fairs and festivals. So it is related with the all aspects of life of a human being and it is a wide aspects of study and it also deserves serious attention underlie almost every aspect of the life of people, religious and mythological beliefs. Considering the Kerala culture, North Malabar also contributed a lot in the field of the development of culture.

The study of the paper ‘Cultural Integration Of North Malabar Through Ritual’ shows the ignorance of the differentiation of caste , class and religion in the performance of ritual and the socio-cultural ingration of the society. A striking example of the integration of cult is the institutions of *kavus ,temples, kalakam, festivals* etc,. At the time of special occasions the whole people were forget the all discriminatins formed by the caste, class or religion and joined together.Folk cult like *Theyyam* is one of the finest example for such a social and cultural integration of North Malabar. Kalakam, one of the socio-religious organizations of the Tiyya community in Malabar where the cult of Theyyattam is maintained in its original form.(Kurup KKN,1977) By this Folk cult the traditions of devotion or *bhakti* should be studied in this context. The word *bhakti* means devotion to *God*. For this devotional surrender whole people incorporated within the framework of society. The word ‘Culture’ means the ideas , customs and social behaviour of a particular people or society. It is the charecteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people, encompassing language, religion, social habits, music and arts. Culture is a word for the way of life of groups of people, meaning the way they do things. A culture is passed on to the next generation by learning. However, these cults have been so much deep rooted that the social changes and modernization of our day have not destroyed them.(Kurup KKN,1977)

Within any society ritual art is one of the most visible expression of cultural identity in public space. Ritual arts forms of North Malabar are the cultural benchmarks that have helped to shape the conscious of a society. Ritual is a religious or solemn ceremony consisting of a series of actions performed according to a prescribed order (oxford).It is a sequence of activities involving gestures, words and objects,

performed in a sequestered place and according to a set sequence. Rituals tend to be culturally associated and are ceremonies that are prescribed by the traditions of a community, including a religious community. In his book “Structure In Primitive Society”, Radcliff Brown, famous English Social Anthropologist explained that rituals are consolidate the society, bring about a sense of group identity, transmit the morals and values from one generation to another and therefore strengthen and build community as a whole. (Brown Radcliff, 1965, p.154)

During the early period itself the worship of Goddesses were widespread in several parts of the subcontinent and also in North Malabar. They were open to both men and women. All we have known that like that of the caste based restrictions, women were also considered as marginalized. But later they get many chances to participate and perform in rituals like theyyam. For eg; *Devakooth*, the one and only female theyyam in north Malabar. It became the most striking feature of the folk culture of North Malabar and also in Kerala, that is the presence of women in ritual. In spite of the community or caste restriction in the society, these women in charged several other social obligations instead of the renouncement. It is the needs of the society while lives in the bound of a traditional circumstances. Claude Levi-Strauss differentiated rituals from myths. He stressed both the terms as living and thinking. (Kizhinipurath Sajitha, 2017, p.2). Emile Durkheim, famous French Sociologist also opined that ritual is the belief system of a society and it is socially formed and systematized. (2017, p.3) Subaltern women engaged in caste based labour, sometimes ritual arts were their main means of subsistence in the living society. But sometimes the society endowed the women with restrictions in every nooks and corner. (2017, p.3) In the case of rituals, we can see such a restrictions observed in relation with menstruation pregnancy and the period just after the child's birth. Womens were expelled from rituals by the name of impurity. (Vasanthakumari. 2000, p.103) Patriarchal elements controlled the society in a massive scale over the rights of women. (2000, p.103) Female participation can be seen in the rituals in a small scale, even though such customs and rituals exist in the society.

There are several factors that contributed to the socio-cultural integration of North Malabar. Traditional ritual art of North Malabar had been impacted a lot into this field. The common village

people's religion and worship were centered around the ritual art like *Theyyam*, *Mudiyettu* etc. The singing and chanting of devotional compositions also a part of such modes of worship. *Thottampattu* is one of the finest example of such a songs and this is singing by Malaya women while performing theyyam by the male members in their community in North Malabar. In his book 'Malabar Manual', William Logan called them as 'musicians' (Logan William, 1995, p.140). *Thottampattu* is became an integral part of this rituals in North Malabar. There are more than 400 theyyams in North Malabar. These are performed by the lower caste communities like Malayas, Pulayas Koppalans, Mavilan etc., They were untouchable in the feudal society, but they joined together in this occasion before the cult of devotion. In fact, the coming devotees of theyyam also were came from diverse social backgrounds and some of them even belonged to castes considered untouchable. It also reveals that, even the higher caste people and people from other religion also, like Muslim coming to the kavus and obtained blessings from the *God*.

*Kavus* existed as the center of worship during the medieval period onwards. The stability of Kavus is based on various types of beliefs. The awareness about the basis and relevance of beliefs, practices, culture and heritage of a particular society is provided to the people for to strengthened the unity of the village. There is a lot of factors in kavus for the existence of human being, so our ancestors closely connected the kavus with their beliefs or worship. It is also enriched with variety of bio-diversity. The people in different sections coming to these kavus and obtained blessings. More important than the direct descriptions of our rural surroundings are the images drawn from them, it is largely depends upon the situations and objects common in village life.

### **Conclusion:**

Historians use a variety of sources to reconstruct histories of the culture of a region. Religious traditions, customs, beliefs and practices, art, rituals, compositions attributed to women and men in different castes etc., are reconstruct the culture of a place. All these traditions in North Malabar, especially folk and religious continue to flourish to date. This continuity has certain advantages for historians or any other sociologists. It allows them to compare contemporary practices with those described in textual traditions. But some people believe that there was no possibility of change in these traditions, because they contributed

an integral part of peoples' existing beliefs and practices. The challenge for scholars or historian is to undertake such investigations with sensitivity. They should recognize that religious traditions, like other traditions are dynamic and change over time.

**Notes:**

Devakooth: Devakooth is the one and only female Teyyam in North Malabar.

Kalakam: A temple organization or administrative unit.

Kavu: A grove where Gods and Goddesses are propitiated in Kerala.

Teyyam: Ritual dance in Kerala

Teyyattam: God's dance

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