

# Magnitude of Folk Performing Arts in the Life of the People of Kanyakumari District – A Case Study

C. Gomathavalli  
Assistant Professor,  
Department of History  
Government Arts and Science College, Nagercoil,  
Kanyakumari District, Tamilnadu, India-629504.

## Abstract

This study attempts to analyse the importance of folk performing arts, which are the real modes of entertainment for folks and way of veneration of their deities, in the social life of people of Kanyakumari district. *Villuppaatu* (82%), *kanuyankoothu* (11%), *Karagaattam* (6%) and *Kalialattam* (1%) are very important in Hindu temples managed by villagers, of which *villuppattu* is inevitable in the temples of deities such as *Mutharaman*, *Isakiyamman*, *Vaathai saami*, *Bathrakali amman*, *Boothathan sami*, *Pitchaikalasami* and *Aaldibothi*, *Kaniyankoothu* is well-liked in *Sudalaimadan* temples, *Karagaattam* is a rule in some *Mutharamman* temples, *Kalialaattam* is austere a mode of entertainment in the temple festivals irrespective of the deity. *Villuppattu*, *Kaniyan koothu* and *Karaga attam* seem to be inevitable in Hindu temples while *Kalialattam* has occupied a high place in the festivals of Christians as well as Hindu temples; the other folk performing arts are being executed during the cultural festivals and even temple festivals for entertainment. This paper presents the real situation of folk performing arts among the people of Kanyakumari district, at present, to reveal their social impacts, economic impacts and cultural impacts on different castes of people and the conditions of artisans in the society.

**Keywords:** Folk performing arts, castes, religions, social, cultural, financial.

## Introduction

Kanyakumari district, the southernmost district of Tamilnadu state, lies between 77° 15' and 77° 36' of the eastern longitudes and between 8° 03' and 8° 35' of the northern latitudes. This district is 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 collectively known as Nanchilnad. This district has the total inhabitants of 2984356 people (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).<sup>1</sup> People of other religion comprise of immigrants who came and settle in the district from the northern states in the past one or few decades. Statistics of profession shows that about

454378 people are main workers and 93678 people are marginal workers in industries, about 13434 are farmers, 56811 people are agricultural labours and about 23922 people engage themselves in manufacturing, processing, servicing and repair in household industries; besides these, about 390211 people do some other jobs and the others stay behind the non-workers.

The nature has provided thousands of joys for human life through a skilful and sophisticated mechanism wonderfully structured as a culmination of evolutionary processes of nature that works on the treasure of man's knowledge which is the direct outcome of mere trial and error practices of so many past events under different circumstances. Folk performing arts seem to be one of such joyful practices man had determined long ago for their pleasure and to entertain others in their vicinity. Folk performing arts have occupied a great position in the culture of the people of Kanyakumari district, especially in their cultural carnivals and religious rituals meant for sacrificing small deities in villages. Wherever the idols or temples of minor deities are located in this district, folk performing arts of certain kinds are executed during festival either as a way to propitiate the deity or as a way to entertain the people who had aggregated in front of the temples to see the events of festivals, which are usually celebrated in the summer when the farmers are at rest after finishing the harvest of paddy and schools remain closed after final examination. Such annual festivals are seen throughout this district irrespective of castes and religions of people, but it is worth to note that type of folk performing arts being executed in villages differ depending on the caste and religion of people accommodated in that village. Since folk performing arts have been transmitted from the ancient customs of native people, they are deeply rooted in the heart and souls of people along with their religious faiths; so, they remain viable and sustaining even in the ultra-modern era in which most of the ancient customs are thrown away due to the advent of modern education that wipes out the ignorance of people, and of many new entertainment media such as radio, television, cinema and cell phones that are introduced for time being according to the will of the people.

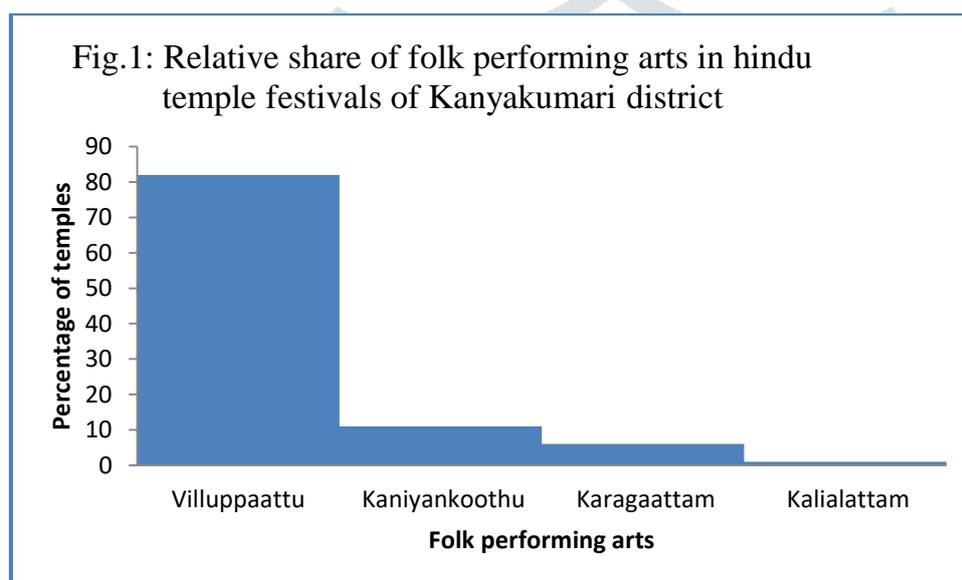
### **Methodology**

Field visits were conducted throughout the district at frequent intervals for a period of three consecutive years and local people were inquired of about the folk performing arts being conducted in their villages, number of people be there as viewers, performing arts associated with people's castes, economy of folk performing arts and financial status of folk artists in this region, and then the collected data was analysed statistically.

### **Social Impacts of Folk Performing Arts**

Society of mankind is enormously resourceful by the cultural development of millions of generations on the earth, wherein someone becomes eminent in folk performing arts in such a way as to absorb the people and seem to evaluate themselves as artists. Folk performing arts play a vital role in the society for bringing out mutual understanding between people, who inhabited in the village, through local village committee as well as between members of adjacent communities settled in nearby villages for having a good relationship, irrespective of caste priorities, religion and economic status which in most cases influence the social hierarchy of various people in the society.<sup>2</sup> In each and every village of Kanyakumari district, at least

one or two folk performing arts have been executed before the people during temple festival and cultural festivals, which of course indicates the priority of folk performing arts in this district. Fig.1 clearly illustrates that *villuppaatu* (82%), *kanuyankoothu* (11%), *Karagaattam* (6%) and *Kalialattam* (1%) are very important in Hindu temples managed by villagers, of which *villuppattu* is inevitable in the temples of deities such as *Mutharaman*, *Isakiyamman*, *Vaathai saami*, *Bathrakali amman*, *Boothathan sami*, *Pitthaikalasami* and *Aaldibothi*, while *kaniyankoothu* is well-liked in *Sudalaimadan* temples and *Karagaattam* is a rule in some *Mutharamman* temples; *Kalialattam* is austere a mode of entertainment in the temple festivals irrespective of the deity. *Villuppattu*, *Kaniyan koothu* and *Karaga attam* seem to be inevitable in Hindu temples while *Kaliyal attam* has occupied a high place in the festivals of Christians as well as Hindu temples; the other folk performing arts are being executed during the cultural festivals and even temple festivals for entertainment.



It is a usual practice in all villages that all people assemble together in one place, particularly before the temple, to plan and propose a date for celebrating the festival and to estimate the fund required for all events associated with that festival to be conducted. The headman of that village, most often known as “*Oor Thalavar*”, takes all the responsibilities of the festival along with his subordinates who are the members of the same village. It is the sole duty of the village committee to book the artists and other facilities required for that festival at least two months before the date proposed for the festival by paying an advance of 101 rupees or more. Further, the members of the village committee go to each and every house to get the share called *Vari* from the households and the amount obtained through *Vari* is the real investment for the temple festival.<sup>3</sup>

All the village people get a bracing mood even one week before the beginning of festival, with the intention of seeing the folk performing arts that have to be conducted in their temple along with their near relatives and friends; such anxious situation is seen in almost all villages of this district during the temple festival. The villagers invite their nearest and dearest, who are residents of other villages or remote towns, to participate in the festival for enjoying the festival along with kin and kiths. Natives who had settled in far

away towns or cities have also been invited to attend the function as they too are the members of the village, and their coming is respected by the villagers. Thus, almost all people along with their friends and relatives celebrated the temple festival.<sup>4</sup> A simple survey in 20 villages of this district reveals that each house has accommodated 2-10 relatives during the festival.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, those who are close friends of villagers visit to the temple at the time of festival, as they are mostly nearby villagers, to see the folk performing arts and subsequent frenzied dance that has to be performed at the end of the performing art in most of the villages.

Table 1: Relative percentage of houses accommodating relatives during the temple festivals in rural and urban areas of Kanyakumari district in 2018.

Areas	Percentage of houses accommodating the relatives			
	1-2 relatives	3-4 relatives	5-6 relatives	7-8 relatives
Rural villages	7±2 <sup>a</sup>	56±7 <sup>a</sup>	32±8 <sup>b</sup>	7±3 <sup>a</sup>
Urban villages	10±3 <sup>a</sup>	62±9 <sup>b</sup>	26±6 <sup>b</sup>	2±1 <sup>b</sup>

Superscript <sup>a</sup> indicates  $p>0.05$  and <sup>b</sup> indicates  $p<0.05$ ;  $n=20$ .

Table 2 shows that during the temple festival of a rural village 7% of houses accommodate less than 2 relations, 56% of houses accommodate 2-4 relations, 32% of houses accommodate 5-6 relations and 7% of houses accommodate 7-8 relations, and that in the festival of an urban village 10% of houses accommodate less than 2 relations, 62% of houses accommodate 2-4 relations, 26% of houses accommodate 4-6 relations and only 2% of houses accommodate 6-8 relations to enjoy the festival. This data confirms that urban people are not as interested as the rural people to see the folk performing arts being executed in the temple festivals because of their engagements in other modes of entertainments or businesses activities. It should also be noted that, among the total number of relations visiting for a temple festival in a village, 15% of relations belong to 1-10 years age group, 12% of relations belong to 11-20 years age group, 40% of relations belong to 21-30 years age group, 23% of relations belong to 31-40 years age group and 10% of relations belong to 41-50 years age group. On the other hand, for the festival of an urban temple, 18% of relations belong to 1-10 years age group, 42% of relations belong to 11-20 years age group, 31% of relations belong to 21-30 years age group, 8% of relations belong to 31-40 years age group and 1% of relations belong to 41-50 years age group. This data clearly depict that middle aged and aged people in rural regions are more interested in seeing the folk performing arts conducted in temples than the urban people. Relations at the age of 51-60 and above have hardly seen in any house during a temple festival both in rural and urban areas since they are too careless to view the folk performing arts.

Table 2: Percentage of different age-group of relatives attending the Hindu temple festivals in rural and urban areas of Kanyakumari district in 2018.

Village area	Age groups of guests attending the Hindu temple festivals					
	1-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60
Rural	15±4 <sup>a</sup>	12±5 <sup>b</sup>	40±8 <sup>b</sup>	23±7 <sup>b</sup>	10±3 <sup>a</sup>	-
Urban	18±5 <sup>a</sup>	42±8 <sup>b</sup>	31±8 <sup>b</sup>	8±2 <sup>b</sup>	1±0.2 <sup>a</sup>	-

Superscript <sup>a</sup> indicates  $p>0.05$  and <sup>b</sup> indicates  $p<0.05$ ;  $n=20$ .

Regarding the mode of amusement, people of 1-10 and 11-20 years age groups are interested to see the folk performing arts being conducted before the temple and the subsequent frenzied dance that has to be performed by someone of the devotees belonging to the same village as a way of entertainment, whereas those of 21-30 and 31-40 years age groups are fond of clearing their doubts about their fortune from the frenzied dancer rather than seeing the folk performing arts as a mode of gratification.<sup>6</sup> Aged people are always aiming at clearing their doubts from the frenzied dancer when he is in the trans-mood.

In the early 2005s, for every 100 villagers, 121 blood relations and 63 friends from adjacent villages visited the village for seeing *villupattu* or *Kaniyan koothu* in a temple whereas in 2018 the situation was very different that only 98 relations and 49 friends attended the temple festival for every 100 villagers<sup>7</sup>; this data clearly states that in earlier times people of this district were more interested to see folk performing arts than the people's interest today because of slight changes in the traditions of people due to modernization of village culture. On the other hand, in the urban areas, nearly 102 blood relations and 57 friends had attended for a temple function for every 100 villagers in 2005 but in 2018 only 78 relations and 41 friends have attended for a temple festival for every 100 villagers. From this survey it can be understood that folk performing arts have definitely urged the villagers, their relations and friends for being aggregated during the temple festival to invigorate their relationships in times, but that state of affairs is slightly dwindling in the modern society because of gradual changeover for town culture.

*Karagattam*, which has been executed only in a few temples, catches the attention of more number of audiences than *Villuppattu* and *Kaniyan koothu* because of its skilled artistic performance with joyful comments and modus operandi that can amuse both the children and adults. Unlike *villuppattu* and *Kaniyan koothu*, which attract Hindus, *Karagattam* is engrossing the Christians and Muslims who have come from nearby villages. A rough estimate shows that, out of 286 people crowded around the artists to see *Karagattam*, 104 people belonged to the native village, 119 people were their relations and 63 people were the friends of villagers; among the friends, 2-7 were Muslims and 6-19 were Christians.

Hindu people belonging to different castes perform *Kummi attam* in the premises of Amman temples while old people perform *Hari Pajan* in the premises of *Vishnu* temples, but *Kummi*, though enjoyable even for children, does not exert a pull on audience from other communities. In fact, *Kummi attam* is meant for the people of a particular street or village either for recreation or dedication. On the other hand, Christians performed *Devasahayampillai* ballad through *Kummi attam* which is performed even today in the St. Xavier's Church at Kottar during the festival, usually in the middle of November every year. This performing art absorbs thousands of people belonging to Hindus, Christians and even Muslims who assemble there without caste and religious feelings to get the blessing of the martyr Devasahayam.

*Kolattam*, being performed by folk women, though fail to attract other people in nearby villages, seems to create a close rapport among the people of the street or village. Relatives and friends who belong to other villages and remote areas do not take part in this performing art while it is performed in the villages during New Year, *Pongal* and *Dewali* festivals. So, its social impact would be indigenous to the village itself. *Oyilattam* has been executed only during *Kantha Sasti* festival along with *Murugar oyil kummi* song

to propitiate lord *Murugan* at Kumarakoil, Vellimalai, Marunkoor, Murugankuntram, Thoivalai, and Arambozhi. Unlike the mode of entertainment for people in the festivals of Madurai and Thanjavur districts, here it is performed with devotion whence groups of people are marching towards the temples. At the district level, it has been performed in cultural festivals to energize people's mind with joy and happiness.

*Aali attam* that has been executed in *Padrakazhiamman* temple at Esaanthangu and in *Azhagiyanayagi* temple at Ammachiyarvilai creates a center of attention for thousands of people from nearby villages. Here, male performers dressed like large demons perform slight dance movements to the accompanied music of *Sendai melam*, *Thappattai* and *Nathaswaram*, and go round the temple to denote that demons follow the Gods in their path during festivals.<sup>22</sup> Even if it is a religious offering of Hindus, people of other castes also attend the function with the purpose of amusement. Therefore, this performing art, without hesitation, tends to bring out unison between the people of adjoining villages for maintaining peace and harmony.

In Hindu shrines, men undergo *Kaliyal attam* to entertain people crowded in one place and to receive a person in trans - mood to perform *Samiyaattam*.<sup>8</sup> In churches, there is a tendency to carry the holy cabin harbouring the idol of Jesus and Mary along the streets in night during festival and most often *Kaliyal attam* goes in front of the idols to entertain the people. Likewise, in Christmassy marching before the day of X-mass *Kaliyal attam* precedes the people to go round the church and villages. As a specific mode of entertainment, this performing art attracts the audience of all castes and religions to proffer their support for the festival conducted by one group of people.

*Udukkaipattu* is a spiritual parlance of devotee during the festival of the *Bhagavathi* temple in *Mandaikkaadu*, which attracts thousands of Hindus to participate in the function with spiritual mood. This performing art in fact does not favour the social well being of people except frenzying the devotee to perform *Samiyattam* expected by many people who arrived for that festival. By the same token, *Kavadiyattam* being performed by devotees is aimed at bringing out the exciting mood when they walk for a long distance during the march to the holy place of lord *Muruga*; its social impact is to bring up unanimity of people participating in the sacrament. The Pariyahs of this district now perform *Thappaattam* before houses, especially on New Year, temple festivals, *Pongal*, *Pogi* and *Dewali* and burial ceremony of deadbodies. It was once performed while carrying *Chaparam* during temple festivals, joyful occasions, for the cinema songs and for the funeral function of corpses. This performance is, of course, expected by high caste people to mitigate them from the tensions at the events of death and to offer the final salute to the dead person. Thus this art form influences the low caste people to participate in the funeral of other people as a way for social relation.

*Thol Paavai Koothu* is a performing art in the villages of Kanyakumari district because of its unique style of expression which enables the people to feel happy, but after the TV programs became popular, people's intention had changed enormously towards TV serials and films reaching their indoor.<sup>9</sup> Even now many people gather in front of stage before which *Thol Pavai koothu* is shown occasionally in villages. This art form, even if fails to bring out communal impact, brings out happiness in the minds of people in a joking trend, so it is liked by Hindus, Christians and Muslims.

Many people are of the opinion that *Samiyattam* is performed by devotees, who are in trans-mood, a strong faith that their Gods remain with them all the time to provide good fortune and wealth and to protect them from the tribulations. Therefore, all villagers rush to assemble before the temple when the devotee gets into the frenzied state to start that spiritual dance. Thus, this excited dance brings up a harmony among the people of the village.

*Kuthiyattam* performed as a ritualistic representation of human sacrifice to the Goddess *Shakthi* in Kuzhithurai, *Bagavathi* in Karungal and Kollancode, and to the Goddess *Mutharamman* in a temple at Thikkilaanvilai village of Kanyakumari district attract many people from adjacent villages. A rough estimate taken from Thikkilanvilai village shows that, out of 686 people crowded around the artists to see *Kuthiyattam*, 204 people belonged to the native village, 219 people were their relations and 263 people were the friends of villagers; among the friends, 21 were Muslims and 89 were Christians. This data confirms that *Kuthiyattam* brings up a holistic unity of the people of nearby villages with the native villagers for their mutual understanding and friendship.

*Koodiyaattam* and *Chakyarkoothu* are dramatized dances based on Sanskrit theatre to propitiate the deities in temples and hence they have been performed in *Koothambalam* in some temples in Kalkulam and Vilavancode taluks during festivals.<sup>10</sup> A rough estimate taken from *Sri Padreswari amman* temple at Melamcode village shows that, out of 486 people crowded around the artists to see *Koodiyaattam*, 204 people belonged to the native village, 119 people were their relations and 163 people were the friends of villagers.<sup>11</sup> Another survey taken from *Bhagavathi* temple at Devicode village states that, out of 346 people crowded around the artists to see *Kuthiyattam*, 104 people belonged to the native village, 121 people were their relations and 111 people were the friends of villagers.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, it is clear that *Koodiyaattam* and *Chakyarkoothu* have helped for mutual understanding between the native villagers and people of nearby villages. These performing arts also bring out a devout mood in the premises of temples.

Since *Pulvapattu* is performed by *Namboodiris* and *Nairs* families in their serpent grooves in Kalkulam and Vilavancode as a one night ritual, it helps for unanimity among the people of the native family or village. It is performed with devotion, not for entertainment, so that no people other than the particular family take part in this function.<sup>13</sup> *Thiruvathiraikali* has been performed by *Nairs* and *Ezhavas* in Sasthakavu, Colachel, Arumanai, Melpuram, Maruthankode and Methukummal. This performing art, which is exclusively performed by the folk women in traditional Kerala costume, is helpful for unity among the people of the particular village and for their indulgence. On the other hand, *Thiyaattu* that has been executed before the *Bhagavathi* temple at Mandaikaadu creates a center of attention for thousands of Hindus belonging to different villages of this district during the annual temple festival usually celebrated in the month of March 12, every year.<sup>14</sup> A survey taken from the *Bhagavathi* temple during festival in the year 2011 shows that, 1472 people belonging to 686 villages of this district had seen the *Thiyaattu* program, which indicates the people's devotion to the Goddess *Bhagavathi* for getting her blessing. Thus, this performing art helps the people from all over the district to assemble before the temple every year.

At present, Kuravas, in Colachel area, execute *Kakkaarissi Kali* only if people request them to perform it in their temples for money. This performing art is a magnet for hundreds of people even today

because of its unique style of expression and cheery making. A rough estimate taken from *Bhagavathi* temple in Colachel shows that, out of 486 people crowded around the artists to see *Kaakarissi kali*, 204 people belonged to the native village, 119 people were their relations and 163 people were the friends of villagers.

### Cultural Impacts of Folk Performing Arts

In this district, both the performing arts of Kerala and Tamil Nadu have existed so far to reveal the antiquity of ancient culture, which had originated even before the Sangam Age that presented some documents to report the role of folk performing arts in the primitive culture of people. Many folk performing arts were, in course of time, thrown away from the cultural tradition of people of this district because of the effect of modernization and western education, which together tailored the human minds to relieve themselves from the ancient meaningless traditions in the society, whereas those performing arts, which have been influencing the culture of people or used in worship of Gods, remain as a viable art against the modern attitude of human life in town as well as villages.

Ancient folk performing arts of Tamilagam such as *Alliyam, Kodukotti, Kudaikoothu, Kudakkoothu, Mallu, Pandarangam, Thudi, Kadaiyam, Pedu, Marakaal, Paavai koothu, Thalaikol, Sathir, Aariyakoothu, Santhikoothu, Kunippam* and *Chokkam* faded away from the culture of people much before the modern era because of frequent war threats between the Pandiyas and Travancore Kings and lack of peacefulness among the people. Tamil scholars have confirmed that *Kummi attam, Kolattam, Karaga attam, Oyil attam, Kurathi attam, Dhasi attam, Aali attam, Kaliyal attam, Therukoothu, Udukai Pattu, Kodangipattu, Kavadiyattam, Thappattam, Ethirkathaiyadal, Manthira Padal, Thol paavai, villuppattu, Kaniyan koothu* and *Kaduva attam* were flourishing in this district in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries; of these, a few were already faded away and some are prosperous even today but at the verge of extinction. *Kurathi attam, Therukoothu, Udukai padal, Kodankipattu* and *Ethirkathaiyadal* were thrown away from the culture of Hindus because of the effect of modern culture while *Manthirapadal* and *Kaduvaattam* were left out in the culture of Christians and Muslims respectively when people came to realize that they are mere contractions to their religious axioms.

Since the small deities were the sole Gods of *Nadar, Ezhava* and *Azhavar* communities who were not allowed to worship the lord Siva and Vishnu under Travancore Government, these people propitiated their deities through bow-song. This tradition is deeply rooted in the culture of *Nadars, Ezhavas, Azhavar*s and some *Vellalas* in this district, so that they have been performing *villuppaattu* in their temple for narrating the story of the deities. They have chosen the bow-song program as a way to tell the stories of Puranas, war events of past, historical events, story of great men and political leaders and events associated with social development for broadcasting the news to the public. Bow-songs of deities reveal that the deities had got supreme blesses from lord Siva to destroy the enemies of villagers and it depicts the revenge mood of people towards the higher caste people who were cruel to them.<sup>14</sup> Even youths and adults of this district most often murmur the verses of bow-song while they are engaged in some other jobs. Since *Kaniyan koothu* is always devotional, it has been performed to worship the deities such as *Sudalai Madan, Pechiammai, Kalasami, Mundan* and *Arichandra sami* by communities such as *Sambavars, Nadars, Devars,*

*Vellalas, Paraiyahs, Pannikars and Chettis* in this district during the annual festivals. But, it does not bring out any other impact on the culture of people. Some youths and adults of this district are found to murmur the verses of *Kaniyan koothu* frequently when they are in a refreshing mood. Simply the story of the Gods is narrated in the *Kaniyan koothu* to bring the *Samiyaadi* to a trans-mood.

*Kummi attam* is performed by girls and folk women during the festivals of Amman temples to reflect their happy mood and to reverence the deities.<sup>15</sup> Old people sing *pajans* about the Lord *Vishnu* or *Siva* or *Parvathi* while they perform *Kummi* in the premises of temples. Yet other type of *Kummi* called *Muzhappaari* is performed in the premises of Amman temples, particularly in *Brahmasakthi amman* temple at Sundapattivilai and *Azhagamman* temple at Vadiveswaram during festival but it is unusual in other temples. *Namboodiris, Nairs, Vellalas, Ezhavas* and *Kammalars* have performed *Kummi* during New Years, *Dewali, Thirukarthigai, Pongal* and temple festivals, but it is hardly seen in the low castes. *Kolaattam* was once performed during cultural festivals like *Deepavali, New year, Pongal* and temple festivals, but it is nowadays executed only in the district-level cultural programs conducted by the Government. *Karaga attam* is performed in pleasant circumstances and festivals in *Mutharamman* and *Sudalaimaadan* temples to amuse people in between the *Villuppattu* or *Kaniyan Koothu* sessions. The *Oyilattam* has been executed only during *Kantha Sasti* festival along with *Murugar oyil kummi* song to propitiate lord *Murugan* at Kumarakoil, Vellimalai, Marunkoor, Murugankuntram, Thoivalai, and Arambozhi. The *Kurathi attam* which was once popular in this district has been performed only in Keeripparai village during temple festival and in the cultural programmes. In Ammachiyarvilai, *Aali attam* has been on the *Thirukarthigai* day in the *Karthigai* month while in Esaanthagu it is usually conducted in *Maasi*, the eleventh month of Tamil calendar, as a way to worship the God.

*Kaliyal attam* is performed in Hindu temples to entertain people crowded in one place and to receive a person in trans-mood to perform *Samiyaatam*. In churches, there is a tendency to carry the holy cabin harbouring the idol of Jesus and Mary along the streets in night during festival and most often *Kaliyal attam* goes in front of the idols to entertain the people. Likewise, in Christmassy marching before the day of X-mass *Kaliyal attam* precedes the people to go round the church and villages. *Kaliyal attam* has also been executed to receive a person who won in a rivalry and to receive a political leader for a meeting. To propitiate the goddess *Bhagavathi* in Mandaikkaadu, *Udukaipattu* has been executed in the midnight on the 6<sup>th</sup> day of annual festival every year in the month of *Maasi* in Tamil calendar; this is often called *Valiyapadukkai*. The lord *Murugan* is one of the deities worshipped by *Vellalas* of South Travancore by *Kavadiyeduppu* and there are renowned temples at Kumarakoil, Vellimalai, Marungoor, Aralvaimozhi and Thoivalai.<sup>17</sup> The *Pariyahs* of Kanyakumari district perform *Thappaattam* before the houses of High Caste Hindus on New Years, temple festivals, *Pongal, Pogi* and *Dewali* to get some gifts in the form of money and grains. Once *Thol Paavai koothu* was performed on a special stage in the temple regularly in the evening to entertain the devotees and during the festivals, but now it is conducted in a village for one or two weeks to narrate the stories of Ramayana and Mahabharata.<sup>18</sup> Then the artists shifts to yet other village to show the leather puppet show.

While the villagers worship their deities in temples, someone devotee gets into a trance state enough to perform frenzied dance called *Samiyaattam* before the effigies of deities. The *Samiyaadi* clears the doubts of people when they ask some questions about their future. The nature of the frenzied dance however varies with the nature of deity who entered the body of the devotee. No one festival is considered to be satisfactory if there is no frenzied dance before the deity.<sup>19</sup> *Isakiammai attam*, *Sudalai attam*, *Pitchaikalan attam*, *Maariamman attam*, *Kalasamiattam*, *Boothathan attam*, *Neeli attam*, *Mutharamman attam* and other dances are performed in the temple depending upon the deity. Hence, *Samiyattam* becomes the part of the general culture of the people.

The Keralite folk performing arts also have some cultural influence in the life of people of Kanyakumari district. *Kuthiyattam* that represents human sacrifice to the Goddess *Shakthi* has been performed as an offering to the Goddess *Kali* in Kuzhithurai, *Bagavathi* in Karungal and Kollancode, and to the Goddess *Mutharaman* in a temple at Thikkilaanvilai village in Kanyakumari district. This ritual has been conducted every year by people of several villages. It is believed that *Kuthiyattam* relieves the temper of *Kali*. In Kanyakumari district *Koodiyaattam* has been performed in Siva temples at Aramanai (in Kalkulam taluk) and Maruthankode and Munchirai (in Vilavancode taluk) during festivals from 1925 onwards. Some *Namboodiris* and *Nair* families in Kalkulam and Vilavancode taluks perform *Pulavupattu* in their serpent grooves or other temples having serpent cults to propitiate the serpent God *Naga Devatha* during festivals. Since people of other communities do not participate in this ritual, it seems to have least recognition among the people of Kanyakumari district. *Nairs* who live in joint families commemorate *Thiruvathirai* day of *Thai* month (17<sup>th</sup> Dec-14<sup>th</sup> 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. In Sasthakavu, *Thiruvathiraikali* has been conducted every year. *Thiyaattu* has been performed in *Bhagavathi* temple at Mandaikaadu in Kanyakumari district for several centuries; it is performed in the *Maasi* month of Tamil Calender. Some *Kuravas* in Colachel area perform *Kakkaarissi Kali* during festivals in *Bhagavathi* temples. *Avaiyarkali* has been performed in temple festivals in Narikal (near Colachel) in this district. Thus these folk performing arts are intimately linked with the culture of different castes of people in Kanyakumari district.

### Economic Impacts of Folk Performing Arts

While the folk performing arts entertain the villagers in the rural and urban areas, they provide jobs to the artists who have enough skill to amuse the people and the villagers in return need to pay the money expected by the artists. Hence, economic impacts of folk performing arts in this district are analysed in this section.

Table 3 shows that there are 140 teams to perform folk performing arts in Kanyakumari district: there is only one team for each of *Aaliattam*, *Thol Paavai koothu*, *Margam kali*, *Thiyaattu* and *Uduakkaipattu*; there are two teams for each of *Avaiyar kali*, *Chavittu natakam*, *Kaduva attam*, *Kavadiyattam*, *Koodiyattam* and *Kurathiyattam*; there are three teams for each of *Karagaattam*, *Chakyarkoothu* and *Kaakarassikali*; there are four teams to perform *Therukoothu*; there are twenty teams for bow-song; there are seven teams for *Kaliyal attam*; there are eight teams to perform *Oyilattam*; there are

sixteen teams for *Thappattam*; there are eighteen teams for *Kolattam*; there are twenty three teams to perform *Kummi attam*; and seventeen teams to perform *Isaipattimantram*.

Table 3: Teams of folk performing artists in Kanyakumari district. \*

<i>Folk Performing Art</i>	<i>No. of well-known artists</i>	<i>No. of less popular artists</i>
Aali attam	-	1 team
Avaiyar kali	-	2 teams
Bow-song	14 teams	6 teams
Chakyarkoothu	1 team	2 teams
Chavittu Natakam	-	2 teams
Isaipattimantram	3 teams	14 teams
Kaniyan koothu	-	-
Kaduva attam	-	2 teams
Kaliyal attam	3 teams	4 teams
Karagaattam	1 team	2 teams
Kavadi attam	-	2 teams
Kaakaarassikali	-	3 teams
Kolaattam	2 teams	16 teams
Koodiyattam	-	2 teams
Kummi attam	-	23 teams
Kurathi attam	-	2 teams
Margamkali	-	1 team
Oyilattam	1 team	7 teams
Thappattam	3 teams	13 teams
Therukoothu	-	4 teams
Thiyaattu	-	1 team
Thol Paavai koothu	1 team	-
Udukkaipattu	-	1 team

\* Data kindly presented by Mr. Iyadurai Nadar – the President of Kumari Maavatta Gramiya Kalaijargal Sangam- Sundapattivilai, on 11-10-2017.

In Kanyakumari district, 614 well-known artists and over 800 less popular artists are known to execute folk performing arts in temples as well as in cultural festivals. This data illustrates the fact that 1414 people of this district have taken folk performing arts as their full-time or part-time profession. Hence, the life of nearly 1,500 families is running with the folk performing arts that are conducted in temple festivals and various cultural carnivals such as New Year, *Dewali*, *Pongal* and others. The artists receive 6,000-8,000 Rs/- to perform *Aaliattam* for a one-time in Easanthangu and Ammachiyarkovil temples. The artists receive 8,000-9,000 Rs/- to perform *Avaiyarkali* for one-night in a temple of Kalkulam taluk. A sum of 17,000 – 25,000 Rs/- is charged for a three-time recital of bow-song in a temple while a sum of 22,000-32,000 Rs/- is charged for a similar *Kaniyan koothu* program. The artists receive 21,000-28,000 Rs/- to perform *Chakyarkoothu* for a three-time function in a temple in Kalkulam and Vilavancode taluks. The artists receive Rs. 9,000 to perform *Chavittunatakam* for a one-time in a temple while those who come from Kerala asked higher remunerations. The artists receive Rs. 3,000-6,500 Rs/- to perform *Isaipattimantram* for a one-time in a temple or in a cultural festival. The artists receive Rs. 8,000 to perform *Kaduva attam* and

Rs 4,000-8,000 is charged for performing *Kaliyalattam* for one session. The artists receive Rs. 12,000-14,000 to perform *Karagaattam* for a three-time recitation in a temple. For *Kaakkarassikali* and *Kavadiyattam*, the artists charge Rs 4,500-5,000 for a one-time recital in a cultural program. A sum of Rs. 3,500-5,000 is charged for *Kolattam*, of Rs. 14,000 is charged for performing *Koodiyattam*, of Rs. 3000-5000 is charged for the recitation of *Kummiattam*, of Rs. 3,500 is charged for performing *Kurathiattam*, of Rs. 4000 is charged for performing *Oiyilattam*, of Rs. 4000-6000 is charged to perform *Margamkali* (in churches), of Rs. 3000-5000 is charged for performing *Thappattam*, of Rs. 7,000-9,000 is charged for performing *Therukoothu* in a cultural festival, of Rs. 12,000 is charged for performing *Thiyaattu*, of Rs. 3,500 is charged for *Thol Paavai koothu*, and of Rs. 4,500 is charged for performing *Udukkaipaattu* for one-time in a cultural festival (See Table 4). The villagers need to pay the amount the artists asked by the performer for performing their program in their temple or cultural festival. Since the other folk performing arts are executed by the village people themselves, they do not affect the economic conditions of the people.

Table 4: Remunerations of artists per program in Kanyakumari district. \*

Folk Performing Art	Salary for a well-known team (Rs/)	Salary for less popular team (Rs/)
Aali attam	-	6,000-8,000 ‡□
Avaiyar kali	-	8,000-9,000 ‡□
Bow-song	17000-21000 ✕	23,000-25,000 ✕
Chakyarkoothu	26,000-28,000 ✕	21,000-24,000 ✕
Chavittu Natakam	-	9,000 ‡□
Isaipattimantram	6,500	3,000-4,000 ‡ □
Kaniyan koothu	32,000 ✕	22,000-24,000 ✕
Kaduva attam	-	8,000 ‡ □
Kaliyal attam	8,000	4,000-7,000 ‡ □
Karagaattam	14,000 ✕	12,000-13,500 ✕
Kavadi attam	-	5,000 ‡ □
Kaakaarassikali	-	4,500 ‡□
Kolaattam	5,000	3,500-4,500 ‡□
Koodiyattam	-	14,000 ‡□
Kummi attam	-	3,000-4,500 ‡ □
Kurathi attam	-	3,500 ‡ □
Margamkali	-	4,000 ‡ □
Oiyilattam	6,500	4,000-6,000 ‡ □
Thappattam	5,500	3,000-5,000 ‡ □
Therukoothu	-	7,000-9,000 ‡ □
Thiyaattu	-	12,000 ‡ □
Thol Paavai koothu	3,400 □	-
Udukkaipaattu	-	4,500 ‡□

\* Data extracted from interviews with the artists of different kinds in Kanyakumari district and from interviews with village people. [ Note: ✕ Three-times recitation ; ‡ one time recitation ]

## Influence of Performing Arts in the Life of Artists

Field trips to different villages during temple festival and cultural carnivals and interviews with the artists have revealed that the folk performing arts, though appearing as a flourishing industry, have been vanishing gradually because of modernization and sophistication in the culture of people of this district. People's attention towards folk performing arts being conducted in temples or cultural festivals has been vanishing year by year due to the advent of new media for entertainment such as radio broadcasting of songs, popularization of Tamil cinema and launching of TV programs. Further, the western educational system that creates social and cultural awareness among the youngsters is found to be yet other cause for decline in the people's interest on folk performing arts. Except *bow-song* and *Kaniyan koothu*, all the folk performing arts have been under the threat of extinction in this district due to inadequate public interest, and hence the artists are forced to a critical situation to shift for some other jobs elsewhere in the state or country.

In Kanyakumari district, most of the artists of bow-song belong to *Nadar* community which accounts over 65 % of the population and which has at least one temple in each village. Further, festivals are nowadays conducted in almost all the months, so that artists remain engaged throughout the year. So, bow-song seems to be a flourishing folk performing art in this district. Even artists of Tirunelveli district are called to perform bow-song in this district. The bow-song performers are therefore comparatively wealthy in this district. The artists earn an average income of 10,5,000 Rs/- per year. This situation has, in fact, encouraged some youths to learn bow-songs.

*Kaniyan koothu* in this district is under a critical condition that there is no *Kaniyans* in Kanyakumari district and that people of *Kaniyan* tribe in Tirunelveli district are nowadays not likely to take their traditional job for their life. *Kaniyans* suppose that this art, today, is facing a predicament not because of lack of patronage, but because not even *Kaniyans* come forward to take up it as a career.<sup>73</sup> The next generation is not ready to take this art since collegiate education has opened many employment opportunities and since it is not an easy profession to play *makudam*, sing songs and dancing continuously for six to eight hours in a temple. Even though the performers play *Kaniyan koothu* in an aggressive manner for several years, it does not suite for old *Kaniyans*. In order to restore this art for future, the Tamindadu Government takes some steps to teach it to anyone who is interested in that performing art irrespective of caste priority.

*Kummi* and *Kolaattam* are performed by folk women and villagers during their temple festivals and other pleasant situations in their villages, but artists are called to perform them for their cultural festivals such as *Pongal*, New Year and *Dewali*. Therefore, the artists who can perform them have preferred some other jobs in the market for the monthly remuneration of Rs/- 1,500 – 2,500. Even though *Karagaattam* has been performed in some *Mutharamman* temples and *Sudalai madan* temples in Kanyakumari district, the chances for the artists are remote because of the reason that this performing art is executed only in temple festivals during the months of *Avanni* and *Panguni* and during cultural festivals, but not in other months. During festival season there are ample of programs so that the artists cannot accept many programs and many artists from nearby districts come to this district to execute their programs during festivals whereas in

the other months they remain inert without a job. Therefore, even youngsters who have learnt *Karagaattam* do not prefer it as a profession in this district.

Vincent- the director of *Kaannpor Kalai Kuzhu* at Ramanpuroor- has stated that *Oyil attam* is at the verge of extinction today because of the upshot of modernization and sophistication due to the dawn of superior electronic media for time being and entertainment. Likewise, there has been a gradual diminution in the recital of *Kurathi attam* in this district and at present there is only one artist in Keeripparai village to do *Kurathi attam* in Kanyakumari district because most others had already shifted their career to some other jobs and migrated to places like Coimbatore and Chennai for seeking a good job. So, at this instance *Kurathi attam* is nowhere to be found in Kanyakumari district during religious and cultural festivals.

*Kaliyal attam* is very much left aside in the society because of the advent of cinema and other entertainment media in 1950s, so that the artists need to go for some other jobs to run their life. The similar is the situation of artists in *Therukoothu*, *Udukkaipattu*, and *Kavadiyattam* in this district. There is much but inadequate scope for the artists of *Ethirkathaiyaadal* (the present version is known as *Isaipattimantram*) during temple festivals and cultural programs; it is mostly performed by famous persons who are already recruited in some Government or private job. Therefore, the artists do not bother about chances to perform this performing art. At present, there is only one artist to perform *Thol Paavai koothu* in this district since young generation in this district is not willing to learn and perform this art; this is mainly because of the reason that the artists need to shift from village to village every time to perform this art, and that it has not been conducted in temples. The artist Balarao has received the *Kalaimamani* award from the Government of Tamil Nadu for his artistic talent. However, he is financially not wealthy.

Keralite folk performing arts such as *Margamkali*, *Kuthiyattam*, *Pulavapattu* and *Thiruvathira kali* are performed by local people, who have no specific skill in those arts, as a way to propitiate deities and to enjoy culturally important days. Since the people are already engaged in some other businesses or other works and folk performing arts seemed to be their hobby, they cannot be considered as real artists of performing arts. The artists of *Chakyarkoothu*, *Koodiyaattam* and *Thiyaattu* are trained personals who do not take other jobs for their life; they live in poverty and hungry for at least 4-6 months when festivals have not been conducted in temples. Their annual income does not exceed Rs 70,000 /- so that they are expecting a pension from the Government to run their life. They encourage the youngsters to learn the performing arts but they do not train their children in their tradition. The artists of *Avaiyarkali*, *Kakkaarissikali*, and *Chavittunatakam* do whatever job available in their locality and perform the arts when people approached them to perform the art in their villages.<sup>20</sup> They earn only Rs. 60,000 – 65,000 per annum. These artists expect that the Government should do some favour for the artist to promote the folk performing arts here.

## Conclusion

Almost all the folk performing arts being conducted in this district are concerned with the traditions of various casts of people so that those performing arts that are deeply rooted into the customs of people are flourishing well but the others have been gradually put aside due to the advent of modern Entertainment Medias and changes brought by modern education. This study clearly shows that all the folk performing arts, except *villuppaattu*, are on the verge of extinction due to the impact of town culture and modernization,

and that the Government and Non-government Organizations should take adequate steps to preserve the folk performing arts to preserve the actual culture and tradition of people in Kanyakumari district. More than 80 percent of artists suffer from poverty and its consequences in the way of life. No one can promote these performing arts unless the public provide their support whole heartedly. So, this is the time to preserve folk performing arts by the joined action of the Government and the public.

## References

1. SH 2007-2008, Statistical Handbook, Government of India, 2007-2008.
2. Eric Miller, "**Video Conferencing for Performance of, Training in, and Discussion about Verbal Arts**", Ph.D., Thesis University of Pennsylvania, 1998, p.263.
3. Eric Miller, Place of Kannaki Story Telling Tour, informative notes available at [www.storytellinginsitute.org](http://www.storytellinginsitute.org).
4. Interview with V. Dhasarathan (59), Maniyanvilai village, dt; 18-10-2017.
5. The survey was conducted in five villages of each of Kalkulam taluk, Agasteeswaram taluk, Vilavancode taluk and Thoivalai taluk of Kanyakumari district.
6. Interview with S. Balasubramanian (68), Thasildar (Retd), Melakonam, dt; 20-10-2018.
7. Data extracted from a survey taken during temple festival in five villages in Agasteeswaram taluk in March 2010.
8. Ponneelan, "**Ammachiyarvilai Azhagiyanayargi Amman**", In B. Azhagesan (Ed) A. Prammananthasami Nadar **Centenary Volume**, Nagercoil, 2008, p.p.60-61.
9. S.Karthikesan, "**Kalai**", in **Puthiya Thalaimurai**, Tamil Weekly, Malar 3, Ithazh 18, January 26, 2012, p.p.42-43.
10. Kamalanathan, **Keralathu Koil Kalaigal**, Chennai, 2006, p.p.21-24.
11. Survey taken from Meamcode Sri Padreswari amman temple during the festival, dt; 21-10-2018.
12. Survey taken from Devicode Bhagavathi amman temple during the festival, dt; 12-03-2017.
13. Chummar Choondal, **Studies in folklore of Kerala**, Trivandrum, 1978, p.63.
14. V.Kanthapan, "**Ketatai Kodukum Mandaikaadu Bhagavathiaman**", In B. Azhagesan (Ed) A. Prammananthasami Nadar **Centenary Volume**, Nagercoil, 2009, p.p. 62-64.
15. Sreekumar and Shunmugasundaram, **Kumari Naattuppura Theivangal**, Bangalore, 2009, p.301.
16. R. Chithra, "**Kummi Padalgal**", Unpublished M.Phil. Thesis, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, 1996,p.141.
17. V. Nagam Aiya, **Travancore State Manual**, Vol.II, Trivandrum, 1906, p.21.
18. Inge, C. Orr, "**Puppet Theatre in Asia**", In **Theatre in South-east Asia**, Cambridge, 1967, p.p.69-84.
19. K. Kailasapathi, **Pandai Tamilar Vazhvum Vazhibadam**, Chennai, 1996, p.128.
20. KSA, **Handbook on Cultural Institutions in Kerala**, Kerala Sahithya Academy, Thrissur, 1976, p.p. 9-10.