

**PERFORMANCE, BODY, AND INTERSUBJECTIVITY:
UNDERSTANDING *THEYYAM* IN MALABAR**

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DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation titled **'PERFORMANCE, BODY, AND INTERSUBJECTIVITY: UNDERSTANDING *THEYYAM* IN MALABAR'** submitted by me at the School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in Sociology of this university, has not been submitted for any other degree of this university or any other institutions.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled “**PERFORMANCE, BODY, AND INTERSUBJECTIVITY: UNDERSTANDING *THEYYAM* IN MALABAR**”, submitted by **JAHFAR SHAREEF P** at the School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** in Sociology of this university, has not been submitted for any degree of this or any other university; this is entirely his own work. We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for further evaluation.

PROF. SURINDER S JODHKA
(CHAIRPERSON)

DR. AMIT KUMAR SHARMA
(SUPERVISOR)

Dedication

To

My

Beloved

Members of family and specially to my

Grandmother

Pathumma...

Who taught me the rudimentary lessons to see world

And its people...

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CHAPTER-1
INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCING THE ISSUES AND THEMES OF STUDY

Performative genres in a culture provide us a platform to engage with the issues that are important at ground level. Scholars have approached it from diverse perspective to decipher the inner meanings of complex cultural practices. As far as Indian culture is concerned, its people, its unique cultural practices have been subject of anthropological and historical investigation for centuries. Despite many studies and discourses, many regional forms of cultural practices still require scholarly attention due to its relevance in deciphering the essence of culture and human psyche. Milton Singer mentioned about the relevance of “Cultural Performance” in understanding Hinduism. He treats cultural performance as “most concrete observable units of Indian culture, the analysis of which might lead to more abstract structures within a comprehensive cultural system”. According to him, these ‘cultural performance’ includes “plays”, “concerts”, “lectures”, “prayers”, “ritual reading”, “recitations”, “rites and ceremonies”, and “festivals”, he asserts the point that their distinctions as “religious” and “artistic” often lead to uncertainty, because, they many religious rituals incorporate the many elements of art and many artistic events are filled with “sacred Epics and *Puranas*”¹. Thus, performative genres provide us a platform to engage with the larger structures of culture, its form and content are less important, because the essence of culture is encapsulated both in “religious” and “artistic” performances.

This endeavor aimed to engage with a particular genre of cultural performance known as *Theyyam*. This particular variety of cultural performance is specific to northern part of Malabar; north Kerala, a southern state of India. The structure and meaning of this genre of performance would be described in detail in coming chapters. The performative expressions of cultural specific categories in the ritual order of *Theyyam* would be taken up to engage with the abstract notions in academic discourse. The sociological and anthropological discourse on ritual/artistic performance would be outlined to contextualize *Theyyam* performance. The production and the performative expression of

¹ Milton Singer *When a Great Tradition Modernizes: An anthropological Approach to Indian Civilization*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1972, pp-64, 68, 69

particular cultural ‘body’ as well as the ‘intersubjective relationship’ among those who are associated to *Theyyam* performance would be problematized.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- Firstly, the study is aimed a theoretical engagement with the *Theyyam* performance. The sociological and anthropological discourses on ritual/theatrical performance would be outlined to contextualize *Theyyam* performance.
- Secondly, this endeavor aimed to historicize reconfiguration of *Theyyam* as a ritual performance to a theatrical performance, but how a ritual practice is undergone changes along with the larger historical transformation of society is given priority.
- Thirdly, the study supposes to look at issue of production of cultural body and its intersubjective relations. It aimed to expose how a particular notion of social corporeality and intersubjectivity is produced. *Theyyam* performance and the mythical stories on theyyam would be taken up to substantiate the claims.
- Fourthly, this is an attempt to highlight the relevance of ‘visual turn’ in addressing the question of what constitute the essence of a culture. Mainly, it raises some critical question over structuralist understanding of caste system. But the substantiation is limited to liminal order of *Theyyam* performance.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

- I.** ‘Theyyam’, a ritual performance by particular lower castes of north Malabar, was a “symbolic strategy” or a ‘resistance’ mechanism against the oppressive hierarchy of caste system and its manifested practices, despite the modernity and its emancipatory projects have reconfigured the oppressive practices of caste and hierarchy, it is very relevant in constituting the inner dynamics of ‘social structure’ in north Malabar. *Theyyam* as a cultural performance, it’s a site where traditional social structure is reflected, so its central in understanding how Hindu social order is manifested even in amidst of social change.
- II.** *Theyyam* as a cultural performance where the social categories are ritually contested and mediated their social identity, it provides an alternative world-view

that is inherent in the regional traditions of Hinduism. Engagement with such regional forms raises critical questions over such theories that encompass everything 'ideally' but not the diverse forms of empirical reality.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The approach to the objectives of the research is kept as multidisciplinary, but sociological and anthropological approaches are given priority. The theoretical framework to the study is grounded in sociological and anthropological theories on ritual and performance. As far as *Theyyam* performance is concerned, the historical perspective is deployed to expose its reconfiguration and transformations. However, both diachronic and synchronic analysis is designed to capture the essence of change over time and its manifestations in immediate past. But the entire study is purely based on the secondary sources of data. The qualitative data, especially the existing literature, both academic and journalistic engagement on *Theyyam* is used to substantiate the issues that I engage. Semiotic analysis of the 'liturgical corpus'; the songs that sung in the context of performance is used to look at how the performing communities are represented, what are the elements of performance that they are incorporating to their everyday life, how the categories are contested, and how the interrelationship is mediated across the caste in north Malabar. The chapters are ordered in such fashion that gives an idea how the issues are interrelated. The second chapter is concerned with the theories of ritual and performance, the third chapter deals with the social corporeality of the *Theyyam* performer in liminal order of *theyyam* and fourth chapter talks about the issue of intersubjectivity in the context of theyyam performing/participating castes, and the last chapter; 'conclusion' makes some comments over the issues of engagements.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Theyyam performance has been subject of intellectual engagement of cultural anthropologist, folklorist, historians, and Marxist. K K N Kurup approached *Theyyam* performance through the social history of North Malabar; he says that it is an "inseparable part of the village folk" and its "fulfill the religious aspirations and aesthetic imagination of the common people". He argues that a "large number of *teyyam* are

known as *Bhagavaties* and they are origin from historical antiquity” of “primitive worship”, and he says this evolution is “continuous process in Indian civilization and it’s traceable in the cult of Teyyam also” He also puts the merging of two “linguistic-cultural complexes” of *Aryan* and *Dravidian*, and their co-existence in creating this unique for cultural practice². Beside this he has dealt with Theyyam as “cult” of hero and their “worship”, and “commemoration”³. Ashley Wayne and Holloman approached *Theyyam* performance in the context of ritual order of theyyam⁴ and its transformation theatre but they missed to incorporate the social transformation in their analysis⁵. Rich Freeman, a cultural anthropologist, has engaged on *Theyyam* for years. His analysis binary treatment of “priesthood” and “possession” as the two separate ways by Hindus mediate the experience of gods, and he exposes the “ritual linkage” between “image worship” and “possession” by the empirical study of ‘theyyam’, his analysis is centered on the category of “high Hindu” and “folk”, he treats *Theyyam* performance as “institutionalized spirit possession”⁶. He focus much more on the complexities of worship, and ritual order of theyyam, his analysis has been framed in a dimension of “possession”, and its ritual content rather than the performative dimension of “spirit possession”⁷. Dilip Menon, historian who brought *Theyyam* in the analysis of larger social history of Malabar, particularly since 20th century. The transformation of agrarian social structure and political structure of the region analyzed brought sweeping changes to “shrines” and “community of worship”. His analysis is focused on the larger social transformation of 20th century Malabar, he concerned with the historical trajectories of certain castes and how “community of worship” centered on *Theyyam* is erased⁸.

² K K N Kurup, *Aryan and Dravidian Elements in Malabar Folklore: A case study of Ramavilliam Kalakam*, Kerala Historical Society, Trivandrum, 1977.

³ K K N Kurup, *The Cult of Teyyam and Hero worship in Kerala*, Indian Publications, Calcutta, 1973.

⁴ Ashley, Wayne)“The Teyyam Kettu of Northern Kerala”, *The Drama Review: TDR*, Vol. 23, No. 2, Performance Theory: Southeast Asia Issue Jun. The MIT Press, 1979

⁵ Ashley, Wayne & Holloman, Regina “From Ritual to Theatre in Kerala”, *The Drama Review*, Vol. 26 No.2 MIT Press, 1982

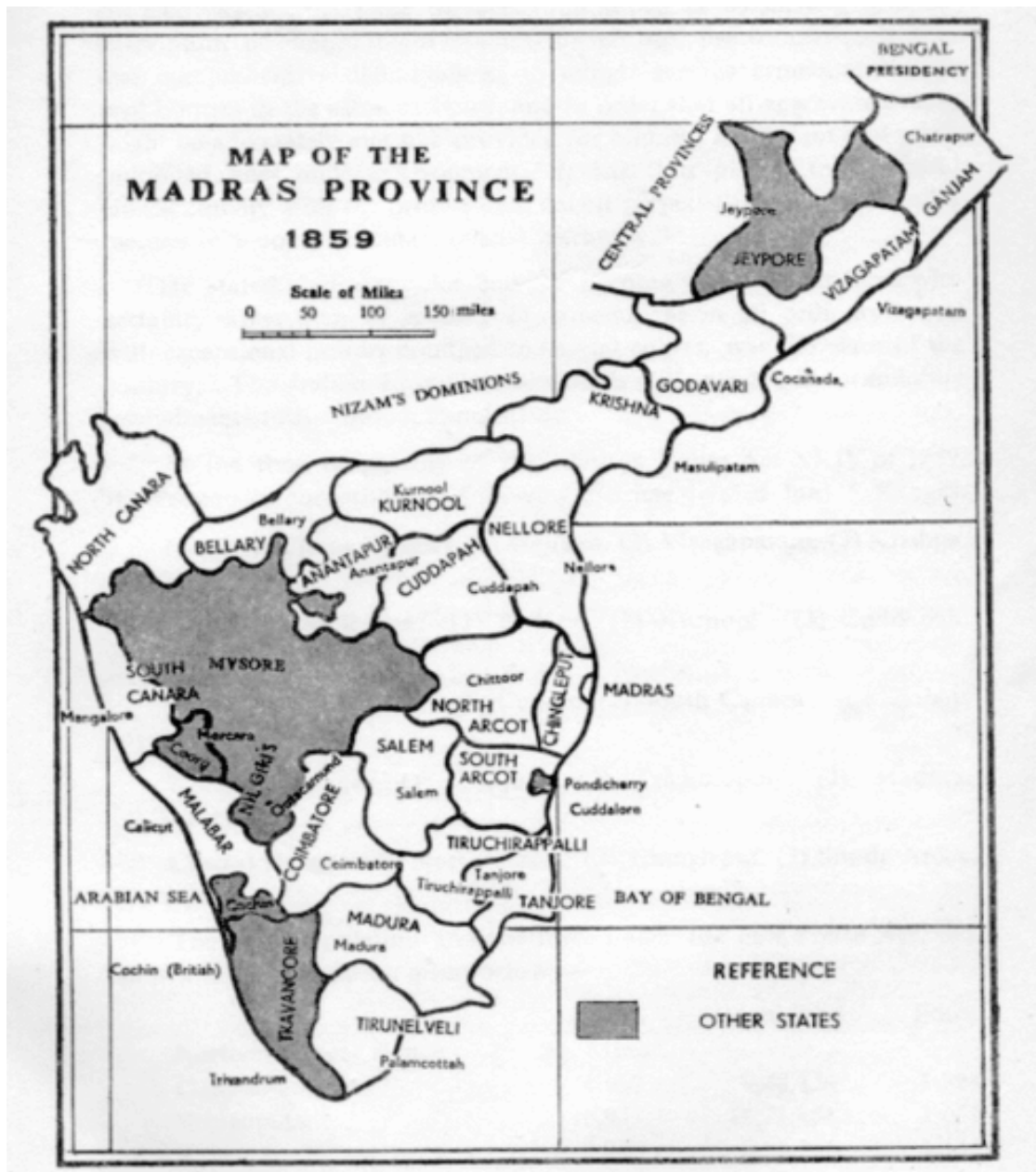
⁶ Freeman, JR, ‘Formalised Possession Among the *Tantris* and *Teyyams* of Malabar’, *South Asia Research*, 18,1,1998.

⁷ Freeman, Rich “Untouchable Bodies of Knowledge in the spirit possession of Malabar” in Axel Michaels & Christoph Wulf in *The images of body in India* (edt) Axel Michaels & Christoph Wulf; Academy Verlag, Berlin, 2009

⁸ Dilip, Menon *Caste, Nationalism, and Communism in South India: Malabar, 1900-1948*, Foundation Books, New Delhi. 1994.

However, he is not concerned about corresponding transformation of *Theyyam* to theatre. J J Pallath studied *Theyyam* especially about the myths and symbols but not the diachronic structure of theyyam⁹. Of course, there are articles and books on *Theyyam* in local language.

MAP: MALABAR IN MADRAS PROVINCE 1859



Source: www.keralaancestry.org

⁹ Pallath, J.J *Theyyam: An analytical Study of the folk culture wisdom and personality* , Indian Social Institute, New Delhi. 1995.

IMAGE OF THEYYAM PERFORMER



A Photograph of Theyyam: by Jasinth M V; 9th May, 2010:Source: www.wikipedia.org.

CHAPTER-2

LOCATING THE CULTURAL PERFORMANCE:

THEYYAMS OF MALABAR

INTRODUCTION

Each cultural system has its own unique practices that are evolving along with the changes in the culture itself. The popular terms associated with these cultural practices often set the analytical categories for academic disciplines. The term 'performance' has become widely popular in the discourse of academia, ranging from arts, folklore, literature, theatre studies, and cultural studies. The popularity as well as the contestation of the term 'performance' has indebted to the theoretical strategies developed around 1960s and 1970s in social sciences particularly in the domain of anthropology and sociology. This popularity among academia has generated a large corpus of writings related to performance from the purview of concerned disciplinary matrices¹⁰. The new turns and twists in the larger discourse of social sciences have opened novel ways of looking at cultural performances.

THE GENEALOGY OF PERFORMANCE STUDIES IN SOCIAL SCIENCES

The theoretical engagements with performative genres across cultures got a new momentum by emergence of a new discipline namely 'Performance Studies'. The merging as well as the demarcation of Performance Studies from/to Social Sciences goes back to 1980; as a new discipline, it encapsulated and set its parameters as well as the domains of engagement by accessing concepts, themes, analytical categories from a number of disciplines which come under the banner of social sciences at large. Richard Schechner, theater anthropologist headed the launching of the new discipline and it is widely acknowledged that the task of 'Performance Studies Researcher' in common including theater specialist, was the *articulation* of both 'the "deep structure" and the 'meaning' unveiled by the instances of performative events¹¹. More precisely, Schechner has listed seven "key areas where performance theory and the social sciences coincide", he included both the 'every day' performances as well as the "structure" of unusual non-everyday performances like "sports, ritual, play, and public political

¹⁰Marvin Carlson, '*Performance: A Critical Introduction*' Routledge Press, New York, 2004, pp, 1,13

¹¹ Shepherd & Wallis: '*Drama/Theatre/Performance: The new Critical Idiom*', Routledge Press, Oxfordshire.UK, 2004 pp, 102.

behaviors”. He asserted that, the “analysis of various modes of communication” and “construction of unified theories of performance”, are the two merging of points of Performance Studies and Social Sciences¹². However, even before the emergence of Performance Studies, those who associated with the disciplines like Anthropology and Sociology had deeply engaged with social practices of exotic cultures as well as familiar cultures. As Performance Studies developed as an academic discipline during 1980s, “sociological models” much more directly influenced it; mainly the works of Erving Goffman put a defining role in the formation of new discipline. Despite the presence of “performative images”, “strategies” and “metaphors” are there in canonical classics like in the writings of Freud, they are rarely cited and less influential in the launching of new discipline¹³. There were theorists who approached ‘performance’ in an unconventional way and engaged critically with the existing anthropological as well as theatrical approaches. Around the turn of the century, Nickolas Evreinoff, Russian playwright and philosopher, came up with the work ‘*The Theatre in Life*’ and he evaded the existing anthropological and theatrical theorists that theatre emerged from ‘ritual base’ or derived or ‘evolved’ from early interest in the aesthetic, expressed at the first in images and dances. However, he argued, “the art of theatre is pre-aesthetic and not aesthetic”, he moved further, “man became first an actor, a player and then came religion” and he made some sociological observation that “we are ‘playing a part’ when we are in society”¹⁴. Later, Goffman came up with much elaborated form of this conceptualization way of looking at social life namely the dramaturgical approach.

Primarily, in this chapter, I would look at sociological as well as anthropological discourses related to ‘cultural performances’. Mainly, the approach of sociologists; Emile Durkheim and Erving Goffman, and social anthropologist Victor Turner, would be surveyed to approach the ‘cultural performance’ that I am engaging at large- ‘*Theyyam*’ of North Malabar, Kerala. Secondly, I would like to describe the ‘structure’ and

¹² Richard Schechner, “Performance & the Social Sciences: Introduction” *The Drama Review: TDR*, 1973, Vol. 17, No. 3, pp. 3-4

¹³ Marvin Carlson, ‘*Performance: A Critical Introduction*’ Routledge Press, New York, 2004, pp, 32

¹⁴ Nickolas Evreinoff, ‘*The Theatre in Life*’ trans. Alexander Nazaroff, New York , Brenetons, 1927, pp.24-25 in Marvin Carlson, ‘*Performance: A Critical Introduction*’ Routledge Press, New York, 2004, pp, 32

‘meaning’ associated with this genre of performance, and its reconfiguration from the dimension of ‘ritual’ (liminal) performance to a theatre (liminoid). The larger socio-historical transformation would be surveyed to contextualize the reconfiguration of the ritual performance.

PERFORMANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF CULTURE

Clifford Geertz approached art forms with its cultural connotations at large. He was much more concerned about the very notion of ‘art’ itself. He engaged with the fact that the non-western popular psyche do not have a meaning for ‘art’ as its western counterpart do have. He says that in non-western society, “people do not talk about it” but people do talk about the “everyday life”¹⁵. He exposes the fact, the art is a part of the ‘every day’ and it does not have a non-dualistic existence. The art/ritual is something that is *performed* with the help of symbols and meanings.

As we know, the concept of ‘performance’ is getting momentum in the discourse of social science. Therefore, it is necessary to look at the concept of performance in the context of culture at first, because, that would enable one to approach its local variations with a broader cultural view. Culture generates its own symbols and meanings through the vivid socio-cultural mechanisms. Cultural symbols are enacted in a social situation as fixed by the culture itself. The social actors perform ‘cultural symbols’ and these “symbolic reference provides the deep background of collective representations for social performance”, and it ranges from “*time immemorial*” myths to invented traditions created right on the spot, from oral traditions to scripts prepared by such specialists as playwrights, and journalists. The ‘performance’ is intrinsically cultural¹⁶. What we can see is that culture is encapsulated in all social acts and no exception in the case of performance.

One can approach the ‘performances’ in Indian context in an innumerable ways. However, it can be reduced into two major category namely “ritual performance” and a “range of performances based on epic and *puranic* texts and culminating in theatrical performances”. In Indian, it is difficult to mark a sharp borderline between ritual and

¹⁵ Clifford Geertz, “Art as a Cultural System” MLN , Vol.91, No. 6 Comparative Literature. Dec-1976.pp-1474

¹⁶ Jeffrey C Alexander, “Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance Between Ritual and Strategy”, Sociological Theory 22: 4 December 2004, pp-530

theatrical performance, because “theatre is often being placed in a ritualized setting and religious ritual often displaying theatrical features of dramatization”¹⁷. The core aspect of the cultural performance is that, it is *ritualized* in unique social context. Most of the performances in India are associated to sacred time and space. The performative efficacy ultimately derives from cultural symbols which people share. The frame, setting, text, context, time, audience and performer, are fixed by culture. The mythical/historical figures are *performatively* represented in front of the audience, who often seek the sacred experience. The ‘representative’ dimension of performances is emphasized in popular culture. The essence of all performative genres in India is nothing but the “manifestation of primal rhythmic energy”. The energy which is represented as ‘*Shiva*’-*Nataraja*, the lord of dancers, it is performed through different names across the continent¹⁸. The dance represents the activities of the energy mainly, creation and destruction.

Culture has preserved the accounts and prescription for performance of text. It is obvious that the *Vedic* texts transmitted a literature containing liturgical texts and performance manuals. Besides these genres, the popular genres of performance, and the ‘possession ritual’, are widespread across south Asia. The ‘demonic’ and ‘divine’ are *incorporated* in human beings, they are often minimal in performative features but highly elaborated in theatrical events. The third major genre, the theatrical performance that is categorically treated as ‘acting out of the story’, is mainly related to epic and *puranas* in a vernacular fashion. The Sanskritic theoretical treatise such as *Natyasastra* and the *Dasarupa* point out the fact that classical Indian theatre was ‘non-ritualistic and illusionistic’ in nature¹⁹.

LOCATING ‘PERFORMANCE’:

THE DISCOURSE OF SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Modernity unleashed a number of episteme, and changed the way human beings perceive the social world, which they collectively share and identify. The large terrain of intellectual discourses was polyphonic and diverse while is oriented to the concerned camps. The enterprise of Sociology, as child of modernity, engaged with the notion of

¹⁷ Veena Das *Handbook of Indian Sociology* OUP, New Delhi, 2007, pp- 244

¹⁸ Ananda Coomaraswamy *The Dance of Shiva*, Asia Publishing House, Calcutta, 1952, pp.83, 87

¹⁹ Veena Das *Handbook of Indian Sociology* OUP, New Delhi, 2007, pp- 244

'social' and its vivid dimensions across cultures, both the so called 'rudimentary' as well as 'advanced' cultures and the social practices were theoretically approached, and located²⁰. The emergence of large volumes of writings; particularly the historically contingent transformation of western society, was the specific feature of classical sociology. At the same time, the 'archaic' and most 'elementary' forms of 'social' were one of the key issues of classical sociology. The researchers set out their voyages in search of 'rudimentary' forms of social life which is uncontaminated by modernity, to get a better picture of both 'archaic', 'traditional' societies as well as 'civilized' and modern society.

Emile Durkheim, the French sociologist associated with the positivist tradition, approached the ritual performance among the Australian aboriginal tribes and came up with much celebrated work; *'The Elementary Forms of Religious Life'*, by which he challenged the existing theories of religion and put some immense sociological insight over several human conditions²¹. The bifurcation of the social world into two spheres, namely the domain of 'sacred' and the domain of 'profane' and his deep engagement with the social practices associated with 'sacred' set new facets to the sociology of religion. He showed that 'totemism' was the most elementary form of religion, totem was the progenitor of the clan and a collective self representation. He substantiated the existence of vivid rites like "representative" and "commemorative" in nature among the Arunda of Australia. Durkheim's approach on religion of early societies transformed the existing paradigms on religion and the ritual practices of the archaic societies were approached by the social anthropologist with a new vitality. Mainly, it caused a large implication for the later discourses about ritual performance in 'anthropology'²². The form of collective rituals, degree of integration and representations, and how it was related to the larger structure of society, were the key issues of Durkheim's interests on rudimentary nature of religion in archaic societies.

²⁰ Larry J.Ray, *Theorizing classical sociology*, Open University Press, Buckingham, ,1999, pp.2,3

²¹ Anthony Giddens , *'Durkheim'*, Fontana Press , London , 1978, pp. 81

²² Tim Olaveson "Collective Effervescence and Communitas: Processual Models of Ritual and Society in Emile Durkheim and Victor Turner", *Dialectical Anthropology*: 26: 89-124 Kluwer Academic Publishers. Netherlands. 2001, pp 89

Erving Goffman, who introduced the ‘dramaturgical’ approach, is very useful, and can be located easily in the discourse of ritual-performance in sociology. The conceptual apparatuses and model of analysis put forwarded by Goffman set new horizons for sociology. He conceptualized ‘human interaction’ in a different way. His primary concern was to examine the link between “interaction order” and “other forms of social organizations”, and “procedures and practices” by which people organized and ‘presented’ themselves²³. The genealogy of the Goffman’s standpoint over human interaction rituals goes back to Durkheimian positions and both thinkers’ position resemble in many ways. Collins argues that his “core intellectual vision, is a continuation of the Durkheimian tradition”²⁴. Both these sociologists engaged with ‘ritually performed’ and ‘symbolically enacted’ behavior of human beings.

When we look at the domain of anthropologists, they have approached performances from the purview of “what it can show about other human institutions such as religion, political life, gender relations, and ethnic identity”²⁵. But the symbolic anthropologist, Victor Turner, who directly engaged with ‘ritual-performances’ of vivid societies, requires much attention due to his better articulation and his engagement with the functional aspect of ritually performed and symbolically enacted practices which happen in liminal time. His conceptual tools and his approach to human symbolic behavior are very relevant in explaining the ritual practices in highly stratified societies. Goffman used Turner’s concept of “frame” to explicate the “relationship between performance events and normal life”²⁶. Therefore, the discursive terrains of various disciplines, which engage with human cultural practices, share genealogical ties so that the intellectual domains are interlinked.

PERFORMANCE:

EMILE DURKHEIM, ERVING GOFFMAN, AND VICTOR TURNER

²³ Paul Drew & Anthony Wootton, *Erving Goffman: Exploring the Interaction order*, Polity Press, 1988, pp.6,7

²⁴Randal Collin “ Theoretical Continuities in Goffman’s Work” in Paul Drew & Anthony Wootton, *Erving Goffman: Exploring the Interaction order*, (edit) Polity Press, 1988, pp.43

²⁵ William O. Beeman, “The Anthropology of Theatre and Spectacle” , *Annual Review of Anthropolgy*, Vol.22, 1993, pp 371

²⁶ *Ibid* pp-37

The enterprise of sociology as well as anthropology is polyphonic and dynamic, which are akin to changes and adaptations. New issues, themes, concepts are launched along with advancement of disciplines. The concept of 'performance' as its "restricted meaning" is a new theme in the lexicons of sociology, which is "derived from the turn of the century"²⁷. However, the concept of performance was present even in the debate of classical sociology. As I mentioned earlier, the ritually enacted collective practices were the subjects of sociological as well as anthropological exploration. We have already seen that, the engagement of sociologist and anthropologists are interlinked and mutually enriched.

EMILE DURKHEIM:

'COLLECTIVE EFFERVESCENCE' AND 'DRAMATIC REPRESENTATION'

Rituals in early societies were the subject of sociological explication; Durkheim set a new paradigm for the study of ritual behavior and he wrote much about the sociological relevance of ritual. He did not engage ritual from the purview of 'performance' but from the vantage point of 'ritual' only, which happen in the domain of 'sacred'. However "all performance has its core a ritual action", 'ritual' is something that is *performed*²⁸. Even though Durkheim did not apparently mention the 'performative' dimension of ritual, he the 'performative' aspect of ritual was not completely omitted. He much more concerned about the macro structure of the society; organizing axioms, collective representations. However, he was aware the 'context' of such ritually performed events in 'archaic' societies. He mentions about the "rites" which are symbolically enacted.

Durkheim mentions about the two distinct phases that the life of Australian societies passes. The two phases, the phase of "broken up", and the phase of "concentration". His analysis of ritual behavior is centered on this phase of "concentration" which the clan celebrate the "religious ceremony" or "*corrobbori*"²⁹. In the "corrobbori", "when they once come together the, a sort of electricity is formed" which "quickly transport them to an extraordinary degree of exaltation" and "every sentiment expressed finds a place without resistance in all the minds", people are "removed from their ordinary conditions

²⁷ Maria Shevtsova, "The Sociology of the Theatre, Part Three: Performance"

²⁸ Richard Schechner "Victor Turner's Last Adventure" , , in *Anthropology of Performance*, Victor Turner, Paj Publication , New York , 1986, pp-7

²⁹ Emile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* , Translated by Joseph Ward Swain, London, 1968, pp. 215

of life” and are taken into “outside of their ordinary morals”³⁰. Durkheim’s view on ritual behavior comes out of the study of these “rites” which happens in the “effervescent social environment”. During this environment, people reach in a “state of exaltation”, “a man does not recognize himself any longer”, the paraphernalia like “decoration” and “masks” associated with the performance of these rites transform the collectivity. Durkheim calls this experience as “interior transformation”; the process by which the whole members of clan transformed into a ‘new world’ which was entirely different from the ethos of everyday. The “collective effervescence” ritual ceremonies, which are ‘performed’ in the second phase, dominated by the ‘sacred’³¹. There are a number of social situations, he puts from the ‘archaic’ societies from Australia that confirm his arguments on rituals. He goes further looking at the different rites like “*representative*” and “*commemorative*” in nature among these societies, which was observed the best among ‘Warramunga’. Among this clan, each member is “thought to be descended from a single ancestor”, the ceremony of ‘Warramunga’ has the “object of commemorating and representing the mythical history of this ancestor”, the ritual “consists solely in collecting the past and, in a way, making it present by means of a veritable *dramatic representation*”³². Durkheim says that the ceremony is not considered an incarnation of the ancestor. But rather, he says, “he is an actor playing a role”; primarily these ‘dramatic representations’ are set to ‘multiply’ the totem of the concerned clan, he says, “these dramas are rites”, here the “*past* is represented” to “fix it more firmly in the mind” and the collective symbols are ritually and dramatically enacted and performed , thereby the “social group reaffirms itself periodically”³³. Although Durkheim never talks apparently about ‘performance’, it is clear that he mentioned about the ‘*performative*’ aspects of rituals. He was quite conscious about the ‘dramatically’ represented, ‘symbolically’ enacted, and ‘ritually performed’ events among archaic societies.

ERVING GOFFMAN:

PERFORMANCE THROUGH THE ‘FRAMES’ OF ‘DRAMATURGY’

³⁰ Ibid pp-216

³¹ Ibid- 218,226

³² Ibid pp -372

³³ Ibid: 372, 373, 376, 387

Erving Goffman, who has written extensively about the nature and pattern of human interaction in different social situations, requires much attention in the study of 'performance', because his metaphorical conceptualization of human interaction brings insights over the study of '*performative*' genres. He is primarily concerned about "connection between the interaction order and other forms of social organizations"³⁴. The "ritual order" that is embedded in all human action was the "key to nature of interaction order" which he takes up, he asserts it in two ways; firstly the "moral character of interaction", secondly the "standardized character of interaction", more precisely, the "ritualization"³⁵. However, unlike Durkheim, Goffman directly engages with the term 'performance' itself.

He defines 'performance' as "all activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants", and he takes two things primarily; the 'performer', and "those who contribute performance as the audience, observers, or co-participants". He says that, in the performance a "pre-established pattern of action which is unfolded", which may be "presented" or "played"³⁶. He uses the term 'performance' in an elaborate way, he gives much space to social situation/occasion, where the performance is occurred, and the 'audience' is considered as genuine part of performance event. According to him, 'performance' is an outcome of a series of events that "transforms an individual into a stage performer"³⁷. However, the "performer is an individual" who performs the "activity" to a "particular set of observers" in "*front*", which he defines as "expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance" for which a "*setting*" is required. The "*setting*" consists of "furniture, decor" and so on, where the performer is staged, some time the "performer momentarily become highly sacred" then the *setting* may follow the performer. He uses the concept of '*front*' in a wide manner; he specifies it again as the "*personal front*", to denote the attributes that are more fixed to the performer like "insignia of office or rank; clothing; sex, age and racial

³⁴ Paul Drew & Anthony Wootton, *Erving Goffman: Exploring the Interaction order*, Polity Press, 1988, pp.4

³⁵ Robin Williams, "Understanding Goffman's Methods", in Paul Drew & Anthony Wootton, *Erving Goffman: Exploring the Interaction order*, (edit) Polity Press, 1988, pp.67

³⁶ Erving Goffman, *Presentation of Self in Everyday life*, Penguin Books, London, UK, 1972, pp.26,27.

³⁷ Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, Northeastern University Press, New York, US, 1986, 124

characteristics...bodily gestures”³⁸. In the process of the ‘performance’, as he said, a “pre-established pattern of action”, is overtly put into action by the bodily movements and signs, he states about the need of “*dramatic realization*” of certain activities, which he “wishes to convey” to express that he “mobilize his activity” during the interaction. According to him this process of *dramatization* is “*instrumentally essential*” for the “completion of core task of the status are at the same time wonderfully adapted, from the point of view of communication, as a means of vividly conveying the qualities and attributes claimed by the performer”³⁹. The performer manages his/her ‘personal front’ to ‘dramatize’ the content and structure of the performance. He uses the concept of ‘*front region*’ and ‘*back region*’ to denote the spaces where the event is performed and prepared respectively; the activity of the performer in the ‘front region’ “maintains and embodies certain standard”. Because the “pre-established pattern of action” is presented as ‘performance’ to audience in ‘front region’ only, at the same time in ‘back region’ the whole process of performance is ‘*pre-established*’. Here the “costumes and other parts of *personal front* are adjusted” and “bodies are cleansed and clothed”, and the control and manipulation of the region act as “measure of audience segregation”⁴⁰. In his ‘*Frame Analysis*’, his much later work, he mentions about the use of ‘*frames*’ to comprehend the social behavior, by which he meant that “isolate some basic frame works” or “elements” of social situations organized by some societal principles. He approach vivid social situations as well theatrical performative events through ‘frames’, he talks about the strict demarcation between the “staging area” and “audience region” to “*frame*” the *interaction order* between the “performers” and “audience”. He says that the “first issue is not interaction but frame”⁴¹. According to him, the “*theatrical frame*” is not a simple benign activity; it requires a “corpus of transcription practices must be involved for transforming a strip of offstage, real activity into a strip of staged being”; primarily to stage an event “an elevated space” is required, where the characters are staged and “dramatic interaction” is set to happen⁴². Goffman often engages with the different social situations

³⁸ Erving Goffman, *Presentation of Self in Everyday life*, Penguin Books , London, UK, 1972, pp.32-34

³⁹ Ibid pp -43

⁴⁰ Ibid: 114,137,

⁴¹ Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, Northeastern University Press, , New York, US, 1986, 127

⁴² Ibid pp -138

metaphorically, that gives a unique way to conceptualize the *performative* dimensions of 'everyday' behaviors as well staged 'non-everyday' behaviors.

When we look at the Goffman's approach to 'performance', it is clear that, he takes up the term in a broad way. He engaged more on the 'performative' aspects of everyday situations than the 'performance' itself. He takes up the 'ritual' aspect of everyday 'interaction order' and "symbolic component" that are embedded in most of the every micro situation like "corrective process". The offended would give a chance to the offender to re-establish the ritual equilibrium, the phases of "corrective process" go in a sequential order where the party or individual from the side of "offender" as well as "offended" would go in a phase consist of "challenge, offering, acceptance, and thanks"⁴³. He contrasted to Durkheim in many ways, he was never concerned about whether it happens in the 'everyday' realm or 'non-every day' realm. He was not much more concerned about the 'spectacular' and 'eventful' dimensions of ritual performance. He concerned about how social situations and the organizing principles of society, *performatively* reproduced in society even through micro-social settings.

VICTOR TURNER:

'PERFORMAMNCE' FROM 'LIMINAL' TO 'LIMINOID'

Symbolic Anthropology approaches cultural practices in a unique way, which is different from sociological perspectives. Clifford Geertz and Victor Turner are the two giant figures in Symbolic Anthropology. Both of them primarily concerned with operations of 'symbols' and their 'meaning' both in everyday and non-everyday rituals. However, the striking difference that sets apart these camps is their orientations and association with classical sociology. Max Weber primarily influenced the camp headed by Geertz. Geertz represents the transformation upon the earlier American Anthropology, which is much more concerned with operation of "culture". Whereas Emile Durkheim influenced Victor Turner, and he represents the transformation of earlier British Anthropology concerned mainly with the operation of "society"⁴⁴. His association with the British Anthropology and its structural-functionalist traditions shaped his theoretical articulations and

⁴³ Erving Goffman, *Interaction Rituals: An Essay on Face -to-Face Behavior*, Penguin, England, 1972,pp 19,22

⁴⁴ Sherry B. Ortner "Theory in Anthropology since the sixties", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Cambridge University Press, Vol .26, No.1,1984, pp-128

engagements with the symbolic practices. As far as Turner is concerned, symbols are not vehicles of culture or ‘analytic windows’ onto “culture” as Geertz says, but Turner calls them as “operators” in social process. When these operating symbols are put together in certain arrangements in certain context (ritual context), where the social transformations are occurred, they move social actors from one status to next and they often resolve the social contradictions. Turner engaged with the ritual orders of among the Ndembu of North Africa for a long time and came up with amazing concepts and theories related to ritual behavior and its collective as well as individual dimensions⁴⁵. His concepts and theories are emerged out of long anthropological encounters with innumerable cultural practices across societies. He takes the symbolic actions in a unique way and he argues that the “cultural performance”, the “dominant genre”, have peculiar relationship with the “everyday mundane socio-cultural processes”. He asserts the point that this ‘relationship’ is not “unidirectional”, and they are not mere reflection of social system or cultural configuration but they are “reciprocal” and “reflexive”, and they are often a “critique, direct or veiled, of social life it grows out of , an evaluation of the way society handles history”⁴⁶. He perceives society as two successive phases, which he calls “structure” and “anti-structure”. He states, “society seems to be a *process* rather than a *thing*, a dialectical process with successive phases of structure and *communitas*”. He substantiates his concept of “anti-structure” by demarcating its distinction from structure. According to him, structure “depends upon the binary opposition” like ‘inferior’ and ‘superior’, whereas anti-structure “abolishes all divisiveness, all discrimination, binary”. He confined to ‘meta’ structural modality of social relationship, which he calls “anti-structure”. The ritual process which occurs in a symbolic order are analyzed, but the symbolic order and actual order are mutually linked, the exchanging of roles and its performance in the symbolic order come out of experiences of people in the normal life⁴⁷. According to Turner, anti-structure consists of “liminality” and “communitas”. The term *communitas*, he means “anti-structural in the sense that they are undifferentiated, egalitarian,” relationships. It “liberates them from conformity to general norms, though

⁴⁵ Ibid pp-131

⁴⁶ Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance*, PAJ Publication, New York, 1986, pp-22

⁴⁷ Victor Turner, *Dramas, Field, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, Cornell University Press, London, 1974, pp-274-278

this is necessarily a transient condition if society is to continue to operate in an orderly fashion”⁴⁸. He regards the liminality as “time and place of withdrawal from normal modes of social action, it can be seen as potentially a period of scrutiny of the central values and axioms of the culture in which it occurs”⁴⁹. He distinguishes two types of liminality; first, “the liminality that characterizes “rituals of status elevation”, in which the ritual subject is elevated into the higher status, for example rites of passage. Secondly the liminality frequently found in cyclical ritual, usually of a collective kind, here the “groups or categories of persons who habitually occupy low status positions in the social structure are positively enjoined to exercise ritual authority over their superiors”, but it is confined in the period of 'anti-structure' only. He calls such rites as “ritual of status reversal”⁵⁰. He brings another important concept, what he calls “social dramas”. According to Victor Turner, “social dramas” are “empirical unit of social process, the inner realities can be substantiated through analyzing these ‘social drama’, or “temporal structures”. Social dramas are not product of the “instinct” but of the “models” and “metaphors” that are carried in the actors mind. If we penetrate into these “social process”, we would get the “darker strata of the unconscious”, the “models” that people “would like to do”⁵¹. Social dramas, the “units of aharmonic or disharmonic process”, which arises in the conflict conditions. They have four main phases of public action. First, there is “*breach of the regular*”, which is occurred between persons or groups within same system of social relations, such *breach* is apparent due to the “non-fulfillment of the crucial norms” which controls the interaction between two parties. This *breach* leads to the second stage, which is characterized by *crisis*. During this period, there is a dramatic spread of tensions between the dissenting parties or individuals and those who regulate the normative social structure. The last stage of this phase ends by “*escalation of crisis*”. The crisis is resolved in the third stage, which Turner entitles as “*redressive action*” stage. In the “redressive action” stage, the “structurally representative

⁴⁸ Ibid: 274

⁴⁹ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* Aldine De Gruyter, New York, 1968, pp- 167

⁵⁰ Ibid: 167

⁵¹ Victor Turner, *Dramas, Field, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, Cornell University Press, London, 1974, pp-34,36,37,43

members of the system” are brought into action, the “performance of the public ritual”. In this phase that the “pragmatic techniques and symbolic action reach at its fullest expression”. As a result of this liminal attempt at redressive action, the cycle moves to the fourth stage, in which the dissident behavior either is *reintegrated* into the normative social structure or permanent rift between the two contesting parties, one party gets “secession” from the rest⁵². According to him, the classificatory schemes of the society are manifested in a different way in 'anti-structure', the categories among the people are activated differently. The identity of the actor in symbolic order depends where he/she is located in 'structure'. People cannot perform the same role in symbolic orders. It is predetermined by the identity of the actor in mundane life, that identity is being changed temporarily or permanently in the last phase of "social drama". Because the crisis has to be resolved through "separation" or 'temporary escalation of status' through "ritual of status reversal". Therefore, 'structure' and 'anti-structure' are not independent domains of operations. Later, he argues "social drama" is the primary source of all cultural performance, and it acts as "processes of regularization" to "fix the social reality"⁵³. He continued his keen observation over the symbolic order and he tracks down its further evolution; he puts many examples for the changing of ritual, precisely losing of its symbolic content by the larger transformation of culture, from the agrarian social structure to industrial social structure. He says that most of agrarian and tribal societies, their work and leisure are hardly distinguishable. He points out that among these societies, “ritual is both earnest and playful”. He claims that modernity and its new cultural configurations have affected the cultural performance and its vivid genres. These genres have undergone a shift that the ritual content has been taken away and a ‘leisure content’, which gives much prevalence to the dimension of entertainment, has replaced it⁵⁴. These cultural performances often provided a space for the downtrodden and the oppressed to articulate their collective self, which was historically oppressed, but the paradox is that it reproduced and sustained the social equilibrium. The “liminal” phases

⁵² Victor Turner, *Dramas, Field, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, Cornell University Press, London, 1974, pp 38-42

⁵³ Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance*, PAJ Publication, New York, 1986, pp-79, 92,95

⁵⁴ Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*, PAJ Pubcation, New York, 1982,pp-31

and phenomena have reproduced the “meaning” and it generated the established cultural subsystems. These ‘liminal’ properties superficially inverted the already established and consolidated “specific cultural cosmos” of the concerned society. He describes the emergence of “liminoid” along with the evolution of structure of the society. He puts the basic features of his notion of ‘liminoid’; it flourishes in societies with “organic solidarity. It tends to be more individual oriented though they often have collective or mass effects, it operate apart from the central economic and political process, it is more “profane” than sacred, its symbols are more closer to “personal-psychological than to the objective-social typological pole”, “it’s more likely a commodity”⁵⁵. The ‘liminoid’ phenomena primarily happen at the ‘free time’ where the people are free from their work space and seek leisure. Though ‘liminoid’ is marked off from ‘liminal’ in many ways, Turner says that “the seed of limnoid” is secreted by liminal phenomena and “its waiting only the major changes in the socio-cultural context to set its growing”, the historical transformation of agrarian and tribal societies witnesses process. Turner claims that this process of change often happens in a time when the people reject the “normative constraints” and they occupy a sequence of social status, enacting multiplicity of social roles, and being acutely conscious of membership in some corporate group such as family lineage, clan, tribe, nation”⁵⁶. According to Victor Turner, the trajectory of cultural performance historically contingent and it derives from the normative ethos of the culture and evolve along with the larger transformation of society and culture.

APPROACHING CULTURAL PRACTICES IN INDIA: THE ‘VISUAL TURN’

The historical specificities of India have a dominant role in shaping the direction of academic discourses. The unique practices associated to Indian culture captivated the eye of alien observers. Often they objectively focused on what they “saw” and been “told”; this tradition was being followed for a long time and often their description was contaminated by their association with the top of the hierarchy, primarily through the

⁵⁵ Ibid: 53-58

⁵⁶ Ibid: 44

“conversation” with Brahmins or mere articulation out of being a “eyewitness”⁵⁷. Three major approaches to Indian society, developed around later eighteenth and early nineteenth century, can be categorized by their inclination to their sources as well as their purpose as “orientalist, “missionary” and “administrative”. These groups often obsessed with the “text and their content” in depth analysis, they rarely engaged with the functioning of ‘every day’ social context which far from the text, this process of “study of text with cooperation with pundits” sets the upcoming parameters to discern the cultural practices in India⁵⁸. This obsession with ‘texts’ had far-reaching consequences; this academic discourse created the notion of Indian society as “static, timeless” this deeply rooted image obscured the contrasting situation of “actual behavior”, and the empirical performative facets of ‘texts’. Much later, the administrative official’s engagements with social practices followed the footsteps of oriental scholars and missionary activists; for instance, they conceptualized ‘caste system’ as a “*thing*” which is, “concrete” and “measurable”, entity rather than a socially constructed and sustained through the ritual domination. The customs and traditions are “reported and studied out of their context”⁵⁹. The later engagements with ‘caste system’ itself shows that the depth of early textual orientations had an axiomatic role in setting the direction of further engagements upon cultural practices. The call for reconciliation of empirical situations and textual categories, for instance, Dumont’s approach on caste system, was never liberated from the essentialist claims of orientalist; who always created a deeply rooted inner thread that demarcated ‘alien observers’ from the ‘other’. ‘*Homo-hierarchics*’, which often sets the caste system as the foundation stone of Hindu society. Dumont’s tradition *reconciled* the major features of British structural- functionalism as well as French structuralism, which used the orientalist and indological comprehensions of Indian society; primarily derived out of textual imaginations, and the genealogy of the concepts like ‘*whole*’ can be traced

⁵⁷ Bernard S Cohen “Notes on the History of the Study of Indian Society”, in ‘*Structure and Change in India Society*’ (edt) Milton Singer & Bernard S Cohen, Paper Back Printing, Published by Chicago Press, 2007, pp,3

⁵⁸ Ibid-6,7

⁵⁹ Ibid pp-15,17

to the “archaeology of modern Western ideology”⁶⁰. This deeply rooted ‘textual fixation’ of oriental scholars as well as indologists, were questioned by later ‘turns’ and twists in ‘Studying Hinduism’.

The point of departure that challenged the textual domination and forwarded an alternative to textual interpretation as source of understanding Hinduism, it goes back to studying ‘religious imagery’; the “hermeneutics of the visible” of both classical images as well as the “ordinary images of people’s traditions, rites, and daily activities”⁶¹. This ‘visual turn’ requires much attention due to its relevance in deciphering the essence of culture, because the visual culture that is prevalent today shares a deep rooted association with the historical antiquity of the subcontinent⁶². This ‘visual turn’ primarily focused on “Hindu art” which is manifested through the sacred spheres. It unleashed a wide range of new spectrums, which can correct the “distorted perspectives that has persisted in two hundred years of indological scholarship owing to overreliance on Brahmanical texts for interpreting Hinduism” and the Hindu art has been profoundly associated with the sacred avenues and primarily derived out of the religious action and devotion. This ‘visual turn’ speaks volumes than the textual modes of understanding because; “it directly express the spiritual feeling of a broad spectrum of society” including those, who were excluded by early scholars, who were primarily interested in the texts⁶³. This turn had a profound impact in generating multiple dimensions and perspectives in the discourses on Indian society. It has been accompanied by an understanding that “visual is constitutive of social and political realities” and it’s “not merely illustrative or reflective of them”. This turn “signifies that the visual can no longer be treated -as mere supplement to knowledge gleaned from written texts” but “it provides

⁶⁰ Arjun Appadurai, “Putting Hierarchy in Its Place” *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Place and Voice in Anthropological Theory, Blackwell Publishing on behalf of the American Anthropological Association, Feb., 1988, pp. 36-49.

⁶¹ Eck Dianna L. *Darsana: Seeing the divine images in India*, Chambersburg: Anima, 1985, in ‘Studying Hinduism: Key concepts and Methods (ed) Sushil Mittal & Gene Thursby’, Routledge, New York, 2007, pp-3

⁶² Rawson “Early Art and Architecture” in *A Cultural History of India* (ed) A L Basham, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, pp-197

⁶³ Heather Elgood, “Art”, in ‘Studying Hinduism: Key concepts and Methods (ed) Sushil Mittal & Gene Thursby’, Routledge, New York, 2007, pp-4

the ground for the generation of theories that questions the primacy of the written word in outstanding of the past and present” and often it unpacks the “complex interplay between visuality, apparatus, institutions, discourses, bodies and figurality”⁶⁴. Thus, the ‘visual turn’ unleashed immense new possibilities in ‘Studying Hinduism, and the early studies on Hinduism were reconsidered in light of this ‘visual turns’. From this juncture, I would look at one of the ‘cultural performances’ of Kerala, known as “theyyam”.

THEYYAMS OF NORTH MALABAR: A BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Theyyam, one of the ritual performances associated to “folk” Hinduism in northern part of Malabar, Kerala. The etymology of the word ‘*Theyyam*’ or ‘*Theyyattam*’ shows its sacred and divine content; ‘theyyam’ means ‘*daivam*’ or ‘god’ and ‘*aattam*’ means dance, so it literally means ‘*the dance of god*’. The village folk in the concerned geographical domain are associated with this genre of cultural performance. The existing anthropological as well as historical endeavours have generated a few works upon ‘*Theyyam*’. These contestations have explicated this genre all about but at the level of concerned disciplinary matrices only. They have emphasized on some aspects that are relevant to them for example the ‘ritual’ aspects of ‘theyyam’. The contestation is often directed by the interest of the researcher and his orientation to the concerned disciplines that he associated.

It is a “tradition of worshipping” the “local deities of northern Kerala” through the “costumed spirit possession and dance” and it is associated to ‘folk’ Hinduism “found anywhere in India”, and it is the way of “folk Hinduism” to “come to terms with caste Hinduism”, the local folks “ritually enact their life” in the course of this performance. It is an “ancient and cognate pattern of *institutionalized spirit possession*” where ‘gods’ are danced as a part of annual festivals⁶⁵. The location of performers in social structure and attribution of divinity to the performers are other two important features of the performance. Traditionally, the performers of the ‘theyyam’ come from specific communities/caste of the area. There are specific ‘*Theyyams*’ which are performed only

⁶⁴ Sumati Ramaswamy, ‘Beyond Appearances? Visual Practices and Ideologies in Modern India’, Sage Publication, New Delhi, 2003, p. xiv

⁶⁵ Rich Freeman “The Teyyam Tradition of Kerala” in *Blackwell Companion to Hinduism* (Edt) Garin Flood, Blackwell Companion Publishing Ltd, Darya Gang, New Delhi, 2003, pp-307

by specific communities/castes. It is also said that “*theyyam is a form of worship consisting of special combination of ritual and art forms: dance and drama*”, the “Pulayas of north Malabar”, they are the performers of this particular genre of performance. The “manifestation of spirits in subhuman animate and inanimate beings, legendary figures of great valour, exotic powers and endowments, are appeased and honoured”⁶⁶. The dimensions of cult, heroism and ‘spirit-worship’ have been given importance in the context of larger historical trajectory of the region by some scholars. Krupu writes, “the heroes who once lived among them organized festivals incorporating ritualism, vocal and instrumental music, dance, and painting” and “one common feature of this folk-cult is that even the spirit are attributed with godliness”⁶⁷. It’s a “popular cult in Malabar which has become inseparable part of the religion of village folk”. As a “living cult with centuries-old tradition, ritual and custom it embraces almost all castes, classes, castes and division of Hindu community in this region” and later “different branches of Brahmanical religion such as *sakatism*, *Vaisnavism* and *saivism* now dominate the cult of theyyam”⁶⁸. This genre of ritual performance has multiple dimensions in terms of its association with the mythical heroes, its participants, spaces of performance, aesthetic sensibility, and its *liminal* nature. In this *liminal* performance “the spirit of the dead hero is propitiated by the folk dancer and during the hours of his serene performance, he is treated as a deity by the village folk” and the performance usually happens in the “shrines” known as *kavu*, the sacred groves which are constructed in same architectural style in Malabar⁶⁹. The ritual embodiment of the spirit of the ancestral hero/heroine is one main stages of this performance. The performer itself embodies the spirit and he becomes the ‘god’. The diachronically generated social structure and its manifested practices have a deep impact over the structure of this ritual performance as well as its later adaptation and evolvement. The “Aryan colonization” of the northern part of Malabar around tenth century and thereby adaptation and incorporation of new

⁶⁶ J J Pallath , *Theyyam: An analytical Study of the folk culture wisdom and personality* , Indian Social Institute, New Delhi, 1995, pp-4

⁶⁷ KKN Kurup, *The Cult of Teyyam and Hero Worship in Kerala*, Indian Publications, Calcutta, 1973, pp.17-18.

⁶⁸ KKN Kurup ‘*Aryan and Dravidian Elements in Malabar Folklore: A case study of Ramavilliam Kalakam*’, Kerla Historical society, Trivandrum, 1977, pp-5

⁶⁹ KKN Kurup, *The Cult of Teyyam and Hero Worship in Kerala*, Indian Publications, Calcutta, 1973, pp.19-20

elements in existing cosmological and metaphysical worldview constructed a new social order. The primitive worship of heroes and spirits were dominated by “new temple and regular *pooja* (offerings)”, but old “folk cult” and “spirit worship remained as a system of tradition”⁷⁰. This genre of ritual performance is usually held during the months of November to June in either private or community shrines. A divinity is created through a wide range of aesthetic and theatrical strategies like drumming, singing, processions, feasting and the manipulation of various paraphernalia such as flags, lamps, swords, and shields, the performer always belong to the male members of the specific lower caste communities, namely *Malayan, Vannan, Kopalan, and Velan*. The structure of *Theyyam* performance is sequential, the gestures, movements, and paraphernalia, are displayed in a prescribed order. Primarily it goes through six sequential order; “*invocation of the deity*”, it means that a small “invocatory prayer” is recited by the performer in front of the shrine, “*recitation of deity’s history-tottam*”, then the “commencement of the singing of the deity’s history”, the singing of the text which describes the myths behind the origin of concerned *Theyyam*. In this stage the performer is given a larger banana leaf from the local lower caste priest who presides the function, he “passes the lighted wicks over the idol of *Theyyam*” often “metal swords or wooden stool” to possess the power. Third stage “*donning the costume and Application of face make up*”, after the singing the *thottam*, the mythical history of the deity, the performer goes back to dressing room to put the costumes and make up, the final stage of transformation to ‘god’. This process of painting makes the performer identical to the small miniature idols, throughout the process of costuming and make up, the singers recite the songs. The next stage, the “*possession and dance*”, the performer is escorted to shrine and he is seated there. Then a mirror would be given to *theyyam*, he continues to shake his legs and arms intensively along with the background drumming, he would say to the people that “I am no longer seeing my reflection but the face of god peering back at me through the mirror”, that moment he completely loses his self and he embodies the god/spirit. Then the next stage, that “*first person recitation and blessings*”, people take blessings and *theyyam* assures that he would provide prosperity and security at the time of crisis it goes on for a long time and finally the performance ends with “*removing the crown*”, he removes his

⁷⁰ Ibid pp-21

headdress⁷¹. The caste structure has a significant role in the performance of ‘*Theyyam*’. Any study of ‘theyyam’ performance requires understanding of the caste structure of Malabar. In Malabar, most of the castes have an association with the ‘*theyyamkettu*’ or ‘theyyam performance’, for convenience, we can simply categorize them into two; the “*theyyattakkar*” ‘performing castes’ and “*theyyaradhakar*”, ‘worshiping castes’⁷². The ritually higher castes like ‘*Nayars*’ sponsor and participates in the performance. Before the temple entry legislation in 1936, ritually lower, the ‘performing castes’ had no access to the temples in Kerala. ‘*Theyya-kavu*’ the performing place of theyyam, where the most of the theyyams were performed, was the only source of ‘divinity’ to these ‘untouchable’, “polluting” castes⁷³. The caste structure, and the roles provided by the caste, operates throughout the performance of ‘theyyam/s’. Each caste has definite roles to play in the performance. But the entire performance, roles of different castes in the performance, are controlled by the forward castes by their hold in the key position in the performance, the lower caste performers only perform the concerned ‘theyyam’ according to the rules set by the upper castes, the *Tantri* or Brahmin priest gives the order to the performance, the *uralanmar* (Nayars), the members of village council, look after the entire performance. The *velichappadu* or *komaram*, the oracle or priest who belongs to lower caste, prepare the ritual arrangements in ‘*theyyakavu*’, the as far as ritually higher castes concerned, they cannot enter into the ‘*sacred*’ domain of these lower castes, but they mediate the ritual transference of ‘*sakti*’, the transference of ritual power from upper caste temples to the ‘*theyyakavu*’ the performing site of theyyam’⁷⁴. The *kalashakaran*, a member of ‘*thiyya*’ caste is unavoidable. He brings tender coconut leaves, leaf torch and liquor. The caste structure runs through in all stages of performance and the roles of each caste in total make ‘theyyam/s’. The lower ‘performing castes’ have different duties in the course

⁷¹Wayne Ashley & Regina Holloman , “Teyyam” in *Indian theatre: traditions of performance*’ (edt) Farley P. Richmond, Darius L. Swann, Phillip B. Zarrilli, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, pp 139-147.

⁷² Sanjeevan, Azheekode *Theyyathile Jathivzhakkam*, (Mal). Current Books, Kottayam, Kerala. 2007,pp 59

⁷³ Freeman, J Richardson, “Performing Possession: Ritual and Consciousness in the Theyyam Complex of Northern Kerala”, in *Flags Of Fame: Studies in South Asian Folk Culture*,(edt), Heidrum Bruckner, Lother Lutz and Aditya Malik, Manohar, New Delhi 1993, pp-113.

⁷⁴ Damodaran, M. P. “*Teyyam* is the Best Tool for Reconstructing the History of North Malabar”, *Anthropologist*, 10(4): 283-287, 2008,pp-287

of performance like '*theyyam kettal*', the performance, '*thottam pattu*', the admiring through singing the position or reciting the myth behind the '*theyyam*', '*aniyarapani*', like body painting and costumes, *kolam* making, and *vadyam*, become drummers⁷⁵. In caste structure, the upper castes, having ritually higher status are the main organizers of '*Theyyam*/s. The norms and practices of performance, like obligatory visit of '*theyyam*', from *theyyakkavu* to the higher caste temple, through allocation of special titles to the *kolakkaran* or performer from the king *kolothiri* of *kolothunadu*, and the calling out of the castes due to ritual importance. All castes are obliged to participate in the performance and make it success, despite the performing theyyam is not ritually associated with them. Even though the caste structure and its manifested practices have been undergone serious changes since late nineteenth century onwards in Malabar, still the '*Theyyam*' performance brings back the memory of sufferings, simultaneously the "operation of collective memory" in terms of '*upper*' and '*lower*' is preserved through the "divinity of the performer"⁷⁶. The ethos of modernity and the apparatuses of state structures have transformed the earlier *interaction order* of the society to some extent. Still, the traditional cultural practices like '*Theyyam*', which is largely associated with the category of 'popular Hinduism' play a dominant role in deciding the patterns and value system that decide and locate the people in different pigeonholes.

THEYYAM AS REDRESSIVE MECHANISM OF CASTE SYSTEM

The '*theyyam*' performance characterizes 'social drama' of Victor Turner; that '*theyyamkettu*', can be located in the third stage of 'social drama', the redressive action. J J Pallath puts the concept of "social drama" by Victor Turner in the introducing chapter of his book on *Theyyam* as one of the theory of performance, but he does not make any further interpretation of that theory in approaching *Theyyam* and he missed the rejuvenating effect of *Theyyam* performance over the rupture made by clash between the

⁷⁵ Wayne Ashley, "The Teyyam Kettu of Northern Kerala", *The Drama Review: TDR*, Vol. 23, No. 2, Performance Theory: Southeast Asia Issue Jun., 1979, pp. 99-112 Published by: The MIT Press, 1979, pp.111

⁷⁶ Dilip Menon, "The Moral Community of the *Teyyattam*: Popular Culture in Late Colonial Malabar", *Studies in History*, 9,2 1; Sage Publications, New Delhi 1993, pp-199,

castes⁷⁷. I analyze the myth behind two ‘*Theyyams*’ to understand how the crisis between two contending parties; upper castes and lower polluting castes, the lower castes challenged the normative, exploitative structure of the caste system; was resolved through “divinization” of dissenting members of the lower castes. Those who challenged the oppressive structure of the caste system are “either banished or killed before their divinization”⁷⁸. The divinization attributes divine qualities to the dissidents, and is being worshiped by upper castes. The lower castes are made into ‘performers’ of that divine power; performing the “rites” itself has some divine values. The analysis of ‘*thottam pattu*’ the myth behind ‘*Theyyam/s*’ reveals how the social structure reflects in the performance from its genesis and periodic valorization. Damodaran argues that these origin tales can be used in tracing the social history of Malabar. However, the element of reintegration is apparent in almost all *Theyyams*.

These myths behind each *Theyyam* are a part of the collective memory of North Malabar. During the liminal time of performance, these myths are narrated. The efficacy of performance and the ritual embodiment of deity depend on this narration through *thottam*. The categories of caste and its metaphors are contested in the site of *Theyyam* performance. The same story has different versions; some characters and features are asserted by varying groups.

‘Pottan theyyam’

“The ‘*tottam pattu*’ of Pottan theyyam reviews the conversation between a Pulayan and Sankaracharya regarding ‘purity’ and ‘pollution’. Once, the mystic Brahmin scholar, Sankaracharya attempted to attain the highest state of knowledge ‘*sarvajnapeedam*’ (throne of omniscience) met one Pulayan (chandala, an untouchable person of polluting low caste), and his women with children coming in front of him. According to the local custom and practice, the Pulayan and his company must keep away from the way of a man of high caste, particularly a Brahmin. But, the Pulayan did not move away. It provoked the great scholar, Sankaracharya. Thereafter, they exchanged a long verbal dispute, through which Sankaracharya learnt a lesson from the Pulayan. The latter demonstrated and proved that all human beings were equal, and the concept of high and

⁷⁷ JJ Pallath *Theyyam: An analytical Study of the Folk Culture, Wisdom and Personality*, Indian Social Institute, 1995, pp-17, 95

⁷⁸ Ibid pp-279

low was a false concept. Sankaracharya realized his mistake. He fell at the feet of the disguised Siva, and begged for pardon”⁷⁹.

‘Iyepalli theyyam’

“One Ayikottaramana Embranthiri, a Brahmin, owned a large field, Chaladutara. The Pulayas did all the works in this field. Once the Embranthiri had taken care of a boy, a Pulayan by name, Pithari. The boy was assigned to look after the field. One day, while Pithari was playing, Kolathiri, the king of Kolathunadu, and his Nayars came across the boy. Unfortunately, he was shot dead by the King because he was unable to keep the ‘pollution distance’. His master Embranthiri also was shot dead by the same king. The assassin suffered from several misfortunes due to his unjustifiable action. He and his family later got out of the trouble through worshipping the boy Pithari as Iyepalli teyyam.”⁸⁰.

Both ‘*Pottan Theyyam*’ and ‘*Iyepalli Theyyam*’, represents the story of heroes which challenged the caste system, the idea of ‘purity and pollution’ they made the “breaches” to the normative structure; this “crisis” was solved through the “divinization” of these dissenting subjects. Through the divinization they are elevated the world of sacred and extraordinary powers were attributed to them. These two *Pulayas* are the representatives of “breach of the regular”, the normative structure of caste system. Later, these two dissenting subjects, were divinized, and the super human faculties attributed to them. As I described, social dramas have four phases. When go through the mythical stories and origin tales of each *Theyyam*, we can make out the four phases of social drama of Turner, and its later historical transformations. If we analyze the origin of *Theyyam* performance, “*theyyamkettu*”, we can identify the oral stories, the narratives, and a myth behind ‘theyyam’, every ‘*Theyyam*’ has to narrate a mythical story about its origin⁸¹. These stories, the ‘origin tales’ of ‘*Theyyam/s*’, have common feature, all the main characters challenged the normative ethos of the society like gender or caste rules and the

⁷⁹ M P Damodaran, “*Teyyam* is the Best Tool for Reconstructing the History of North Malabar”, *Anthropologist*, 10(4): 283-287, 2008. pp-285

⁸⁰ Ibid pp-285

⁸¹ Ibid: pp- 283, 287

offenders “were killed by their superiors”⁸². This leads to the further clash or “*escalation of crisis*” among them. Through the ‘*theyyamkettu*’ the crisis, the process of ‘divinization’ of the dissidents redresses conflict. The ‘transference of ritual power’, *sakti*’ from Brahmins, the original source of *sakti*; to lower castes, which do not have access to it by the norms of the structure, and it also meets the “psychological” needs of lower, performing castes; finally the normative structure /behavior is “*reintegrated*”. Due to the divine value, ‘*Theyyams* are worshipped’ in the liminal period of the year, the social actors come into action, perform the definite roles. Indirectly, they are reinforcing the structure of caste itself through the performance. ‘*Theyyam*’ epitomizes all aspects of “social drama”, *Theyyam* becomes a tool having efficacy, to heal all ruptures made by conflict.

They dissidents were permanently associated or identified with the “sacred”, they become the part of institutionalized structure of religion. The belief and rites are practiced regarding to them. They lose all “profane” value, are elevated to the symbolic world of religion, and never get the representation in “profane”, mortal world. The relationship between them and their community was transformed into divine; they cannot represent them in profane spheres, but sacred spheres. Through ‘theyyam’ performance, they are incorporated into “commemorative cult” and worshipped due to “divine value”. However, they are escalated only into “hierarchy” of gods; they are ‘gods’ which are propitiated only in “liminal periods” or “communitas” of annual cycle. Durkheim observes the same thing in Australian tribes, which “periodically celebrate rites in honor of fabulous ancestors”, he identifies the ceremonies having “dramatic representation in which are rehearsed the deeds which the myth ascribe to these legendary heroes. But the personages thus represented are not men who after living the life of men, have been transformed into a sort of god by the fact of their death”⁸³. In ‘*Theyyam*’ performance, the heroes; who lived the life of men and challenged the normative structure of the caste system, are being worshipped “periodically”; it redresses all contending elements of

⁸² Freeman, J. R, *Gods, Groves and the Culture of Nature in Kerala*, Modern Asian Studies, Vol. 33, No. 2, Published by: Cambridge University Press. 1999, pp. 257-302

⁸³ Emile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* , Translated by Joseph Ward Swain, London, 1968, pp. 215

oppressive structure through the “temporal structure” of “status reversal”; and it confines the “aggression” or “breach” of living being into symbolic act rather than real act. Here it is important to remember Quigley’s observation on embodiment of caste through various social contexts determined by caste, and that ultimately *shape* the caste itself rather than the notions of ‘pure’ and ‘impure’⁸⁴.

THE POINT OF DEPARTURE:

DE-RITUALIZATION OF *THEYYAM*

Through Durkheim, Goffman and Turner, we moved through the vivid dimension of performance in Sociology and Anthropology. When we frame ‘*Theyyam*’ performance through the conceptual apparatuses of these thinkers, we do have different possibilities to locate *Theyyam*. It resembles the concepts and theoretical frames of these thinkers in many ways. *Theyyam* as a ritual performance, it resembles the concept of “dramatic representation” which happens in a ‘sacred’ and “effervescent environment”. It exactly resembles the notion of ‘reaffirming the social group’. As Goffman asserts, during the course of performance, “pre-established pattern is unfolded”, but in ‘*Theyyam*’ performance, the sacred performer and its ritual spectators, there is an “interaction order” which is predetermined by the location of the performer and its audience in social hierarchy. This unfolding of the “non-everyday” “interaction order” often sustains the “organizing principle” of everyday social interaction, more precisely the caste system. However, the conceptual apparatuses of Victor Turner provide a direct interpretation for the existence of such liminal structures and their relevance in a highly stratified society like India. An analysis, which is centered on Turner’s frame, would be much more suitable and productive. The conception and evolution of such ‘liminal’-‘meta’ structures and their further change as ‘theatrical performance’, can be theoretically framed in a better way through Turner’s concepts like ‘social drama’, anti-structure, and liminoid etc.

The emergence of ‘public domain’ is an indispensable attribute of modernity⁸⁵. It set a new pattern of current that challenged the existing ways in which the social spaces were

⁸⁴ Declan Quigley *The Interpretation of Caste*, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp-26

⁸⁵ Valerian Rodrigues, “Untouchability, Filth, and the Public domain” in Gopal Guru (ed) *Humiliation: Claims and Context*, OUP, 2009, pp-108

constituted. The structures of modernity could reconstitute the ways in which society integrated and organized. Unlike the western societies, Indian society witnessed this transformation through the historical process of colonialism. The political movement against the single colonial entity created a subtle unity among people. As we know, 'Theyyam', primarily a liminal ritual and confined to traditional village shrines. The ritual structure was controlled by the social order of caste system. The lower caste members' role as "submissive servant" was maintained by this "prescriptive inversion" of social status. Here the religion sacralized the ritual authority of rural elites. Ranajit Guha did recognize the role of this "prescriptive inversion" in sustaining the feudal social structure including theyyam⁸⁶. The peasant belonged to different ritualistic and caste group was not a coherent social group. In Malabar, a "network of ritualistic caste associations", which had existed through centuries, played a significant role in uniting these scattered social groups. These each ritual organization derived at the level of caste, each organization had a ritual deity, primarily "Theyyam". These organizations like *Kazhakam*, *Muchilot* and *Kannangat*, were the integral part of feudal social structure and often they were controlled by "land owing institutions like *Tharavads* and rich matrilineal houses", when nationalism broke out, all these ritual organizations were met every month in a common place of worship, the *Manram* and many 'theyyams' were propitiated⁸⁷. The venue of the performance became a meeting place for nationalist as well as peasant activists rather than a ritual performance where the devotees gathered. The nature and purpose of the performance were changed. The organized movement of nationalism brought the inherently antagonistic social categories in a single platform. The emergence of new social groups that is formally organized in villages often appropriated elements of traditional villages. Here the *Manram* acts a platform to organize as an entity against colonial powers, but the ritualistic components of cultural performance coincided and manifested in an *instrumental* way. Colonialism brought these diverse social groups in a single platform.

⁸⁶ Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1983, pp-31

⁸⁷ K.K.N Kurup "Peasantry and The Anti-imperialist Struggles in Kerala", *Social Scientist*, Vol. 16, No 9 , 1988, pp-38

During first two decades of twentieth century witnessed lot of changes in social life. The social reformation was not only the business of new religious leaders. The political organization like Indian National Congress took active role in the sphere of social reformation. The issues of cleanliness surfaced as major theme in the agenda of Congress. The caste inequality was related to the traditional occupational pattern and ugly substances that one engages in everyday social life identified with social stigma of caste. A meeting which was organized in 1929 by north Malabar congress committee for *Adi Dravidas of Pazhagadi* three issues for greater concern, namely; ‘cleanliness, nomenclature, and Congress activity’, people removed their caste names which indicate particular job which gave a stigmatized identity⁸⁸. The intense atmosphere of freedom struggle provided wider avenues for contestations of everyday life and its sufferings. The yearn for self-esteem and recognition, were the driving forces of changes.

Besides these, the legal system of colonial rule brought much favours to the tenants. The Compensation for tenant’s Improvement Act of 1900 provided an impetus to the aspiration of cultivators. According to this act, if tenant was evicted from the land, the payment of compensation became mandatory. Large number of overlessee who got repayment were *Tiyyas*, the traditional toddy tapping “lower castes”. They managed to invest the amount in a successful way. Basel Evangelical Mission, established in Switzerland 1815, started its missionary activities a century later, they begun a network of elementary and high school, *Tiyyas* were among the first who join these institutions and became the employees in Colonial authority as lawyers, pleaders, sub-judges, etc. This new elite of *Tiyya* were born out of colonial and missionary activities. Gradually, *Tiyyas* moved out the caste driven occupation, and *tharavadu* dominated system. But this disintegration was not amicable, but *Nayars* contributed to the *Tiyya* journal *Mithavadi* founded in 1913, it advised *Tiyyas* to become more like *Nayars*.⁸⁹ This transformation was generated by the historical context of colonialism, freedom movement and social reformation like temple entry to the lower castes. This great transformation, which was driven by a particular historical context, played a crucial role in eroding the ritual content

⁸⁸ Dilip M Menon *Caste, nationalism, communalism in south India: Malabar, 1900-1948*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 1994, pp-85

⁸⁹ Dilip M Menon *Caste, nationalism, communalism in south India: Malabar, 1900-1948*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 1994, pp-64, 66

and active participation of various communities mainly lower castes. The teachings of social reformers like Sri *Narayana* Guru, who focused on lower castes, influenced the ex-untouchable castes. His motto, “one caste, one creed, one god for man” made sweeping changes in social perception, he founded a *Tiyya* temple. The new elite *Tiyya* made an organization, *Sri Gnanodaya Yogam*; ‘Society for Awakening of Knowledge’ such reform movement within the community reframed the socio-religious order. The rituals like animal sacrifice and cult of deified human beings, were looked down and these features are indispensable to theyyam performance⁹⁰. Thus the *tharavadu*, *Kavaus* and service castes nexus and its complex “community of worship” became disintegrated. This emergence of new elites from the traditionally inferior castes undermined *Theyyam* performance as ritual. They felt inferior in their relation to shrine as “purely suppliers of toddy and cocks to festivals”. In 1921, “*Tiyyas* in Chirakkal refused to take the traditional pots of toddy decorated with flowers” and they described *theyyam* performance “as an occasion for the upper castes to get free liquor”⁹¹. Since independence, theyyam has been undergoing serious changes at the level of content and structure. The occupational structure and aspiration of youth have been widely influenced by the exposure generated by state, electoral politics and market. The public attitude to theyyam has been influenced because of its commercialization mainly for tourists. There are so many currents, which is shaping theyyam, from subaltern literature to tourism.

As far as ‘*Theyyam*’ performance is concerned, its transformation was not an easy process. On January 24, 1981, ‘*Natana Kala Kshetram*’, a theatre company from the city of Cannanore, Malabar, was invited by *Navadhara* Club, a community action group driven by various political parties, to a nearby place Nileshwar for the performance of ‘*Sree Muchilot Bhagavathi*’. The purpose of drama was driving money to build a new bridge. Suddenly, a violent confrontation came up regarding the staging of deity, the *Bhagavathi*. *Muchilot Bhagavathi* is the caste deity; ‘*Kuladevada*’ of *Vaniyars*, a caste group confined to north Malabar, they filed suit against theatre company objectifying the

⁹⁰ Gilles Tarabout “Malabar Gods, Nation-building and World Culture: On the Perception of the Local and the Global” in Jacki Assayag & C J Fuller (ed) *Globalizing India: Perspective From Below*, Anthem Press, London, 2005, pp-191

⁹¹ Dilip M Menon *Caste, nationalism, communalism in south India: Malabar, 1900-1948*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 1994, pp-69

performance of drama. However, the court judgment did not favour the Vaniya community. The clash between the 'Natana Kala Kshetram' and Vaniya community shows process of transformation. In 1981, Communist Party held a rally in a small village that featured 'Theyyam' dancing against capitalism, corruption, and oppression and at the end of the performance, instead of calling the names of the important high caste members of the audience, the performer called the local Communist Party members over microphone. *Theyyam* was an entry by India by its folk culture in the Year of India festival held in Paris in 1985. A photograph of *Theyyam* appeared as the cover a French book entitled *Atlas de l'imaginaire* by well known cultural institution in Paris, the *Maison des Cultures du Monde*, which produces musical, dance and theatrical performances from different parts of the world. A *Theyyam* troupe was invited to perform in the street during the French Year of India in 1985⁹².

Poster announcing performance of Sree Muchilottu Bhagavathi

Source: The Drama Review, Vol. 26 No 26, 1982,

⁹² Wayne Ashley & Regina Holloman, "From Ritual to Theatre in Kerala", The Drama Review, Vol. 26 No 2, 1982, pp-59,71, 74, 199, 204.

Dalrymple writes about Hari Das, a manual laborer and a seasonal *Theyyam* artist, during the month of December to February, he gives up his job and become a *Theyyam* artist. When season ends, he backs to manual labour⁹³. The transformation of *Theyyam* performance is contingent on the historical experience of north Malabar. The upward social mobility of many communities particularly in opening decades of twentieth century, the social reform movements, the rule of law, and globalization erode its essence as a ritual performance. However, the newly emerged social order has made the ritual cosmology of *Theyyams* as trivial. The de-ritualization of *Theyyam* occurred in the larger social transformation of society. Thomas Luckmann has pointed on “sacred cosmos” and its reconstitution in modern society as an “invisible” “form of religiosity” unmask how the sacred cosmology of modern society is shaped. He says that the “functional rationality” of the segregated institutional system of modern society makes the religious cosmos as “trivial”. This trivialization of “sacred cosmos” must be addressed in a situation where the individual is controlled by “public institutions”⁹⁴. We have observed that the process of de-ritualization of *Theyyam* is happening in a phase of rapid social transformations.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As far *theyyam* performance is concerned, it has been ‘objectified’ in larger social and historical experiences. However, the reconfiguration of *Theyyam* as theatrical performance derives from the historically contingent experiences of Malabar, particularly since the closing of 19th century. The performative expressions that fall in the larger category of ‘dance’ have been subject of historical and anthropological analysis. However, the new turns in the study of performative genres focus on the issues like relations of power and protest⁹⁵. The categorical expression of power relation and its ritual inversion of that relation as performative genre require attention. The social and cultural categories like ‘pure’ and ‘impure’ and the visual culture which is generated

⁹³ William Dalrymple, *Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in Modern India*, Blooms Burry, London, 2009, pp-33

⁹⁴ Thomas Luckmann, *Invisible Religion: The transformation of symbols in industrial society*, MacMillan, New York, 1967, pp- 70, 96

⁹⁵ Susan A. Reed “The Politics and Poetics of Dance”, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 27, 1998, pp-505

along with the operation of these categories was further evolved through the colonial and postcolonial experiences. The “oriental dance” is an invention of occident, later the development of “classical Indian dance” was an outcome of the seeking “indigenous roots”. The “rediscovery of Sanskrit and regional language texts (shastras) on Indian dance” ended the invention of Indian “classical dance”. The danced forms related to “temple sculptures”, “literary citations” are designated as “classical”⁹⁶. The category of “classical” and “folk” related to the larger power dynamics of culture. *Theyyam* became a “folk” performance because the bodily movements in theyyam not an embodiment of the text. *Theyyam* is still a performed by *particular* lower caste “folk” belongs to north Malabar. This particularization and exoticization are reflection of continuity of structural elements. Dalrymple has narrated about Hari Das who belongs to this category of “folk”, he becomes *Theyyam* artist during the season and leaves his manual job temporarily; he says *Theyyam* made him what he is and all his self-esteem comes from theyyam performance⁹⁷. *Theyyam* performing artists like Haridas, they come in front of national and international public as an *embodiment* of social structure and its memory, which is indispensable in constituting their essence of ‘being’ in the world.

⁹⁶ Joan L Erdman “Dance Discourse: Rethinking the history of “oriental Dance”, in *Moving Words: Re-writing dance* (edt) Gay Morris, Rutledge, New York, 2002, pp-255

⁹⁷ William Dalrymple *Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in Modern India*, Blooms Burry, London, 2009,pp-55

CHAPTER-3

THE LIMINAL BODY:

THE SOCIAL CORPOREALITY OF *THEYYAM* PERFORMER

INTRODUCTION

Human body is cultural and symbolic. It is not mere an organic entity. It is perceived through patterns of the culture. Cultural body is continuously produced through the mechanisms of culture itself. It is allowed to express/perform in a culturally fixed manner. Human body and its relation with the fellow being is subject to historically contingent transformations. The apparatuses of modernity has revolutionized the way of human body is perceived, disciplined and projected. But still body is an object of subjection through the historically derived and transformed institutions and its practices. The discourse of social science never excluded 'body'. Since the inceptions of many disciplines, body has been contested and debated through the analytical categories like 'race' and 'caste'. Since the last decades, it is a hot topic among academia. In recent years, the scholars of religion have begun to look at body critically on the notion of embodiment to examine the discourse of the body in concerned religious tradition. The body in Indian culture is complex and it has multiple layers of meaning. In India, "body has been represented, disciplined, regulated, and cultivated, from a variety of perspectives in Hindu ritual traditions, ascetic movements, medical traditions, legal codes, philosophical systems, *bhakti* (devotional) movements, *Tantric* traditions, the science of erotics, martial arts, drama, dance, music, and the visual arts"⁹⁸. The ritual practices/meanings associated to body have been sustained through stringent rules and regulation. The foreign scholars observed that the notions of 'pure' and 'impure' are main axioms of social regulation of body. The structuralist scholars like Louis Dumont treated it as immutable dualistic integrals of the whole, the caste system.

This chapter is devised to look at the 'performing body' of lower caste and the 'meta-structure' of '*Theyyam*' performance is taken up to engage with the notion of 'purity' and 'pollution', how they have been contested and reproduced. The meta-structure of 'theyyam' performer directly reinforces the '*opus operatum*' of structure or power relation in caste system. The major argument of this chapter is that the production and sustenance of 'textual bodies' as well as the power metrics which produces the text is

⁹⁸ Barbara A Holdrege, "Body" in *Studying Hinduism Key Concepts and Methods*, Sushil Mittal and Gene Thursby (edt) Routledge, London, 2008, pp -19

much more depended on the cultural practices. *Theyyam* performance is substantiated to raise some critical engagement with immutable dualistic understanding of body in Indian culture. The categorical divisioning of body as 'pure' and 'impure' are questioned in the context of liminal body of *Theyyam* performers. The alternative divine personhood of *theyyam* performer and the capacity of his body to incorporate the attributes of 'pure' are taken up to expose the empirical contradiction for everlasting conclusions of structuralist episteme.

ON PRODUCTION OF SOCIAL/CULTURAL BODY:

PIERRIE BOURDIEU, MICHEL FOUCAULT, AND BRYAN TURNER

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu is one of the influential thinkers who engaged on the ways of 'embodied' nature of human social positions and statuses. The macro-structural axioms of a culture run through the veins of its microcosms. The social of the concerned culture is continuously being produced and sustained through the practices which derive from its own axiomatic principles. The axiomatic principles sustains through the cultural practices. Bourdieu designed his theoretical enterprise to rectify the limitations of traditional Marxism which emphasized much on materialism, and French Structuralisms which emphasized idealism⁹⁹. His concept of 'habitus' become a "standard notion in social and historical sciences, but remarkably enough it is its bodily dimensions" and he could locate individual in the discourse of structuralism in a meaningful way and the question of reproduction of structure is resolved his theory of 'social practice'¹⁰⁰. The concept of habitus incorporated structural elements in individual. It is something that is embodied and preserved through the bodily practices. Bourdieu substantiates his concept of practice though the concept of 'habitus'. He brings 'embodiment' as a "system of structured structuring dispositions". He puts the concept of 'habitus' as something unique to a "particular class of conditions of existence", habitus is varies from the objective historical experiences and they are the "system of durable, transposable dispositions", which is "objectively regulated". It "ensures the active presence of past experiences"

⁹⁹William H. S Well, Jr "A theory of Structure : Duality , Agency, and Transformation" , American Journal of Sociology, vol. 98, No 1 (July, 1992), pp-3

¹⁰⁰ Herman Roodenburg, "Pierre Bourdieu: Issues of Embodiment and Authenticity" , Entofoor, Vol. 17 No . 1/2 , AUTHENTICITY , 2004, pp-214

which is “deposited in each organism” and finally it “produces individual and collective experiences”¹⁰¹. He says that, since 'habitus' as a product of particular class existence, the human action which is generated by the 'habitus', operate through the “objective regularities”. He further elaborates the concept of 'social practice' through notion of “confrontation between habitus”, he says that “social practices generated by the same habitus cannot be described either as the autonomous development of a unique and always a self-identical essence, or continuous creation of novelty”, but “it arises from the necessary yet unpredictable confrontation between the habitus”. The confrontation, between/among distinct 'habitus', is the wheel of history. Social practices are the outcome of history, embodied as the 'habitus', particularly “class habitus” (“the embodied history”, and “second nature”), of a particular group who share similar “world view” and “common scheme of perception, conception and action”¹⁰². Social practice is further embodied and “inscribed in bodies” through the enactment of already embodied roles in 'social practice'. Since the practices have been generated by the ‘objective conditions’; these ‘objective conditions’ are reinforced through the enactment of ‘predetermined’ actions. He treats body as the sole carrier of the distinctive 'habitus', the subjective dispositions of the objective categories. It is “a living memory pad” and the “repository for the most precious values”; the body is the sole idiom where “most fundamental principles of the arbitrary content of a culture” are inscribed. He substantiates, how the body is an object by which the ethos of a cultural system, are reproduced. Body is an “automaton” to “realize the oppositions” on the world through 'enacting' the embodied subjective dispositions of objective historical categories. He uses ‘female body’ to decipher how the reproduction of cultural values of a system maintained through the fixation of bodily movements. The body has been predisposed to function as *pars totalis* in accordance with the fallacy of *pars pro toto*, the microcosmic entity of the macrocosm. The “social choices are naturalized” and “social identity” comes out of the “social determinations” of body, which is “attached to a determinate position in a social world”, he elaborates, “the body is apprehended and appreciated” through “the classificatory schemes”, what happens in the practice is that, he says “schemes are able to pass directly

¹⁰¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, translated by Richard Nice, Stanford University Press, California, 1990, pp-52, 53

¹⁰² Ibid-55, 56, 60.

from practice to practice” to the upcoming generations¹⁰³. The point he asserts that, human body is active agent of cultural transmission and it keeps the social structure is durable through process of *embodiment*. The “past experience”, “individual and collective practices”, in accordance with “schemes” generated by objective relations, are “deposited in each organism” and these “*systems of dispositions*” reproduces itself through enactment of predisposed ways of “structured practices”. Habitus provides the infinite capacity to generate “thoughts, perceptions, expressions, and actions” but their limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions. Body is the cultural signifier through many meanings are expressed and preserved, and the configurational values of cultural system, particularly the power relations, are continuously being reproduced and maintained. The properties which are specific to either to a culture or a group are sustained through the social practices, often; these practices are unique to that specific culture. But body is the sole agent where all these social and cultural properties of the concerned are inscribed.

Michel Foucault, much celebrated French philosopher brought human body as the centre piece of his entire theoretical enterprise. The Foucauldian approach to the body is characterized, firstly, preoccupation with the body, social and cultural institutions which govern the body, secondly, by an epistemological view of the body which is produced out of ‘discourse’¹⁰⁴. But the central concern of his theory of body is focused on ‘*mindful*’ body rather than the ‘*fleshy body*’. The modernity and its institutional practices have focused the ‘mental’ aspect of body rather than the ‘*fleshy aspect of body*’. The ‘technology over body’ is the central concern of his theoretical projects. According to him the human body is directly involved in political field. Body is the object of political investment in accordance with the complex reciprocal relationship, its continuously regulated and trained to emit particular sign. He argues, it is largely a “force of production” and “relation of power” is “invested in it”. But body is a useful force only when it becomes a “productive body” as well as a “subjected body”. The “micro-physics of power” operate in cultural ‘institutions and apparatuses’ and the ‘docile’ nature of body are the foundation for its subjection and transformation through the apparatuses and

¹⁰³ Ibid:69, 71

¹⁰⁴ Chris Shilling ‘*Body and Social Theory*’, Sage Publication, New Delhi, 2003, pp-70

institutions¹⁰⁵. He asserts the ‘docile’ dimension of body, because he treats body as a natural entity, is already there, and the ‘discourse’ create the social bodies. He stands for the position that, body is socially constructed through the discourses, the discourse generated by the concerned ‘systems of power’. He substantiates his arguments putting the historically derived practices and concepts which changed the way body is perceived and located. But he focuses the non-corporeal elements what he calls “soul”, which is derived out of “certain type of power and the reference of certain type of knowledge, the machinery by which the power relations give rise to a possible corpus of knowledge, and knowledge extends and reinforces the effects of this power”¹⁰⁶. The non-corporeal and invisible elements ‘embedded’ in human body through process of ‘discourses’ which is generated by the concerned systems of power, have been taken by Foucault to approach social body. He says that this “soul” is the “effect and instrument” of “political anatomy”, the “soul is the prison of body”. He brings the ‘power’ as the central episteme of his argument. The production and sustenance of social corporeality, the subjection of human body, are nothing but the effect of discourse having certain power relation as well as technology to dominate the human body. He talks about the “surplus of power” enjoyed by the “sovereign” and “lack of power” which associated to those who are subjected to punish. He says “the darkest region of the political field, the condemned man represents the symmetrical, inverted figure of the king. We should analyze what might be called, “the least body of the condemned man”¹⁰⁷. The ‘surplus power’ exercised on the ‘subjected body of the condemned man’ give rise to a different type of ‘noncorporeal’ or a ‘soul’ which is correlative of the technology of power over body.

Body, the natural entity, is turned into ‘social’ and ‘cultural’ through the discourses produced out of the power metrics in the society. Foucault reaches the broad view of body which is subject to historical transformation and changes along with the change in systems of power. The corporeal existence of the natural body is biologically produced, it live as an organism, but the ‘being’ of human, social existence, is produced out through the discourses. The ‘discourse’ is contingent to history, the history of ‘systems of power’.

¹⁰⁵ Michel Foucault “The Body of the Condemned” in *The Foucault Reader* (edt) Paul Robinow, Pantheon Books, New York, 1984, pp-173, 180

¹⁰⁶ Ibid:177

¹⁰⁷ Ibid:pp-176

The British and Australian sociologist, Bryan S Turner also ventured much about body. He focused on the way academic discourse conceptualized human body and he more interested in changing notions of body along with time. He described much about the cultural, institutional aspects of human body. The process of 'embodiment' is the key aspect of his theory building. Lastly, his engagement with human body by the gaze of sociological frames aims to build sociology of body'. But he addresses the absence of body in social theory. The sociological concepts like social order, social control, and the stratification of societies, have been taken up to locate body in sociology. From a methodological point of view, 'sociology of body' has been neglected because 'macro-sociology' always concerned with the larger sociological issues whereas micro-sociology excluded 'body' because "self as social actor is socially constituted in action". Thus 'body' never perceived and conceptualized by sociologists. He says that the "bastard offshoots" like 'sociobiology' never give a model for explication of social body.

He says that every society is primarily confronted with four issues which are very core in regimenting human body, namely; they are the reproduction of populations in time, the regulation of bodies in space, the restraint of *interior* body through disciplines and representation of *exterior* body in social space, he argues that this schema was systematically deployed by Michel Foucault in his engagement with human sexuality¹⁰⁸. The cultural institutions like 'theology' and 'patriarchy' have been focused in delineating the historical subjection of human body and the associated 'disorders', the "disorders of women"; the hysteria, anorexia, and agoraphobia are treated as disorders of society. He argues that 'social control' must be considered as core aspect in regimenting human body. He states that for the individual and the group, the body is a part of nature (environment) and a culture (self). His articulation of body is much more centered on reproductive body and its disciplining, its manipulation by historically derived apparatuses. All the disciplinary practices which regulate body occur along two dimensions of time and space. He says that "body may be governed, but embodiment is the phenomenological basis of individuality"¹⁰⁹. However, he is more concerned with the intuitional controlling of human body, primarily how the reproductive power of human

¹⁰⁸ Bryan S Turner *The body and society*, Sage Publication, New Delhi, 1996 , pp-38, 61, 62

¹⁰⁹ Ibid: pp-234

body is manipulated in modern time and the discourse generated over its 'diseases' by the larger knowledge enterprise of modernity. The process of 'embodiment' which happens in a social and cultural situation is dependent upon the technologies of subjection of collective as well as individual body.

BODY IN INDIAN CULTURE:

LOUIS DUMONT, DECLAN QUIGLEY, AND NICKOLAS DIRK

Approaching body in Indian culture in a monotonous way would lead to a dismal understanding. The different philosophical systems and world views conceptualize the idea of human body differently. For instance, the conception of body in the *samkya* system of philosophy is not a monad which is determined by its physical body limits, but it is a "porous structure", it is immensely social¹¹⁰. The *dividuality* is the rule and routine both in every day and non-everyday ritual spheres. The notion of 'purity' and 'impurity' is also a major dimension of body. The vertical structure of caste system creates the notion of un/touchable body. The physical proximity between top and lower ladders of caste system was kept alive in a stringent way for centuries. Besides these, several forms of asceticism with their specific body techniques like Yoga and fasting or mortification, etc focus on controlling of natural body. The notions about body in Indian culture derive from a design in the philosophical and religious text. The existential possibilities of body in Indian culture are immense, it is never perceived without the social and cultural context. It is a part of larger cosmic system and its 'being' is determined by the symbolic systems of culture¹¹¹. The sociological and anthropological endeavours over the notions of body in India put many insights. Social and cultural bodies are reproduced through the cultural mechanisms over time. The structuralism and semiotic anthropology have engaged Indian social categories at large. Body and its social and cultural meanings has been the subject for academic discourse.

The structuralist understanding builds its theoretical enterprise by identifying the deeply rooted axiomatic principles of the concerned culture. Louis Dumont, the structuralist

¹¹⁰ Axel Michaels & Christoph Wulf "Rethinking the Body: An Introduction" in *The body in India* (edt) Axel Michaels & Christoph Wulf; Academy Verlag, Berlin, 2009, pp-13

¹¹¹ *Ibid* pp- 14

social anthropologist engaged with caste system in a broader way. The idea of 'body' and its meanings in the context of caste system have been taken up to expose the functioning of the system. He says:

“..the caste, unified from outside, is divided within”.. “It’s a state of mind which is expressed in by the emergence in various situations, of group of various orders generally called caste”, “..but by starting from the notion of the ‘system’ in terms of which certain fixed principles govern the arrangement of fluid and fluctuating elements”, “the caste system as a pan-Indian institution”¹¹².

Here, he brings the very idea of culture and territory into the centre of discourse. For a structuralist, it might be necessary to look at the abstract categories through the notion of cultural territory. The idea of certain principles which is *governing* the system of caste puts much insight in explicating many issues regarding caste system. He points out the existence of certain principles which operate in Indian culture despite any changes. His theoretical projects are rooted in these *fixed* principles. He calls these certain fixed principles as “ideology”, this ideology brings into the system-the integrated *whole*. The ‘parts’ analyzed in the context of whole system. The sociological significance of ideology lies in its totality. The dictation of hierarchy prevents the separation of constituting elements of system¹¹³. So the meaning attributed to ‘signifiers’ in the culture derive from the hierarchical values. The constituting integrals of whole, functional interdependence among these integrals, and the notion of ‘pure’ and ‘impure’ constitutes the cultural body. He argues all the principle which is decisive in sustaining the caste is reducible to “a single true principle and takes up the terms from the normative literature related to this notion. He says:

“The whole is founded on the necessary and hierarchical coexistence of the two opposites”, “this opposition underlies hierarchy, which is the superiority of the *pure* to the *impure*, underlies separation because the pure and impure must kept separate”. According to *Harita*, the purity he calls external of three kinds, bearing on the family (*kula*), objects of everyday use (*artha*), and the body (*sarira*)”. It is clear that impurity of the Untouchable is conceptually inseparable from the purity of Brahman. They must have been established together, or in any case have mutually reinforced each other.”¹¹⁴.

¹¹² Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implication* Chicago University Press, 1980, pp-34, 35

¹¹³ Ibid pp-41

¹¹⁴ Ibid pp-44, 49

He puts the binary opposition as the axiom which keeps all constituting integrals united. The social and cultural categories of 'pure' and 'impure' located as two halves of the *whole*. Even though, the 'pure' and 'impure' are mutually exclusive categories, they are integral in constituting the whole. The existence of 'pure' is much more depended on the existence of 'impure'. As I mentioned earlier, the existence these two relative categories are protected through the dictation of hierarchy; the ideology and disintegration of constituting integrals are prevented through ritual dominance and endogamy. He says, besides this hierarchy of 'pure' and 'impure', it is further manifested through '*varna*' system of hierarchy, "whereby four categories are distinguished: the highest that of *Brahmanas* or priest, below them *Kshatriyas* or warriors, then the *Vaishyas*, in modern usage mainly merchants, and finally the *Shudras*, the servants or have-nots". The '*varna*' order is not a linear order, but a series of successive dichotomies or inclusion and "untouchable are outside the *varnas* just as *Shudras* were outside the twice-born"¹¹⁵. The social corporeality derives from the very notion of cultural meaning which is attributed by oneself and by others. The social body is continuously reproduced, perceived, and pigeonholed in the available schema of culture. Dumont gives fine way of approaching caste system. The idea of 'body' in Indian subcontinent primarily derives from its textual meaning and its being protected through vivid cultural practices.

The social anthropologist Declan Quigley provide interesting observation on caste and production of social corporeality, and his theoretical projects launch some critical questions over Dumont's conceptualization of caste and social corporeality. He highlights the difference between the pre-classical and classical *Brahmins* particularly he asserts that *Brahmins*' body which became an idiom for 'purity' is confined to 'classical brahmins' not earlier to them. He takes up Heesterman's stands on supremacy of Brahmins which generally assumed "derives from his priestly capacity and his monopoly over the performance of *vedic* ritual" but in fact purity is not from "priesthood but precisely the opposite"- "abstention form priestly activity" or "renunciation". Quigley substantiate Heesterman's argument, he says:

¹¹⁵ Ibid pp- 67, 68.

“it is only by escaping from the transient and polluting affairs of the every social world that the ideal ‘brahmin’ manage to achieve a state of transcendent purity. Above all, he argues, the ideal ‘brahmin’ must not be a priest because priestly activity is a source of degradation and impurity”, “In the older, pre-classical pattern, however, the *yajamana* enters the ritual charged with impurity which he transfers to the priest”, “The brahmin of pre-classical ritual and the brahmin of the classical ritual are thus two very different personae”¹¹⁶.

He says that this transition is referred as “axial breakthrough” by Heesterman, besides, it was for him the beginning of caste. In pre-classical situation, the ‘brahmin’ was priest who officiated a necessary “perilous” function for patron. But, in classical situation, “the ‘brahmin’ has escaped from his dangerous and degrading role; he is no longer a priest accepting the death impurity of his patron”. Quigley argues that this transformation can be conceptualized in two ways, firstly; brahmin “renounced from his priestly duty of sacrificing for powerful patron, essentially of submitting to a ritual death in order that his patron might be reborn, secondly; “he has interiorized the ritual-he sacrifices for no one but himself” the classical brahmin preferred not to compromise the ‘purity’, because “the ‘brahmin’ who perform ritual for others is not considered by the Brahminical text to be a real ‘brahmin’ at all but is seen as equal to a *Ksatriya*”¹¹⁷.

Quigley’s observation puts much insight on the production of social corporeality, he contends Dumont’s position of mere ‘impure’ and ‘pure’ based in hierarchy but omitted the empirical aspects of how caste is shaped. The corporeal meaning associated to people who belongs to various castes was generated by many social practices which are prevalent in caste society. The reductionism to ‘pure’ and ‘impure’ obscures many facts that undermine the conjectural claims of Dumont. Definitely, the notion of ‘pure’ and ‘impure’ constitutes the essence of corporeal meanings. However, body as cultural signifier, it has the generative capacity to emit various meanings. Quigley’s observation unveils that the corporeal meanings are historically generated but it is not completely free from the cultural configurations.

Nicholas B Dirk; historical anthropologist engaged with caste in a different way. He used historical documents extensively. The colonial archives about Indian society were his main source of anthropological investigation. He traced the transformation of caste in the

¹¹⁶ Declan Quigley, *The Interpretation of Caste*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, pp-57, 58.

¹¹⁷ Ibid: 59, 60

context of historical experiences of Indian society. The impacts of colonial administrative strategies over caste system have been focused. The caste system and its taken for granted principles are discursively generated particularly during the colonial cultural practices. The cultural notions of body are nothing but the effect of colonial administrative and missionary practices. The colonial power strategically used the rudimentary social divisionings to ensure their imperial power. Body and its social corporeality were central in controlling the colonial practices.

The manuscripts from the missionary sources and the orientalist accounts, were used for canvassing the changes in the discourses regarding Indian cultural categories. He says that missionaries kept the view that caste “was principally a civil rather than a religious institution” but around the middle of 19th century “missionaries came overwhelmingly to agree that caste was an unmitigated evil”¹¹⁸. According to him late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century colonial rulers were not that much interested in dealing with caste and they were “concerned military matters”, the basic concern were “conquest and control” and “land revenue”¹¹⁹. But the revolt of 1857 made British rule stable. Under stable imperial rule the “colonial ethnographic curiosity” is flowered. From 1870 onwards “caste became the primary object of social classification and understanding”. The memory of rebellion led rulers to the obsession of ‘social order’; it was indispensable in maintaining the empire. The “classificatory schema of India’s social world” became the subject of “imperial empiricism”¹²⁰. Throughout the 19th century, the practice of colonial ethnographic writing became canonic and formalized. The collection of material about castes and tribes and their customs, ritual forms were described in detail. The practices monitored by the institution of state which were prevalent in modern states of Europe, came to India in a mediated way, the colonial modernity. In 1869, Hunter was appointed as director general of statistics to the government of India. He supervised a series of gazetteers that sought to “systematize official colonial knowledge about India”¹²¹. The process of ‘*objectification*’ was the unintended result of colonial knowledge

¹¹⁸ Nicholas B Dirk *Caste of Mind: Colonialism and The Making of Modern India* Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2001, pp-27.

¹¹⁹ Ibid pp-28, 40

¹²⁰ Ibid pp-44

¹²¹ Ibid pp-45

production. People were classified and enumerated. The more ‘*scientific*’ methods like anthropometry were deployed to get more empirical essence of caste. The works like ‘*The People of India*’ by H Risely puts Indian society in racial dimensions; they justified their stands by the argument of “caste system that organized social relations through the principle of absolute endogamy”¹²². Dirk says that the whole attempt of colonial ethnographic account of Indian society was contaminated by “politics of knowledge”. The long historical process of colonialism left a new form of society. He says:

“Colonialism in India produced new forms of society that have been taken to be traditional; caste itself as we now know it is not a residual survival of ancient India but a specifically colonial form of civil society that both justified and maintained an Orientalist vision. This was a vision was of Indian in which religion transcended politics, society resisted change...”, “..post colonial form of power and representation, not only disguising the history of colonialism and essentially contingent and political character of caste but also reproducing what might be the most extraordinary legacy of colonial rule in the contemporary social life of caste and Hinduism in India today” .“For colonial ethnography, the colonized subject was first and foremost a body, to be known and controlled through measurement and interpretation of physical subjects organized in categories by caste and gender. In all this attention to the body, there was little interest in subjectivity, will, or agency of colonial subjects..”, “And with the prevalence of anthropometry and ethnographic interest in bodily practices, the materiality of the text and custom, for colonial ethnographers, was the colonized body”¹²³.

From the purview of historical anthropology, body is discursively produced by the power, and domination. The social schema through body is being perceived, is produced by a power system. The discursively generated ethnographic accounts which were contaminated by political motives were the critical for the creation of a specific meaning to body. But Dirks’ notion of caste as residual *survival of ancient India* needs more historical accounts. Through the regulation of *body*, the imperial power was sustained. Body was the focal point where colonial power focused.

These scholars provide well crafted visions to approach caste and its derivatives. Other than these Scholars, Dumont neglects history in his analysis and Dirk over emphasizes the history and his analysis of history confined to colonial era, but Quigley incorporate both historical and ideological aspects in his conceptualization. It is clear that, body is a *signifier* of cultural meaning. According to Dumont’s model, it’s the ‘signifier’ of either ‘*purity*’ or ‘*pollution*’. The discourse of ‘purity’ and ‘pollution’ is protected by many

¹²² Ibid pp-50

cultural practices which are pertinent to caste system. The colonial regime did use the existing customs, categories, cultural notions, and practices primarily for its survival. The process like census enumeration with the help of notorious ethnography with the help of anthropometry caused the process of *objectification*. These scholars deal with the larger categories of culture and they derive the assumptions, which fit into the models of culture and its historical transformations. However, they are not concerned about the how the categories are produced through the *distinctive* cultural practices. The culturally situated understanding of social practices unmasks the reflexive capacity of body to transform the meanings. However, this transformation is preconditioned by ‘being’ the impure through long subjection. R S Khare observed that the production of social corporeality is contingent upon the historical conditions and such conditions still shape the social corporeality of the lower castes¹²⁴

THEYYAM PERFORMANCE AND ‘EMBODIMENT’ OF CASTE

Human body is a repertoire of culture. The body is a medium to articulate innumerable cultural practices. The cultural symbols, meanings and practices make the inter-subjective universe of a culture. Caste system, one of the pillars of Indian culture, has been subject of intensive anthropological and sociological discourse. The micro-structural process of the interiors of Indian villages puts much insight to the question of how caste survives over time and how it’s being ‘*embodied*’. ‘*Theyyam*’ as a ritual performance derived from stringent practices, which are associated to caste system at large. The inter-subjective universe of caste and the particular reciprocal relationship, which are generated by it, sustained through its micro-structural processes. Therefore, *Theyyam* provide us an epitome for strategy of structure to survive over the rebellious attitude of those who have been located around the bottom of structure. As far as Kerala is concerned, the consensual hierarchy of Louis Dumont is not enough to comprehend the presence of violence in maintaining the caste hierarchy. Dumont himself acknowledges this unfitness

¹²⁴ R S Khare “The Body, Sensoria and the Self of the Powerless: Remembering/”Re-membering” Indian Untouchable Women”, *New Literary History*. Vol. 26, No. 1, Narrative Literature, the Arts, and Memory, Winter, 1995, pp-148

of *consensual* model of hierarchy in the case of Kerala¹²⁵. As I mentioned in previous chapter, the ritual structure of *Theyyam* is primarily derives from the caste system. The regional caste structure, untouchability and ritual pollution are the core thread running across *Theyyam* performance, *thottampattukal*; liturgical songs in the performance of *Theyyam* invoke a parallel lower caste culture which is challenging the asymmetric power relation. In the liminal structure of *theyyam*, the untouchable polluting- *avarna* performer becomes the locus of spiritual experience for all members of *Varna* system. This cultural irony must be contested in the context of structure itself. This ritual ability of performer, which is confined to the liminal order of *Theyyam*, provides deep insight over the logic of structure. This liminal transformation of personhood of the lower caste performer and his changed social corporeality raise some critical questions to the structuralist understanding of social practices in India. As I mentioned earlier chapter, the performers of these ritual are belong to the traditionally considered *avarna*, the un-touchable communities. The current form of theyyam worship is said to be established in the *Kolathiri*, a local kingdom of Malabar in 12th century. Freeman argues:

“...kolathiri domain illustrates something of the caste and status mediation and challenges these posed in Kerala’s late medieval social order. The creation and establishment of the 39 chiefly theyyams of this realm in attributed to one *Manakkadan Gurukkal* , a powerful sorcerer-magician of the then untouchable Washer men caste, the *Vannans*. His fame was such that his chief disciple and attendant, against the norms of caste-pollution, was even a member of the chiefly Nayar caste. Eventually the notoriety of the Gurukkal.’s supernatural accomplishments brought him to the attention of the Kolattiri Raja, who summoned him to his palace. While *en route* and at court, Manakkat.an was subjected to a number of natural and supernatural tests by the king and his agents, in all of which he handily triumphed. His final trial was to single-handedly perform the *teyyattams* of 39 different gods in the span of a single night. He not only succeeded in this, but the king was so impressed that he commanded these *teyyams* to be established throughout his territories. These 39 comprise some of the most prominent *teyyams* connected with notable lineages and their territorial centers, including that of the king’s family...” The caste tensions inherent in such incorporations, however, are evident in the conclusion to the legend. Having shamed the king and his nobles through the course of his meteoric rise, Manakkatan determined to preempt the ignominy of their almost certain attempts at vengeance. Like the Cankam heroes of old, he therefore sat facing the north, in a rite of deliberately relinquishing his mortal life. Though Manakkatan Gurukkal. is not himself celebrated as a *teyyam* (his empowering family goddess, however, is), his final resting place is surmounted by a monument of laterite stone, dedicated by the king, in which his living presence still resides. There he is

¹²⁵ Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implication* Chicago University Press, 1980, pp-82

regularly worshipped through vows and periodically offered liquor and massive blood sacrifices in collective calendrical rites...”¹²⁶

The hierarchically organized social order had a significant role in evolving the pattern of worship. The above mentioned mythical story, the victory of untouchable over the ritually higher, and his demise then the subsequent elevation into a sacred domain is the theme of many theyyam liturgies¹²⁷. Here the lower caste performer, the epicenter of divine experience to all those who belong to the caste hierarchy undergo a process of ritual transformation of personhood. The context of this ritual transformation of performer is unique in its caste dynamics. During the performance, each caste fulfills the concerned function associated to their caste occupation. The blacksmith repairs the sword, the umbrella maker supplies the umbrellas, the fisher people brings salt from the coast and toddy tappers bring coconut and toddy. The major local higher caste families like *Nayars* donate rice for the devotees. The *Nayar tharavadus*; the ancestral house plays a crucial role in supplying many scarce resources for the successfulness of the entire ritual. During the each stages of performance, the service caste plays crucial roles, and their caste identity is more emphasized by their association¹²⁸. *Theyyam* performance brings all the caste in a single platform. The ritual cosmology of theyyam derives from the ethos of the structure only. Humiliation, frustration, and agony of *being* lower in the bottom of structure, is washed away by *liminal cosmic order* of *theyyam*. The liminal cosmic order of *Theyyam* inverts the hierarchy or it obliterates the axiomatic principles of caste and the way of its constituting integrals located and perceived. The binary categories like ‘pollution’ and ‘purity’ ceased to operate there. Dalrymple’s account on theyyam performers and his interviews with them have highlighted these aspects of liminal order of Theyyam. Hari Das, a seasonal theyyam performer narrates to Dalrymple:

“There was one Brahmin last month who worshipped me during a theyyam, reverently touching my feet, with tears in his eyes, kneeling before me for a blessing. Then the following week I went to his house to dig a well as an ordinary labourer. He certainly didn’t

¹²⁶ Rich Freeman “The Teyyam Tradition of Kerala” in *Blackwell Companion to Hinduism* (edt) Garin Flood Blackwell Companion Publishing Ltd , New Delhi, 2003, pp-310

¹²⁷ Ibid pp-311

¹²⁸ Dilip Menon, *Caste, Nationalism, and Communism in South India: Malabar, 1900-1948*, Foundation Books, New Delhi, 1994, pp-49, 50

recognize me”. “Theyyam has made me what I am. All my self-esteem comes from this. I am here in a village far from mine, because of my fame as a theyyam artist. The rest of the year, no one here would even greet me or invite me to share a cup of tea with them. But during the season no one knows me as Hari Das. To them I am like a temple, if not a god”¹²⁹.

The logic of liminal cosmic order gives a new meaning and new perception to Hari Das, a performer. The everyday cosmic order regulates the intermingling of higher and lower. The meaning associated to one’s body which is derived from the hierarchical values never functional in the liminal cosmic order of theyyam. But the role which is played by each caste in the performance ultimately depends their position in the hierarchy. Even though Hari Das, an ordinary labourer, he become the locus of spiritual experience to his superiors in the performances, once the performance is over, he is taken back to the ‘everyday’ of caste system. But as far as Hari Das, is concerned, it’s the only one way to get self esteem.

The process of *embodiment* of caste can be contextualized in a better way through Bourdieu’s theory of social practice. It gives a novel insight how the social positions and cultural meanings are reproduced through cultural practices. How body become the store house of historically derived social categories and meaning. Bourdieu notion of “*structured structuring dispositions*”, the “*habitus*” which is always oriented towards *practical function* provides better explanation for the role of liminal cosmic order of *theyyam*. The predetermined role of lower caste performer and his ‘Others’ who seek divine experience from him is predetermined, more precisely these roles are already constituted. The caste habitus which is a product of history is preserved in body; the historically derived social categories are incorporated into the body through the social practice of caste system. As Bourdieu conceptualized, this incorporation of social categories into the subjective realm is the magic of body. The docile nature of body enables individual to take instituted social roles. The liminal order of *Theyyam* is product of this incorporation of objectified social categories into the body and its performative enactment. This naturalization of historically constructed categories is contingent to the taming of body in social space. He says this “incorporation, which exploits the body’s

¹²⁹ William Dalrymple *Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in Modern India*, Blooms Burry, London, 2009, pp-38, 55

readiness to take seriously the performative magic of the social” that finally transforms the instituted differences into *natural* distinction, produces quite real effects, durable inscribed in the body and belief”¹³⁰. Bourdieu’s mode of cultural analysis accommodates the *performative* aspects of *Theyyam* which is itself a social practice where the socially incorporated and *embodied* roles are being enacted. The bodily incorporation of historically evolved habitus is conditioned by the history itself. So Hari Das as a microcosm of the larger macrocosm is more or less fixed. The dynamics of caste is the core of theyyam performance. The survival of shared meaning to one’s body in the context of larger perception of cosmology is grounded in the social practice and belief. Bourdieu articulates directly about the role of collective ceremonies and symbolic powers. He says:

“Symbolic power works partly through the control of other people’s bodies and belief that is given by the collectively recognized capacity to act in various ways on deep rooted linguistic and muscular patterns of behaviour, either by neutralizing them or by reactivating them to function mimetically”¹³¹

As far *Theyyam* is concerned, the performer who represents the collective habitus of the group becomes the centre of attraction and the meaning associated to his body is systematically controlled or sacrificed for the sake of structural continuity. The symbols and meanings which are confined to the intersubjective universe of caste system are inverted in the liminal order of *Theyyam*. The liturgical songs in the performance; *thottam* songs, are full of metaphors and similies that ritually criticize the legitimacy of social hierarchy. The social body of lower caste performer incorporated the “deep rooted linguistic and muscular patterns” of hierarchy through continuous subjection of body in everyday life is *neutralized* in the liminal order of *Theyyam*. However, these patterns are *reactivated* in the performing site; the lower caste member becomes an object of divinity. This performative incorporation of divine personhood is an outcome of body’s reflexive capacity to perform the social. The rebellious attitude upon the domination of structure is tactically regulated through the regulation of body both in the liminal and in the non-liminal every day. The assertion of the “classificatory schemes through body is practically apprehended and appreciated are always grounded twofold, both in social

¹³⁰ Pierre Bourdieu *The Logic of Practice*, Stanford University Press, California, 1990, pp- 54, 56, 57

¹³¹ Ibid pp-69

division of labour and in the sexual division of labour”¹³². As in the case of ‘*theyyam*’ which is directly linked to *classificatory schemes* of caste system, more precisely cultural body. It further reinforces the social division of labour. The classificatory scheme of the culture and the specific cultural bodies are reproduced through the cultural practices which are specific to the culture. *Theyyam* as a social practice, it reproduces the hierarchical nature of caste habitus. In *Theyyam* performance whether its ‘liminal’ ritual or ‘liminoid’ theatre performance, the lower caste performer come in front of participant for ritual or for leisure. Historically instituted classificatory schemes of culture are naturalized through the social practices. As Bourdieu mentioned, the confrontation between different habitus causes distinctive expressions and action, *Theyyam* is nothing but such an expression of lower caste and mediated by upper caste. The zeal for liberation from caste is prevented by illusionary liminal order of *Theyyam* and the systemic principles are further embodied.

Foucault’s notion of productions of social corporeality related to his idea of power. According to him the human social body is discursively produced in the political field. The micro physics of power continuously regulate the body. Body is socialized to emit particular sign. Body is the object of political investment in accordance with the complex reciprocal relationship like caste system. The body of both higher and lower members of caste system emits the idea of either ‘pure’ or ‘impure’. These ideologically mediated discourses generate social corporeality in caste system. The non-corporeal elements of ‘pure’ and ‘impure’ ‘embedded’ in human body through ‘discourses’ which are generated by the ideology of caste. As he substantiated, a particular social corporeality is an “effect and instrument” of “political anatomy”. According to Foucault’s model of analysis, the embodiment of caste occurs through the caste and its associated technologies of subjection. The ideology of caste has tactically utilized the capacity of body to emit certain signs. The liminal order of *Theyyam* and the performative transformation of particular given social relation are contingent upon the position in social hierarchy. Brayan Turner’s notion of embodiment and its phenomenological base shares the genealogy to Foucault’s model of analysis. *Theyyam* as a ritual, it requires active

¹³² Ibid pp-72

participation of a number of castes of north Malabar. The social corporeality and its sustenance are ensured through the giving an alternate liminal corporeal existence to the performers from specific lower caste groups. Thus *theyyam* acts as a distinctive “instrument” of reproduction of particular social corporeality.

TRANSFERENCE OF ‘SAKTI’ & THE ‘REFLEXIVE BODY’ OF PERFORMER

The structuralist understanding, the ‘body’ in Indian culture is pigeonholed either in the category of ‘pure’ or ‘impure’. However, the empirical evidences of ‘*Theyyam*’ indicates that these categorized bodies are more or less ‘*fluid*’ in contrast to the structuralist model of immutable binaries. The performative ability of lower caste to transforms into a ‘pure’ body; that ceases his impurities as well as that brings his ritual superiors in close proximity, indicates that these categories are ‘*fluid*’. As I mentioned in previous chapter, one of the key aspect of theyyam performance is nothing but the “performers are from castes traditionally considered polluting, the *avarnar*”¹³³. In popular parlance, *avarna* invokes a wider connotation. It means their existential being and their everyday social condition. However, it directly related the *naturalized* production of social and cultural corporeality of lower caste members and it also related to their profession which is definitely associated to removal or disposal of ugly substances or something which require intense physical endeavors. The social construction of everyday notions of body derives from the models in the cultural text. Susan Wadley did mention about the transformative capacity of body to incorporate the divine “shakti” – the “embodied power”¹³⁴. The ritual transmission of divine power; *Sakti* from upper caste temple to lower caste *Kavus*; the sacred grooves where the performance is held, and then finally to the body of performer is indispensable in this ritual transformation of lower caste performer. Freeman narrates these events:

“Often there are relations of traditional hierarchical subordination of the castes sponsoring a *teyyattam* to one or more higher castes in the vicinity. In that case the *teyyam* festival is inaugurated by lamps in the *teyyam* shrine being lit with a flame brought by shrine priests from the temple that is associated with these higher castes. Thus the social hierarchy is

¹³³ Rich Freeman “The teyyam tradition of Kerala” in *Blackwell Companion to Hinduism* (edt) Garin Flood, Blackwell companion Publishing Ltd, New Delhi, 2003, pp-310

¹³⁴ Susan Wadley *Shakti: Power in the Conceptual Structure of Karimpur Religion*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 1985 (1975), pp-151.

mirrored in the divine energy of the gods flowing down the chain of authority, from the temple gods to the *teyyam* shrine through the medium of the flame. In any case, however, it is the flame used in worship of the *teyyam* shrine's images that will be passed out by the priests, (and through insulating intermediaries in the case of higher caste priests) to the *teyyam* performers. This represents the actual spiritual energy or power (*caitanya* or *sakti*) of the enshrined images being transferred to the lower-caste dancers. As we shall see below, the ritual elaborations that this transfer takes are significant"¹³⁵.

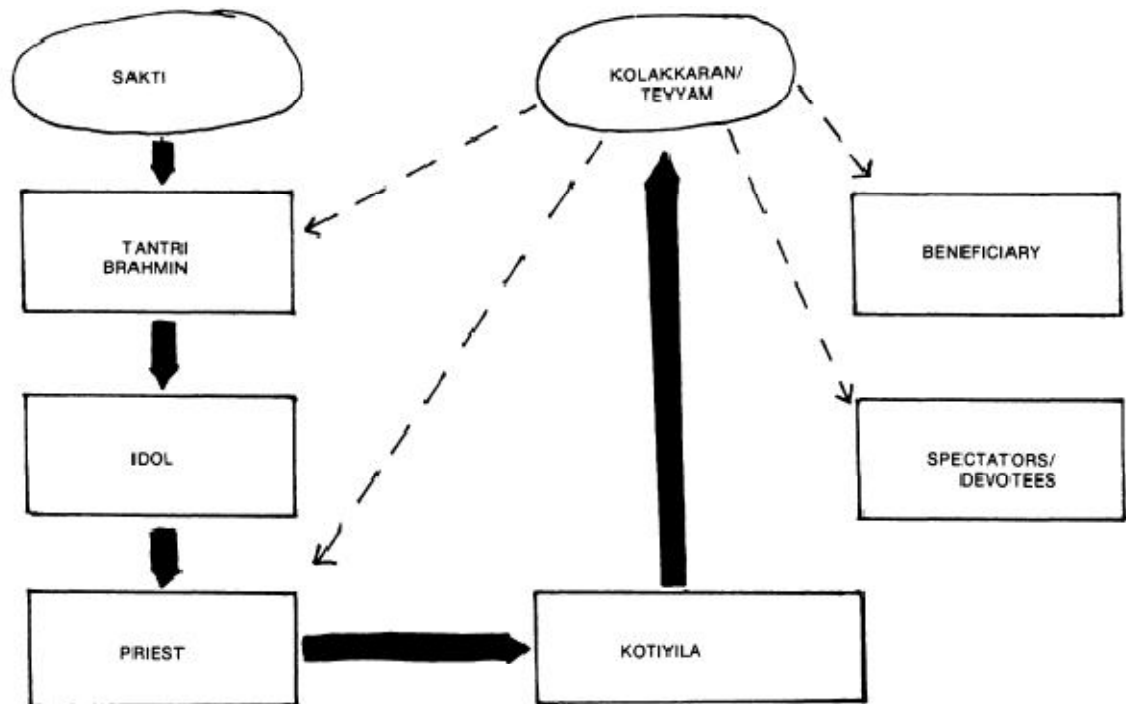
The process of ritual transference of '*Sakti*' from higher caste temple indicates how the social hierarchy is mirrored in performance. It is clear that what is transferred into the body of performer is nothing but the ritual power brought from the temple. The ritual power is incorporated into the body of the performer through ritual activities by using a number of paraphernalia. The physical body, the container of the notion of 'pure' and 'impure' exists, but a lower caste male body, of course a constituting integral of the hierarchy, can also be 'pure'. In '*Theyyam*' performance, the *Sakti* is transferred to the lower castes through different stages. First, the Brahmin priest transfers the *Sakti* to *komaram*, a priest from the lower castes and he transfers *sakti* to *kolakkaran*, the performer. Every *Theyyam* performance is inaugurated by exchange of the ritual flame brought by *komaram*; shrine priest from higher caste temple. The performer becomes the medium to further transference, to the spectators and to the devotees. This act, the act of transferring the *Sakti*, is done through the exchange of paraphernalia like a banana leaf containing areca nut, some rice and some betel leaves, associated with performance, this entire symbolic act is known as *kodiyilavazhakkam*¹³⁶. However, this ritually mediated embodiment of *Sakti* from upper caste temple to the lower caste performer is experienced through performative frames of elaborate costumed body specific lower castes. When the performer takes up the "weapon and insignia" of deity, he dances as deity and speaks as deity. The "corporeal inhabitation" of "tantric dispensation of god's consciousness" is performatively manifested through the lower caste body. The process of being icon of deity requires intense preparation; the cognitive and physical transformation is mediated through heat, light, smoke, fluids, substances, insignia, and weapons. The

¹³⁵ Rich Freeman "The Teyyam Tradition of Kerala" in *Blackwell Companion to Hinduism* (edt) Garin Flood Blackwell Companion Publishing Ltd , New Delhi, 2003, pp-313

¹³⁶ Ibid pp-112

consciousness of deity is brought through the ritual context of liturgy and subsequent speech¹³⁷. The liturgical corpus of *Pottan theyyam* engage the issue of bodily pollution; *tindal*. On the way of Sankara, the proponent of non-dualism, the Lord Siva is appeared as a wicked untouchable man.

Pictograph on ritual transference of *Sakti* in *Theyyam*¹³⁸



The *Pottan theyyam* does not keep the distance of ritual pollution, besides, he undergoes a long verbal fight with Sri Sankara. The ‘wicked untouchable man’ list out the “ontological and physiological constituents of Sanskrit philosophical school” and ask him

¹³⁷ Rich Freeman “Untouchable Bodies of Knowledge in the spirit possession of Malabr” in Axel Michaels & Christoph Wulf in *The images of body in India* (edt) Axel Michaels & Christoph Wulf; Academy Verlag, Berlin, 2009, pp- 138, 139

¹³⁸ Wayne Ashley “The Teyyam Kettu of Northern Kerala” *The Drama Review: TDR*, Vol. 23, No. 2, Performance Theory: Southeast Asia Issue *The Drama Review: TDR* Vol 23, No, 2 Performance Theory South East Asia Issue, pp-112

the qualitative difference between his body and Sri Sankaras's body. The liturgical corpus of Pottan theyyam which is performed in upper caste shrines tells:

“In what respect do/ We differ, if you omniscient/ Please tell us”/ “Senses are five, six, and nine, / Elements are five, Mandalas are three, Eshnavas (desires) are three, / Dushanams (evils) are three/Gods are three, bodies are three/ Nerves are three./ “States (of sleep, dream, awakesness) are three/ Pranas (life-breaths) are seven/ Adharas (bases) are six/ Kosas (cells) are five/ Dhadhus (constituting of the body) seven/ Is it with full knowledge of these/ That you ordered us out?/ God is the essence of all”¹³⁹

The ‘wicked untouchable’ man narrates the tantric notions of human body and he asserts nothing sets apart upper and lower castes. He questions the legitimacy of caste based categories and ‘he’ asserts the capacity of each and everyone’s body to incorporate the essence of god.

The liturgy continues:

“The one who’s mixed into the body, /The rules of the body’s domain, /The Lord who pervades the body, within; /Those search about for him in the land; Don’t comprehend that he’s based in the body/”¹⁴⁰.

The liturgy negates the position of godly attributes as fixed and based in the human body, but it conceptualize it as something which “pervades” to the body. The capacity of lower caste’s body and its capacity to act and speech as god are asserted. In the course of performance, the performer get possessed by the deity, he is transformed into ‘divine’ and the structural superiors seek bless and advices from him. However, when *Sakti* pervades through the body of lower caste, it’s being manifested in a unique way. But the *sakti* totally changes their prior form which is incorporated into idol in the sanctorum of temple. The performer is “masked” by terrifying objects. Wayne says that “the performer has moved closer towards transformation by literally *painting* the deity onto his face”¹⁴¹.

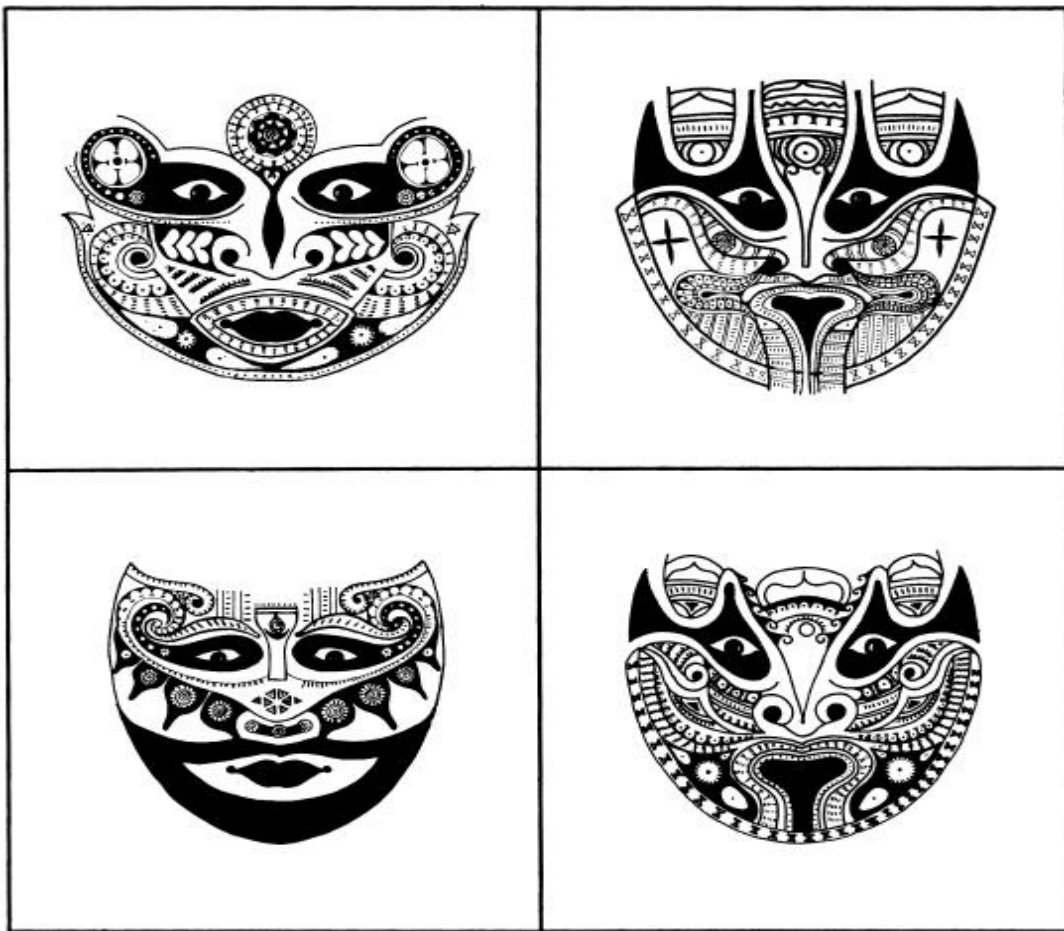
¹³⁹ K M Tharakan “Thottam of Pottan” (translated) in Appendix-2 of ‘*The Sacred in Popular Hinduism: An Empirical Study in Chirakkal, North Malabar*’ Abraham Ayrookuzhiel, The Christian Institute for the study of religion and society, Madras, pp-172.

¹⁴⁰ Rich Freeman “Untouchable Bodies of Knowledge in the spirit possession of Malabr” in Axel Michaels & Christoph Wulf in *The images of body in India* (edt) Axel Michaels & Christoph Wulf; Academy Verlag, Berlin, 2009, pp- 160

¹⁴¹ Ibid pp- 104

Victor Turner has mentioned the role of this monstrous masking in terms of Halloween Communities. He says they “often wears the monstrous kind of masks, these monstrous looking, dancing creatures are propitiated by structural superiors”. Victor Turner mentions about customs among different communities like Halloween, their children are masked in “ritual reversal” by terrifying powers. He uses Anna Freud’s argument on identification of something that threatens them to cope up with the challenge of something that makes them inferior.

The face paintings of Various *Theyyams*.



Source: Wayne Ashley (1979:104)

When the 'Sakti' reaches to the lower caste performer, it manifests in a unique way; it's animated through the *performative* capacity of lower castes' body to emit an alternative meaning which is contrary to its everyday. The liminal space of *Theyyam* performance and its vivid ritual paraphernalia enable his body to emit a higher divine meaning. This ritual transformation of social corporeality is happened due to the cooperation everyone who belongs to the intersubjective frames of caste system. However, the liturgical songs of *Theyyam* reveal that this ritually mediated reflexivity is predetermined.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Anthropologist and dance scholars have enriched the literature on 'body'. The 'visual turn' among scholars has generated a large corpus of literature over body. The question of what constitutes the essence of social corporeality in India needs to incorporate both the philosophical traditions and cultural practices. Of course, the natural docile body of an individual is *cultured* through the culture specific technology of body. The caste system and its particular ways of subjection provide a specific model to perceive the body. Approaching body in Indian culture in a monotonous way would lead to a dismal understanding. The "docile" nature of body enables it to act *reflexively*. However, the structuralist engagement of cultural signs often leads to the dualistic conceptualization of body at large. Dumont's model of analysis of social corporeality diverts our vision from an alternative possibility. According to him, social corporeality of an individual is culturally shaped and regulated by being a member of the category of either 'pure' or 'impure'. But the culturally situated understanding of liminal cosmic orders unveil that these "fixed principles" are not as *fixed* as we conceptualized. The corporeal existence of social body in the context of Indian culture cannot be limited to everyday. However, the power relation tactically mediates the capacity of lower caste's body to emit an alternative divine meaning. What is striking is that this transformative capacity of body in liminal order is limited to the category of particular *avarna* caste, the 'untouchable' in the everyday social life. During the liminal order of *theyyam*, the corporeal existence of *avarna* "polluting" member is transformed into "deity", whom everybody seeks blessing and advices. This *reflexivity*, the capacity to transform from upper to lower, is confined to the body of lower caste member; those who fall in the category of *varna* cannot act as

speaking god. In brief, body is docile and it is changed as *cultural* through various ideologies that discursively generates the social corporeality. Its docility is natural and that enables it to act *reflexively* but that is mediated by the power relation.

CHAPTER: 4

**BEING IN THE BOTTOM:
ON CULTURAL TECHNIQUES OF 'INTERSUBJECTIVITY'**

INTRODUCTION

Even though notion of self and subjectivity are not novel concepts in sociology and social anthropology; the recent discourses in sociology and anthropology have taken up the issues regarding self and inter/subjectivity in the context of new theoretical frames. Social world is based in human interaction which is evolved along with culture. The study of human being in the context of cultural, social and psychological universal goes back to 1940s and 1950s, and this movement led a few anthropologists to think about phenomenological conceptions of self and person. This new group of anthropologists conceptualized human being in the context of culture and its “system of symbols and meanings”. The biological rootedness of self and personality was questioned by these new camp, they took all these age-old abstract notions in the context of culture and its expressions through cultural sign system. The analysis of the “sign-function” or “sign action” called *semiosis* which consist of triadic relation of object, sign, and interpretant prevent the sway of subjectivism and solipsism in comprehending the idea of self through the prism of culture¹⁴². Such new movement compelled the community of scholars to accept the diverse notions of self and subjectivity across cultures. It essentializes the necessity of culturally situated understandings of human being rather than larger generalizations.

Intersubjectivity is an outcome of social process, it is *mediated* by the universal capacity to recognize that, human share minds and their intentional states through vivid means of communication¹⁴³. The ‘intersubjective’ dimensions of human relations have been theorized intensely since the inception of many social science disciplines. The rudimentary nature of human interrelations and its expressions through innumerable modes have been explicated through different theoretical projects. The new ‘intersubjective turn’ in anthropology has unleashed the novel anthropological investigation like the stories, autobiographies, narratives, etc. These experiential aspects

¹⁴² Milton Singer *Man’s Glassy Essence: Explorations in semiotic Anthropology*, Hindustan Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1986, pp- 53, 57

¹⁴³ Jerome Bruner “Meaning and Self in Cultural Perspective” in *The Social Self* (edt) David Bakhurst and Christine Synowich, Sage Publication, New Delhi, 1995, pp-21

of everyday life have been hunted down by these new turn. The so called “phenomenological anthropology” of Michael Jackson, and “literary and liberal anthropology” of Rapport, are two main tributaries of this new approach¹⁴⁴. Jackson gives priority to the social aspect of the relationships in order to demonstrate the value of intersubjectivity for ethnographic analysis. The ‘intersubjective’ life is the focal point of these new turn. The “physical and metaphysical, conscious and unconscious, passive and active, kind and unkind, serious and lucid, dyadic and collective, symmetrical and asymmetrical, inclusive and exclusive, emphatic and antagonistic – prefigures and configures more discursive forms of relationship” are put into the metrics of these new modes of cultural analysis¹⁴⁵. Even though the notion of intersubjectivity is widely used across the disciplines, the term has been taken up by this newly emerged camp in a novel way primarily because of its methodological grounding in anthropology. According to him the concept of ‘intersubjectivity’ is useful three ways; primarily, it resonates that many non-western society tend to articulate ‘identity’ as “mutually arising”- a relational variable than assigning to ‘ontological primacy’ to the individual or the object that are inherent in the intersubjective nexus; secondly the idea of ‘intersubjectivity’ helps us to expose the critical characteristics of pre-literate society; its ‘extra-psychic process’ which is derived from the ‘intra-psychic processes’, finally; the notion of ‘intersubjectivity’ helps us to unpack the “relationship between two different, but vitally connected senses of the word ‘subject’”, the empirical person endowed with consciousness and his/her outer world; society, class, nation, gender, caste etc¹⁴⁶. The notion of ‘intersubjectivity’ is pivotal in understanding the individual in the context of ‘social’. The constitution of the ‘social’ ultimately rely on the individual who s/he shares the social world. It is irreducible and ‘*sui generis*’, it acts “a generative principle of our own identities”¹⁴⁷.

¹⁴⁴ Aleksandar Boskovic “The “Intersubjective Turn” and the Question of Subject in Contemporary Anthropology: A Review Article” *Campos* 2:55-65, 2002., pp-55

¹⁴⁵ Michael Jackson. *Minima Ethnographica: Intersubjectivity and the Anthropological Project*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999, pp-4, quoted from Alexanadar Boskovic “The “Intersubjective Turn” and the Question of Subject in Contemporary Anthropology: A Review Article” *Campos* 2:55-65, 2002., pp-56

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid* pp- 7

¹⁴⁷ Nick Crossley *Intersubjectivity: The Fabric of Social Becoming*, Sage Publications, Ne w Delhi, 1996, pp-173

This chapter is designed to focus on the idea of ‘intersubjectivity’ in the context of caste. The scholars who approached ‘intersubjectivity’ with sociological categories are emphasized to outline social and cultural dimensions of ‘intersubjectivity’. Besides this, the chapter tries to look at ‘*Theyyam*’ performance in the context of this notion that intersubjectivity that is ‘mutually arising’ in the discursive practices of culture.

ON DIMENSIONS OF INTERSUBJECTIVITY:

ALFRED SCHUTZ, JURGEN HEBERMAS, AND MICHEL FOUCAULT

Since the concept of intersubjectivity is multilayered, the discourse centered on intersubjectivity is polyphonic. The German Philosopher; Edmund Husserl, unleashed the idea of phenomenology which concerned to “investigate the various ways in which different objects are ‘intended’ in consciousness; that is the ways in which different objects are presented to consciousness”, and he advocated the Cartesian method of doubt for a process of ‘phenomenological reduction’. Thus phenomenology becomes an analysis of active constitution of the object of experience. He engaged much more on *Cartesian Mediations*, and he criticizes Descartes on the ground of solipsism, he attempts to answer, precisely, the “question of the existence of other consciousness and his (human) relationship to them- Husserlian version of the question intersubjectivity”. He maintains the stand that takes up ‘experience’ in an intersubjective way, the experience of others also constitutes the experience of an individual¹⁴⁸. But Alfred Schutz brought the terrain of sociology and phenomenology together; he takes up the institutional dimensions and social roles played by human being as central features of intersubjectivity. The symbolic reproduction of social life and the participative and communicative actions of the subjects have been focused in pivotal questions related to intersubjectivity. Whereas Jurgen Hebermas treats ‘intersubjectivity’ and the ‘life world’ are keys in framing social theory. According to him, the rudimentary aspect of social life is constituted in the form of the life world and the ‘systemic features’ are evolved along with time. The social actor as a communicative and communicatively engaged being is central to his theoretical enterprise. According to him the issues of intersubjectivity is based in the claims of subjects which are embedded in the communicative action. The

¹⁴⁸ Ibid: pp-4

intersubjectively experienced world is communicated through claims of individuals. But Michel Foucault, French philosopher put the entire discourse of intersubjectivity in the metrics of power relations. According to him inter/subjectivity is nothing but the effect of power. The particular intersubjective practices and relations brought out definite intersubjectivity itself. The vivid technologies of social control emerged and institutionalized by power. The human subjectivity is an outcome these cultural practices of power¹⁴⁹. These three thinkers concerned with their models of social analysis. However, at the same time they address some genuine questions related to intersubjectivity in the context of culture.

ALFRED SCHUTZ:

INTERSUBJECTIVE UNIVERSE OF ‘SIGN SYSTEM’

The notion of intersubjectivity came out of a series of discourse generated by different schools of philosophy. Alfred Schutz approached the discourse of intersubjectivity out of the transcendental considerations. He brought the mundane ‘every day’ as the corner stone of the discourse. The ‘embodied’ nature of human being and his/her ‘situated’ life among the similarly ‘embodied’ and ‘situated’ are emphasized in comprehending the notion of intersubjectivity¹⁵⁰. The ‘relational’ aspects of human consciousness, human experiences and its nature of occurrence are key facets of his theory building. He says:

“I can observe my own lived experiences only after they are over and done with, I can observe yours as they actually take place. This in turn implies that you and I are in a specific sense "simultaneous," that we "coexist," that our respective streams of consciousness intersect”,¹⁵¹.

The coexisting ‘we’ constitutes through the process of sharing the innate experiences of life world. The intersection and synchronism of different streams of consciousness play a determining role in moulding the individual consciousness. Here he unveils the social nature of the private mental engagements of human beings. He says “the world of contemporaries, the world of predecessors, and the world of successors” are different

¹⁴⁹ Ibid: pp-77, 78, 100, 101, 131, 134

¹⁵⁰ Ibid: pp-77

¹⁵¹ Alfred Schutz *The Phenomenology of Social World*, translated by George Walsh and Frederick , North Western University Press, 1967, pp- 102

“regions” of social world which make human consciousness intersubjective¹⁵². But he says that there is a “continuum” among different consciousness. The process of “synchronization” among consciousness through the sharing of “lived experience” make the social world is intersubjective and relational. Further he puts the concept of “sign system”. He says that signs invoke meanings. The experiences of ‘knowing’ self is build and used through signs. Sign system is present to those who understand its “higher order between previously experienced signs”. Every sign system has two schemes namely; “expressive scheme” and “interpretative scheme”. He substantiates that, in the world of solitary ego, the distinction between the “expressive scheme” and “interpretative scheme” are coincided and merged. The conceptual schemas of Schutz are made out by considering spatio-temporal factors. These schemas are formed on the basis of their immediate accessibility and their experience to one another. He uses the conceptual schemas like “consociates, contemporaries, predecessors or successors”¹⁵³. The ‘consociates’ we have immediate access to them, the second one, the ‘contemporaries’ those we know personally and those we do not know, the third category constitute either in the past or future; the predecessors and successors. The “spatial and temporal immediacy is essential” to constitutes the category of “face-to-face relation” which belong to schema of “consociates”. The inner world of the individual consciousness is shaped by horizontal and vertical integration of lived experiences. The human being is integrated to these types of ‘other’ at different level and there are many similarities and differences across the types. Finally the social world is made through the continuum among consciousness of contemporaries. So intersubjectivity is relational and historical. It’s an outcome of the process of sharing of intersubjective domains of experience of social world through the ‘sign system’. The interaction among the individual is routinised, rationalized and institutionalized. It’s observed that the Schutizian work reveals that ‘intersubjectivity’ is more a differentiated phenomenon and he gives what makes a community is nothing but “coherent unity of possible experience” and the interpretation of lived experience in a community is kept homogeneous through the sign

¹⁵² Ibid: pp-105

¹⁵³ Ibid: 143

system. It is also 'ordering' the way the 'experience' is experienced at group level¹⁵⁴. The notion of intersubjectivity developed in Schutizian works give prevalence to the gregarious nature of human being, their individual experience and its sharing through a sign system. The social and cultural dimensions of human relations are given considerations in addressing the issue of intersubjectivity. The 'interlocking' and 'continuum' of past, present and future, and network among young, mature and demised members; the temporal categories, shape his unique idea of intersubjectivity.

JURGEN HEBERMAS: CLAIMS ON LIFE WORLD

When we consider theoretical enterprise of Hebermas, intersubjectivity and life world are primordial for him. He derives his understanding of the life world from three sources, namely, phenomenology, the pragmatism of Mead and the linguistic philosophy of Wittgenstein and Austin. He adopts the model of social actor as a communicative and communicatively engaged being from Mead, and that is the base of his theory of communicative action. Three notions form his entire project of theory building; firstly, a social theory of human behaviour must be framed in a symbolic level, secondly he takes the notion that human beings keep the communicative relation to each other, and thirdly, he takes up the dialogue and linguistic communicative processes are irreducible.¹⁵⁵ The communicative world is taken up and individual consciousness is put down. The notion of subjectivity is embedded in his conceptual categories. He says

“It makes clear that the intersubjective relation between participants in interaction, who adjust to one another and reciprocally take positions on one another's utterances, is reflected in the structure of the relation-to-self”. “The more complex the attitudes of the other are, which participants "internalize in their own experience," the more there is a shift in what connects the participants (to start with, organisms) beforehand, in virtue of systemic features—from the level of innate, specific, instinctual regulations to the level of intersubjectivity that is communicatively generated, consolidated in the medium of linguistic symbols, and secured finally through cultural tradition”¹⁵⁶

The transformation and attainment of a higher level of evolution is made possible through the emergence of linguistic symbols that enabled human being to transcend a state of

¹⁵⁴ Ibid: 82

¹⁵⁵ Nick Crossley *'Intersubjectivity: The Fabric of Social Becoming'*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1996, pp-100

¹⁵⁶ Jurgen Hebermas *Theory of Communicative Action, Vol.2, Life World and System: A critique of Functionalist Reason*, Translated by Thomas MacCarthy, Beacon Press, Boston, 1987, pp-10

regulation conditioned by instincts to a “level of intersubjectivity”. According to him, intersubjective world of cultural symbols enable human to take off from the bondages of instincts.

Hebermas substantiates the linguistic or communicative base of social and cultural symbols. The unintended function of communication has far reaching impacts; the “transposition of cognitions, obligations, and expressions” is based in linguistic tools, besides this, it acts as a medium for communication, it is “coordinating action” and “socializing actors” as well, more precisely it serves the “transmission of culturally stored knowledge”¹⁵⁷. The expressive and performative components are embedded in grammatical speech, through these components the speaker entering into the interpersonal relation with other members, thus neophytes is taken off to the fully developed social roles. As far as Hebermas is concerned, the ‘intersubjectivity’ is communicatively generated along with the development of self. Language is the principle of intersubjectivity and the “structure of intersubjectivity” lays down the communicative roles, thus the central theme in his theory of social action is language. The “life world” which means for him “the transcendental site where speaker and hearer meet, where they can reciprocally raise claims that their utterances fit the world (objective, social, or subjective), and where they can criticize and confirm those validity claims, settle their disagreements, and arrive at agreements”¹⁵⁸. The “validity claims” are integral to communicative interactions. When the agents are in communication with other, s/he makes claims regarding their own subjectivity as speakers but according to the “role-and-rule” structure of life world. Through the interaction, people contests claims; the intersubjectively experienced life world is exposed to substantiate their claims. When we assess the Hebermasian notion of intersubjectivity, the problem with his analysis is that he equates ‘intersubjectivity’ with linguistic communication. He does not speak about emotion, perception, or imagination. The linguistic centrism prevents him in unveiling sociological dimensions of inner nature of human being¹⁵⁹. The avoidance of philosophy of consciousness, and over emphasizing of linguistic and communicative schemas

¹⁵⁷ Ibid: 63

¹⁵⁸ Ibid: 126

¹⁵⁹ Nick Crossley *‘Intersubjectivity: The Fabric of Social Becoming’*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1996, pp-124

deprived him from the terrain of cognition and consciousness where his predecessors like Husserl obsessed. But he could unmask how the intersubjectivity is communicatively generated.

MICHEL FOUCAULT:

‘INTERSUBJECTIVITY’ AS AN EFFECT OF POWER

French philosopher, Michel Foucault unveiled hidden dimensions of human self and its mortification through historically derived ideologies and practices. The discourse on human ‘intersubjectivity’ got new turn. The abstract concepts like consciousness, self, truth, etc and it’s taken for granted nature, are contested. The discourse analysis of these historically derived categories could expose certain mediated convictions over its validity and autonomy. From the purview of Foucauldian vision, the intersubjectivity is nothing but mere effect of a particular power relation¹⁶⁰. He is concerned with more how power is constituted and exercised. He focuses on the techniques of power and its deployment over subjects. According to him power is embedded and constituted in all forms of social organizations. The human self is an effect of certain technologies of subjection regulated and controlled by power. Power is relational; it’s exercised, diffused across the population. He says:

“..we must understand that there are four major types of these "technologies," each a matrix of practical reason: (1) technologies of production, which permit us to produce, transform, or manipulate things; (2) technologies of sign systems, which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification; (3) technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject; (4) technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform I themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality”¹⁶¹.

He gives a novel notion of power and its operations in society. The process of objectivizing of the subject is mediated by certain power relation in society. He says that each of these technologies involved in certain modification of individuals. The “way of

¹⁶⁰ Ibid: 135

¹⁶¹ Michel Foucault “Technologies of Self: A seminar with Michel Foucault” From: Martin, L.H, London, Tavistock,1988 pp.16-49.

being” is exercised by power through operation of certain power relation. Certain means and ends, and certain ‘state of mind’, certain institutions are sacralized and certain operations are exercised over the subjects. The intersubjective world is constructed through historically derived technologies of power. These technologies are primordial in constituting his theory of power. The exercising of power is only possible in an intersubjective world. This relational attribute of his theory of power make it more comprehensive in exposing how complex the way power is organized and operated. According to him, the nature of power is not fixed; the ways in which power is organized and diffused among population along with advancement of culture itself shows the complex chronology of power metrics. He argues that the “since the seventeenth century, of technique for governing individuals-that is, for guiding their conduct- in domains are different as school, the army and the workshop”¹⁶². The emergence of novel institutions and new forms of diffusion of power made sea changes in the metrics of power relation between state and its subjects. The corresponding changes reflected in the realm of human interrelationship, the new rational schemas and its disciplinary systems, the new “technologies of self” canvassed it in a different way. The ‘inter/subjectivity’, which is an outcome of systemic procedures, changes along with the changes in the power metrics of society at large. Earlier societies, the “deductive power” of the sovereign exercised through claiming and letting the life, but later since the classical time, it was replaced by the “life administering power” of sovereign¹⁶³. These changes in the constitution of power and its manifestation caused new dimensions to human intersubjectivity. The very broad notion of “life administering power” provides deep insights over the human society, their interrelationship to each other and with their physical environment. More precisely, according to Foucault, the intersubjectivity is fluid and it’s processed out of the complex systemic procedures of culture. But the question of intersubjectivity in a sphere of ‘power free’ zone must be conceptualized. But Foucault puts forward a comprehensive theory of intersubjectivity which not merely based in the apparent elements of culture like “sign system” or mode of “communication”.

¹⁶² Michel Foucault “The History of sexuality Vol. 2” in *The Foucault Reader* (edt) Paul Robinow, Pantheon Books, New York, 1984, pp-337, 338

¹⁶³ Ibid: 259

INTERSUBJECTIVITY IN INDIAN CONTEXT:

Caste system as a cultural technique of 'Intersubjectivity'

The terrain of intersubjectivity is contested from different theoretical frames. As we discussed above, it's "generated" and "embodied" through a series of continuous cultural process. The specificities of a culture must be addressed in framing the issues of 'intersubjectivity'. More precisely, the culture specific mediums of "sign system", "linguistic symbols" and culture specific "technologies of power" should be brought to the focal points where the cultural notions of intersubjectivity is explored. The cultural categories and its subjective experiences are taken to the questions regarding 'intersubjectivity' in the context of India.

The situated understanding of cultural subject in the context of larger cultural matrix provides much better insight over subjective experience as well as the way social categories are organized. The notion of 'unitary individual' and exploration of 'intra-psychic individual' without the 'context' of culture reinforces the primacy of the individual in the discourse of sociological and anthropological categories. The very idea of "intersubjectivity undermines this monological emphasis by asserting the embeddedness of the subjects within social relations" and the "hermeneutic notions of recognition, intention and agency inherent in the idea of intersubjectivity counteract the functionalist emphasis of materialist theory"¹⁶⁴. The human being is born into the culture and his/her ways of 'being' is already predetermined by existing 'structures' and its specific power relations. The prevalence of structures over individual experience indicates nature of 'intersubjectivity' which is already constituted categories and modes of cultural being limits the individual's becoming and intersubjective universe of culture. The operations of cultural categories and its sustenance through power determine the dynamics of 'intersubjectivity' in a culture.

In India, traditionally people are categorized, stratified, and pigeonholed as distinctive groups called '*jati*' in popular parlance. These popular parlance make the very base that

¹⁶⁴ Lois McNay "Situated intersubjectivity" in *Engendering the Social: Feminist encounters with sociological theory* (edt) Barbara L. Marshall and Anne Witz Open University Press, Berkshire, England, 2004, pp-177

determine the intersubjective relationship. G S Ghurye asserts that these categories derived from the intermingling of people from various cultural area and such categories were maintained through practices like endogamy. He agrees that, “untouchability and un-approachability arose out of ceremonial purity”, that became idiom to look at the people, the very “consciousness of superiority” of “Brahmins” which is based in “purity” operated everywhere and generated “rules” for life¹⁶⁵. But Irawati Karve challenges Ghurye’s argument that “caste did not differ from the class system of modern Western societies”, she uses her “field experience” and “ancient records”. She takes up two words, “jati” and “varna” from various historical sources and its usages to denote the difference among people. Thus she argues that “caste-like structures seem to have existed for a very long time in India, were there in before the Aryans came and persisted up to the present”¹⁶⁶

However, people are not aware of the intricacies of the traditional concept ‘varna’, the “Varna scheme of the Vedas there are four orders, and the Untouchables has no place in it”, and this scheme is a “broad category of the society and not its real effective units”. For instance, “Untouchables are outside the scheme, but as a matter of actual fact they are an integral part of the society”, the *varna* system provides a “distorted picture of caste but it has enabled the ordinary men and women to grasp the caste system by providing them with a simple and clear scheme which is applicable to all parts of India”. However, as far as hierarchy is concerned, its expressed diverse form across the country, and “each caste tries to prove that it is equal to a ‘superior’ caste and ‘superior’ to its equals”¹⁶⁷. Beteille makes the same observation over caste and *varna*. He also says that “Varnas refers to one of the four main categories into which Hindu society traditionally divided; *jati* refers generally to a much smaller group”, but he says, “*jati* has a series of meanings, by extension it is applied to what according to traditional usage, should be designated as *varna*”¹⁶⁸.

¹⁶⁵ G S Ghurye ‘ *Caste and Race in India*, Popular Prakshan, Bombay, 1986, (1950), pp- 176-178, 180.

¹⁶⁶ Irawati Karve *Hindu Society: An Interpretation*, Deshmukh Prakashan, 1968 (1961) pp-50, 51,65

¹⁶⁷ M N Srinivas *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays*, Asia Publishing House, New York, 1962, pp - 63, 67

¹⁶⁸ Andre Beteille *Caste, Class, and Power: Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1969, pp-46

Through traditional hierarchy of four Varna, the “preliminary enumeration” of people are made as “the highest as *Brahmanas* or priest, below them the *Kshatriyas* or warriors, then they *Vaishyas*, in modern usage mainly merchants and finally Shudras, the servants or have-nots” and “fifth category the untouchables, who are left out of the classification”¹⁶⁹. The hierarchy of Varna is constituted by all these ‘castes’; the interrelationship between these castes are regulated and protected through the ideology of ‘purity’ and ‘pollution’. The hierarchy of Varna is expressed in many ways; the “differentiated treatment” is one of distinguishable features of the system. The projection of caste as a mental structure, which is manifested through vivid cultural practices, based in “certain fixed principles” which govern the “elements” of the whole system. Dumont says:

“..the caste, unified from outside, is divided within”.. “It’s a state of mind which is expressed in by the emergence in various situations, of group of various orders generally called caste”, “...but by starting from the notion of the ‘system’ in terms of which certain fixed principles govern the arrangement of fluid and fluctuating elements”, -“the caste system as a pan-Indian institution”. “The whole is founded on the necessary and hierarchical coexistence of the two opposites”, “this opposition underlies hierarchy, which is the superiority of the *pure* to the *impure*, underlies separation because the pure and impure must kept separate”¹⁷⁰.

The production and sustenance of the system depends on the production of the “state of mind” and its continuity across the generation. He calls these certain fixed principles as “ideology”, this ideology brings into the system-the integrated *whole*. The sociological significance of ideology lies in its totality. The dictation of hierarchy prevents the separation of constituting elements of system¹⁷¹. The interdependence of the constituting integrals of the system maintained through the “sign system” of caste. The notion of “purity” and “impurity”, which “govern” the subjects but keeping them ‘divided’ and at the same time, it ensures integration of all parts. When we take up the new turns and twist in the academic discourse on caste, we hardly find the theories which never incorporate the cognitive elements of the system. Even if those who dumps the “doctrinally given rigidity” of the system and focuses more on the “fluid” nature of it, they also never drops

¹⁶⁹ Louis Dumont *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implication*, translated by Mark Sanibury, Louis Dumont, and Basia Gulati, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999 (1970), pp-67

¹⁷⁰ Ibid: 34, 35, 44, 49

¹⁷¹ Ibid 41

the role of ideology but its asserted that its ‘solidified’ through the discourses and practices generated by historical experiences like colonialism. The ethnic approach to the caste incorporates the “fluid” nature of caste, but it also never excludes the naturalized claims¹⁷². The cognitive base of caste system, its natural claims about existential questions of ‘being’, and its immutability which is legitimized through ideology, are central in framing the intersubjective universe of caste. The individual’s ‘intersubjectivity’ is generated and limited by already constituted cultural categories.

‘BEING’ IN THE BOTTOM: Humiliation as precondition of ‘Intersubjectivity’

As I mentioned earlier, when we take the Foucauldian version of intersubjectivity which is focused on power relation and its technologies, caste system epitomizes the notion of technologies of sign system, power, production, and self. The “existential inclusive dimension”; the incorporation of various religious notions like *Karma* and *Samsara* and “religious ritual offering expiation” provides individual the ultimate answers to the questions of life and death, and the “positional-historical dimension” of the system determines the location of cultural subjects the larger social structure¹⁷³. The important dimensions of intersubjectivity, “the existential, the normative, and the area of potential growth” are determined by this ideology of *Varna*. The lower castes who falls in the category of “impure” are being told that they are incomplete, the “*avarnas*”, thus the positive recognition of those of who shares the same ideological discourse are rejected. The “inculcation of caste ego ideology begins in the family” where the child learns the typical words, expressions, and gestures, and finally that deprives human dignity of lower members of the hierarchy and the permanency to the consciousness of “being low and polluted”,¹⁷⁴. This culture specific technology of power, self, sign system and production inculcates in its subjects a specific form of intersubjectivity which is rooted in an ideology. A far the so called “lower” castes are concerned; a feeling of being humiliated

¹⁷² Deepa Reddy “The Ethnicity of Caste”, *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 78, No. 3 ,Summer, 2005, pp. 547

¹⁷³ F Franco and Sarvar V. Sherry Chand “Ideology as Social Practice: The Functioning of Varna” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol 24, No. 47 (Nov.25, 1989) ,pp 2606

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*:2610

is a precondition of intersubjectivity. The choice of individual is minimum, his/her existential location and potentials are limited. The “sign system” of caste; through the notion of ‘pure’ and ‘impure’, the cultural bodies, are permanently categorized as inferior and superior. This hermeneutic base of system and its expression through endogamous cultural practices undermines the monological notions of intersubjectivity. So when we consider the lower ‘parts’ of the ‘whole’ and their ‘interconnectedness’ to the whole system, it is clear their ‘being’ is limited and derives from the location in the social hierarchy of the system at large. The ‘embodiment’ of structural elements and cultural symbols are assured through the framing of cultural practices like segregation and denial of public resources. The individual is embedded in the social network and the social environment is regulated and created through cultural signs. The notion of ‘untouchability’ is pivotal in determining the intersubjective sphere of social life. The notion of “institutionalized humiliation” is important in understanding the dynamics of intersubjectivity in a highly stratified society. A legitimizing ideology is essential in a society, where the “institutionalized humiliation” is prevalent. Its “more effective when it become the common sense of society, so that its members instinctively understand their social world in terms of its categories” and “organized humiliation represents a systemic assault on the self respect of its victims”,¹⁷⁵. The understanding and conceptualization of social world are contingent upon the social schemas. As far as those who located in the bottom of the social hierarchy or those expelled from the hierarchy, are concerned, they are deprived of human dignity. The deprivation of dignity and self respects are detrimental to their potential experiences. The ideology of caste, the notion of pure and impure prevents the direct communication or mingling of the so called upper and lower castes. But their relative position in the social hierarchy depends on the existence of the two categories. But in the intersubjective sphere of social life and its relatedness is always activated through the ritual segregation and untouchability. The ‘communicative’ dimension of intersubjectivity is immanent in ritual pollution. The verbal communication always not required for communication. The cultural symbols and practices can operate without any verbal communication and physical proximity. Humiliation itself acts as a

¹⁷⁵ Bhikhu Parekh, “Logic of Humiliation”, in *Humiliation: Claims and Context* (edt) Gopal Guru, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2009, pp-32, 34

communication¹⁷⁶. The state of being at the bottom of the social hierarchy determines the subjective experience of the lower castes and their perception of the social world. As I substantiated, the interrelationship between the categories of ‘pure’ and ‘impure’ are predetermined, the relative nature of these categories make it ‘intersubjectively’ generated and experienced. As far as the lower strata of the social hierarchy are concerned, humiliation acts as precondition of intersubjectivity.

THEYYAM:

AS A PERFORMATIVE ENACTEMENT OF ‘INTERSUBJECTIVITY’

When we take up the Milton Singer’s notion of ‘cultural performance’ and it as an analytical tool to decipher the complex interrelationship among the castes, and their mediation of social crisis, theyyam performance provides us a unique platform to engage with the empirical issues of cultural principles, its survival and its appropriation in changed social conditions. As I mentioned in the preceding chapters, the caste hierarchy had a dominant role in constituting the ritual cosmology of *Theyyam* performance. As far north Malabar was concerned, the *tharavadu* (landed ancestral house of upper caste) and shrines, were the centre of the “community of worship” which emphasized the interdependence between castes. The idea of “religious community” has been taken up the recent south Indian historiography in comprehending the genealogy of reproduction of social order. Dilip Menon says that “common worship and festivals at temples are seen as performing an integrative role by mediating between castes and creating a space for the redistribution of ritual resources”¹⁷⁷. The mutual interdependence and obligation were the indispensable elements of social order and it was reinforced through periodic festivals, and processions. During the performance, the “performer (*kolam*) was waiting to be possessed by the spirit of the local hero or heroine who had been deified as a form of the *bhagavati* or *Siva*”, the songs (*thottam*) were sung “relating the circumstances of the life and death of the deified victims”, the “retelling of the story of the unjust killing of a lower caste was a lengthy criticism of the power exercised by upper castes in general”, and “during the period of performance, *Nambudiri* and *Nayar* land lord would seek the

¹⁷⁶ Sanjay Palshkar “Understanding Humiliation”, in *Humiliation: Claims and Context* (edt) Gopal Guru, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2009, pp-87

¹⁷⁷ Dilip M Menon *Caste, nationalism, communalism in south India: Malabar, 1900-1948*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 1994, pp-3,4

advice of the performer as it was believed that his prophecies as well as his curses came true”¹⁷⁸. During the liminal cosmic order of *Theyyam* performance, the social categories are activated in an inversed way. The site of performance acts a space for criticism to wrong deeds and words of upper castes. However, the whole process is mediated through the symbolic order of ritual sphere rather than the real act. Thus the liminal order of *Theyyam* is increasingly argumentative and discursive in nature.

The liminal order of *Theyyam* is unique due to its structure, content, and ideals. However, the role played by each caste community is predetermined by their structural location in the caste hierarchy. The liminal order of ‘*Theyyam*’ derives from the normal ‘everyday’ life which is determined and mediated by caste ideology. So it is clear that caste ideals operate as an inner thread of social life that determines the interrelationship among different castes, that determines who should come in close proximity of whom and when. Freeman says

“...virtually every caste and community in the region, from ritually higher *Nambutiri* to the lowest Pulayan Untouchables, traditionally sponsor and participate in yearly Teyyam rites at their own and others’ shrines. It should be also pointed out that before the temple entry legislation of the late 1940’s took effect in Malabar. Teyyam shrines were the only functional temples accessible those “polluting” castes (*avarnas*), who in fact constituted the bulk of the Hindu agrarian population”¹⁷⁹.

What is the striking feature of this ritual performance is that it brings the scattered lower caste "polluting" groups and the ritually upper caste controls the land, hold the ritual authority, and other material possessions, are brought together in a single platform of symbolic order. The days long intense preparation and hardworking are ended by *Theyyam* performance. As Freeman observed, as far as lower caste members, theyyam acts as single divine source of power, which is mediated by their ritually upper castes. The hermeneutic notions of recognitions, agency, and intention which are inherent in the idea of intersubjectivity are rejected in the normal every day, but the liminal symbolic

¹⁷⁸ Ibid: pp-56,57

¹⁷⁹ Richardson Freeman, “ Performing Possession: Ritual and Consciousness in the teyyam complex” in *Flags of fame : Studies in South Asian folk culture* (edt) Heidrun Bruckner, Lothar Lutze, and Aditya Malik, Manohar Publishing , New Delhi, 1993, pp- 110

order of theyyam exchange the ritual order. The temporary recognition and inclusion through giving divine power to the “polluting” castes helps to rejuvenate the axiomatic principles of culture, its fixed cultural categories and sign system. Of course, these liminal orders itself derive from the already constituted and conceptualized social world. The performative enactment of ritual order further get empowered and consolidated in the cognition of all those who “sponsor and participate” in theyyam performance. The cultural notions of body, its ways of ‘being’, its relationship with the larger intersubjective social world, and finally its bond with the cosmic order, are get further strengthened. The individuals’ private mental engagement has nothing to do with the theyyam performance. Even through *Theyyam* as a ritual causes certain consciousness in individual performer but one should emphasize the fact that “these rites and their results have a verbally and symbolically defined content and interpretation prior to and independently of the performer as individual agent”. He should be contextualized in larger social network, because, *Theyyam* performance and its “highly formalized set of behaviors and beliefs which owe little to individual motivation or dispositions”. The “performer is therefore embedded in a set of conventions which presuppose the constitution of and effectiveness of the possession rituals to which he subjects himself through training, and by which he is himself turned into a ritual object”¹⁸⁰. Despite the individual’s personal dispositions do not have any role in setting the behaviour in the symbolic order, a set of conventions play an active role across the structure of the performance. The performers and participants as socially situated being, their role in the performance is presupposed. Through the intense training and practice, the bodies of certain lower caste groups are subjected to act in the ritual space of theyyam performance in a definite way. The symbolic space of performance is created through enactment of already constituted notion of social corporeality. Through the performance, the social bodies having separate meaning of ‘pure’ and ‘impure’ come in contact, however, what is signified and fortified is that it’s cultural meaning and its incapacity to transcend the categorical meanings completely.

Even though *Theyyam* is a solo performance, the participation and interaction of various castes of the concerned area is necessary for the success of the performance. As I

¹⁸⁰ Ibid: pp-116, 117

mentioned earlier, the Brahmins, their position in the performance is indispensable. Because, “no theyyam shrine is considered sacred/operative until a *tantri* Brahmin consecrates it, thus bringing it into existence”, and “next to the Brahmin in ritual is the Raja of Cannanore District”, he actively engage with performance through “deciding which castes (lower) were to perform each theyyam” and he “allocates special honorary title to and gold bracelets to performers of high physical and intellectual accomplishment”¹⁸¹. The social hierarchy is mirrored in each stages of the performance, and the domination of upper castes is clear in the prescriptive nature of performance. *Theyyam* performance is inaugurated by the lamps in the shrine which is lit by the flame brought the shrine priest from the temple which is run by ritually higher castes. Freeman sees it as an “actual spiritual energy or power (*caitanyam* or *sakit*) of the enshrined images being transferred to the lower-caste dancers”¹⁸². The body of the lower caste performer becomes only a medium which involves in the process of ritual dissemination of *Sakti*. What is striking here is that, the performative capacity of lower caste members to act as supernatural figures derives from the tantric notion of spiritual power or *sakti*. He never incorporates any ritual power other than what make him mediocre in the everyday social world. Once the performance is over, he ceases to be what he was. What is the *fluid* is the ‘signifier’, but the notions on social bodies, the meaning; the ‘signified’, is stagnant. The intersubjectively derived and embodied notions of ‘*being*’ inferior never melts away but that had been continuously produced and survived through temporary fulfillment of human social needs and through bypassing the rebellious tendencies of the inferior members of the cultural system. The coherent whole of caste which is “unified from outside and is divided within”, was systematically maintained through cultural mechanisms of exclusion through temporary inclusion. As Dumont conceptualized caste as mental category, “state of mind which is expressed in by various situations, of group orders” and the “certain fixed principles govern the arrangement of fluid and fluctuating elements” reflect in *Theyyam* performance at large. However, his model of analysis based in the notions of ‘pure’ and ‘impure’ as solid categories, is misleading. As Dumont says,

¹⁸¹Wayne Ashely , “The Teyyam Kettu of Northern Kerala”, *The Drama Review: TDR*, Vol. 23, No 2, Performance Theory : Southeast Asia Issue (Jun) 1979, pp-101

¹⁸² Rich Freeman “The teyyam tradition of Kerala” in *Blackwell Companion to Hinduism* (edt) Garin Flood, Blackwell companion Publishing Ltd, 2003, pp-313

the everyday notions upon “elements” in social world are governed by these “fixed principles”. The interrelationship, proximity, exchange of materials and ritualized communication among the members of castes which are associated to *Theyyam*, are governed by the “fixed principles”. However, the performative expression of the lower caste body in the liminal cosmic order unveils the complex inner dynamic of the larger system.

The totality of the system of caste in north Malabar and its notions upon social interaction, its manifestations both in liminal and every day social situations were derived from “fixed principles” of caste and that had been managed well through the particular social organizations of north Malabar. Menon says that “*tharavadus*, and cultivators; upper castes and lower castes were bound together in a shared religious culture” and “reassertion of community and interdependence” is an indispensable attribute of the performance; the predominant characteristics of theyyam was its grounding in “community”; “a community of past belief, of gods and humans, of ancestors and present generation and during the space of performance, of upper and lower castes” and thus “shrines” of performance acted as a “physical markers of an imagined area of community as well as reminders of the ever-present relations of power”¹⁸³.

The microcosm of the macro social and cultural universe was reproduced through the operations of social categories in cultural and religious practices. Theyyam of north Malabar epitomizes the reproduction of power and interdependences in unified way. The “shared” understanding of the cosmology of cultural universe was necessary for the survival of the system. The reciprocal relationship between the upper caste *tharavadaus* and lower caste cultivators was maintained through the periodic exchange of service and materials. *Theyyam* performance acted as continuum where the castes were brought together and reinforced the mutual interdependency. When we explicate the notion of intersubjectivity through the spectrum of *Theyyam* performance, we are exposed it’s groundings in culturally and socially mediated schemas and categories, and manifestations in every day social world and its intense expression in liminal spaces. The individual’s subjective experiences and his/her very psychic life derive from the

¹⁸³ Dilip M Menon, *Caste, nationalism, communalism in south India: Malabar, 1900-1948*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 1994, pp-56, 57

immutable cultural categories-“fixed principles”. The interpretative anthropology which is grounded in hermeneutics and empiricism unveils the base of social and cultural dimensions of individual subjective experience. The already constituted social and cultural categories, and power relations are *performatively* enacted and mediated in the symbolic space of *Theyyam* performance. These categories and its performative enactments are indispensable in making social world as social and intersubjective.

THOTTAM of THEYYAM:

Discursive formations of Intersubjectivity

The success of *Theyyam* performance results through unleashing of a series of ritualized events. As I mentioned earlier, *Theyyam* performance is not held without the recitation of verses related to the concerned *Theyyam*. Through these liturgies, the stories about the defied victims who challenged the taken for granted or “fixed principles” of caste system like the notion of ‘pure’ and impure’. These liturgical verses are *instrumental* in transforming the lower caste performer into the divine. The collective memories of injustice and suffering of caste violence are ritually invoked to the performative space of theyyam. The corpus of these verses is called *thottam*. The themes of most of theyyams are “a member of lower castes infringes or transgresses accepted caste restrictions and is unjustly punished with rape (in the case of women) or death (in the case of men, and some time women too), and then is deified”¹⁸⁴.

For the deification, one must be killed and thus the diseased victims are elevated into the apotheosis of divine being. The *thottam* is sung during when the costumed performer is waiting to be possessed by the concerned deity. The word *thottam* is derived from the verb “*thonnuka*” meaning to create, often, the “performer himself is called the *thottam*, thus the creator and the created is become ‘one’. Usually *Thottam* began with the performer saying “I do not know the name of village (where the incident happened) that I could inform or enlighten you. I do not know the name of person”, this stanza about *thottam* of *Vishnumurthi* (an incarnation of lord Vishnu) which is story of a *Tiyya* lower caste boy was murdered by *Nayar* landlord. The time and space of the events are not

¹⁸⁴ William Dalrymple ‘*Nine Lives: In search of Sacred in Modern India*’, Blossombury, London, 2009, pp-36

mentioned deliberately in *thottam*, because the experiential aspects of oppression and violence not confined to any specific time and space¹⁸⁵. The “fixed principles” and categories derived from these principles are contested through these liturgies. The liturgies of *Theyyam* are full of metaphors and similes which are associated to the very everyday life of the concerned castes. However, these contestations of categories are *ritualized* rather than challenging its logics of oppression and subordination. Through these liturgies, the “biographical life and deeds” of the god are recited often as a human being and the transformative trajectory of theyyam culminates in a final song of actual possession called “*uraccal thottam*”, that poetically concludes the death and apotheosis of the protagonist. This narrative invoking of the memories of past is indispensable in generating the efficacy to theyyams as “performative mode of worship” and this “discursive support” of *thottam* enables the lower castes performer to take an alternate divine personhood¹⁸⁶. The collective experiences of communities, and the memories about the protagonists, who challenged the taken for granted ethos, are preserved through these liturgies. These performative enactments of collective memories in a liminal social order ritualize the violence and thus it prevents the genesis of defiance.

The analysis of *thottam* gives us inner realm of the performative aspects of collective memories and how the technologies of power protect the social order. The social situatedness of individual subjects, social embeddedness and fixation of cognition, and his/her performative engagements with cultural categories are mediated and sustained through the cultural mechanism which derives from the axiomatic principles of vey cultural system itself. The origin tales of most of the theyyam are associated to vengeance and rebellion against the asymmetric power relation across the society. The deep running thread through various *thottams* is nothing but agony and frustration of inferior castes. Their memories, frustration, and protogonistic tendencies are kept organized and allowed to express in a ritualized way in the liminal order of theyyam performance. The liturgical corpus of *Theyyams* has ritual role in transforming the social corporeality of lower caste

¹⁸⁵ Dilip M Menon *Caste, nationalism, communalism in south India: Malabar, 1900-1948*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 1994, pp-56, 57

¹⁸⁶ Rich Freeman “The teyyam tradition of Kerala” in *Blackwell Companion to Hinduism* (edt) Garin Flood, Blackwell companion Publishing Ltd, New Delhi, 2003, pp-315

performer into a divine being, its acts as a “discursive support” in the context of performance, but its unintended consequences is lasting. The site of theyyam performance acts as platform for ritual contestations of social categories and ritual defiance of “fixed principles”. Thus the categories and principles are get consolidated. The individual’s cognitive realm of consciousness and his/her interrelatedness to fellow beings are mediated by technologies of power.

As Hebermas conceptualized the notion of intersubjectivity; which is communicatively generated through the social processes in “life world”, where the speaker and hearer meet and contest the claims on “life world” reflects in theyyam performance. The officiated communicative actions which are indispensable in *Theyyam* performance operate as ritualized site of dissemination of cultural schemes to the upcoming generation. The liturgical corpus of *Pottan theyyam* and the fundamental message that tries to spread is relevant in understanding the performative relevance of metaphors and its ritualized expressions in liminal spaces. As I mentioned earlier about the *Pottan theyyam*, it’s performed by *Pulayas*, the “polluting” ‘untouchables’. The Brahmin priests and as well as other theyyam performing communities neither perform any religious function in the shrines of *Pulayas* nor the *Pulayan theyyam* performer is invited to the public shrines of any other castes, but individual families may invite a *Pulayan* dancer if they made a swear to celebrate the *theyyam* of *Pottan*. According to the *thottam* of *Pottan theyyam*, the lord Siva himself came in the guise of a *Chandala* (an untouchable) to challenge Sri Sankaracharya, the proponent of *advaita* philosophy. The *thottam* of *Pottan theyyam* has two versions, the first version is sung when the *theyyam* is performed in the shrines other than *Pulayans*. This version is “brahmanised as the argument for human equality is based on the Advaita of Sankara”, and the other version which is sung when *Pulayas* perform the theyyam in their own shrines, the argument here is based on “natural justice on facts such as same blood, eating same rice, common lot of birth and death and belief in one God”¹⁸⁷. The colloquial word “pottan” means ‘deaf-mute’ or ‘idiot’. In the first version, the story begins birth and education of the saint Sri Sankara, he is depicted as the master

¹⁸⁷ Abraham Ayrookuzhiel ‘*The Sacred in Popular Hinduism: An Empirical Study in Chirakkal, North Malabar*’ The Christian Institute for the study of religion and society, Madras, pp- 17, 18, 170

of all forms of knowledge. In the first version, the thottam of Pottan depicts as the holder of omniscience. As Sri Sankara sets his journey; the liturgy shifts to scenes to a cremation ground and the conversation between saint Sankara and Lord Siva, the disguised as Chandala. Thottam of *Pottan* which is sung in the private shrines of upper castes depicts the events:

...Thereupon, Parvati smeared herself with mud, and /Wore a tattered black sari /Put on chains of cheap stones /And her hair disheveled, /She took her boy, Nandikesan,/ And the Lord who bears the Ganges,/ He who was of the highest caste /Right from the beginning of time. /Put on the loin cloth of low caste/ And started with them. The Lord, had with him a pot of toddy/ Out of which he drank now and then/ He would often run, and leap, and fall down/ And Mutter abuses/ He held out a knife/ Now and then he would/ Take the boy in his arm/ And fondle him./ Thus intoxicated/ He gamboled about/. And then, in the path/ Opposite to him at a distance, / Stood the Learned Sankara. The Sage asked the low caste/ To get out the way,/ “You, Chandala, Haven’t you the sense/ To recognize the learned from distance/ Those who belong to any of the four castes,/ To sense the gait of a Brahmin Instantaneously? /You have no knowledge of time/ The past , the present and the future, /You have no caste, /You beyond law, / you don’t wash,/ you smell of fish and beef/ you are naturals/ with no knowledge of God”./”You seem to be bent upon obstructing our path/ Abandon reckless ventures/ You ignoramus, / With no idea of higher knowledge/. “You so mean Devil of the first water /Get out of the way/ if you plan to defy,/ You shall be treated to a sound beating/ Don’t standing on the path,/ You evil minded man”./ At this the Chandala in reply asked the learned scholar “what do you mean by path, and who should get himself out of the path?/ Can you discriminate between Truth and Untruth,/ The perennial and ephemeral,/ The Sacred and profane/ The clean conscience and the unclean/ The female and the ennuchs/ The abstract and concrete/ The learned and low born? Please show us the path of justice./ In what respect do/ We differ, if you omniscient/ Please tell us”/ “Senses are five, six, and nine, / Elements are five, Mandalas are three, Eshnavas (desires) are three, / Dushanams (evils) are three/Gods are three, bodies are three/ Nerves are three./ “States (of sleep, dream, awakeness) are three/ Pranas (life-breaths) are seven/ Adharas (bases) are six/ Kosas (cells) are five/ Dhadhus (constituting of the body) seven/ Is it with full knowledge of these/ That you ordered us out?/ Cut your bodies and see/ Any difference of color in the blood of a Brahmin and mine?/ It is a matter of pity/ That you have asked me to get away, Poor me, holding the pot of toddy on my head/and managing a little family”./ “See, on the either side/ There are woods of thorn/ And things movable and Immovable;/ God is the essence of all/ With thoughts of his glories in mind/ How may you asks us to move out?/ How may you abuse us? Darkness of ignorance/Clouds your mind/ Or else, You would not have erred this way”./ He who is clean of heart and thoughts is not likely to talk low this manner”/ As Sankara heard the talk of the low born/He knew that the man was no low-born/ The realization came to him/That He was the destroyer of the god of lust/He fell upon his

feet/ And with piety praised him high/ "I kiss your feet, Oh, wearer of the snake!/ Forgive me wearer of time in your grace and save me"/. As the scholar praised him/The destroyer of the god of lust said,/ "I Came as a Chandala/ To put you to test/ I know there is none on earth,/ So leaned as you, /Go you need not be late,/ Nor shall you feel crest-fallen/May all the worlds be born through you"/ As the bearer of snakes blessed him thus Sankaracharya resumed his journey¹⁸⁸.

However, the second version of *thottam* of Pottan theyyam is sung whenever it is performed by Pulayas in their own shrines. It tries to project the natural equality of human beings rather than the Brahmanic supremacy. The second version of *thottam* starts by narration in praise of Pottan theyyam that is devoid of Sanskritic influences. The scene for this version is set as paddy field. As Pottan is introduced as standing in the fields and a Nair landlord and his associates are approaching:

...There is no boy to work on the land/No boy to tend the cattle either/No one to keep watch over the crop,/It was Pottan theyyam who guarded the crop/ As he kept on the wet land/ From distance comes a Chovar (Ezhava)/ There is with him a Machurer, And another, it's an Elango (Nair)/. Along with Elango is a Thandyam/ With the Thandyam is Koil¹⁸⁹/ As they saw Pottan/ On the ridge of wet land, A Chovar sternly said to him "Give way, give way Chinna pulaya, give way Chinna Pulaya" But out came the retort. "I have my child on my arm,/ And pot of toddy on my head/On the side the thorn./On the other side, you see the thicket/ How can then we give way?/When Chovar rides an elephant, we ride a buffalo/ If so, why then quarrel over caste?/ When your or ours is hurt, it is human blood that gushes out./The blood is the same/ Why then the quarrel over caste? When Chovar wears a garland of lotus/We wear a garland of Poothali (an inferior flower), /When Chovar dances holding the bronze idol, / We dance holding vessels of prawns/And the rice they eat, and the rice we eat/ Isn't it of the same stuff? Why then, Chvars quarrel over caste distinctions?/ Suppose Chovar and We break a coconut, Shall not we find inside the same kernel? The knives of the chovar are sharp/ And so our knives./When you are wounded blood comes out / when we are wounded too blood comes out /Why then do quarrel over caste distinctions?/ We planted a plantain tree in the heap of refuse,/ With the fruit thereof, you make offering

¹⁸⁸ K M Tharakan "Thottam of Pottan" (translated) in Appendix-2 of 'The Sacred in Popular Hinduism: An Empirical Study in Chirakkal, North Malabar' Abraham Ayrookuzhiel, The Christian Institute for the study of religion and society, Madras, pp- 172-175

¹⁸⁹ Ezhava is an member of inferior caste, Machurer means mason and Koil means Muslim.

to God./ Yes we planted a Tulsi in the heap of refuse./With the leaves and flowers thereof you make offerings to God./ If so, What distinction are there between us..”¹⁹⁰

The content analysis of both of these liturgical corpuses of same *theyyam* reveals ritual contestations of caste ideals. As far as the first version of *Pottan theyyam* is concerned, it's recited when *Pottan theyyam* is performed in the private shrines of upper castes. So its major theme is centered on the great saint *Sankara* who propounded the *advaita* philosophy. The *Chandala* said to the saint to see the things both “movable” and “immovable”, “God is the essence of all”, he teaches the great saint about ideals of non-dualism. Here notion of caste difference and ill treatment of *Chnadala* are challenged the very idea of non-dualistic philosophy; capacity of everything to encapsulate the essence of godly attributes. The alternative ideology other than “fixed principles” of caste system is entertained. The wicked *Chandala* asks puts the Sanskritic notions of body and self. He poses the question the challenge the very idea of ‘purity’ and ‘pollution’ by asking the qualitative (material) difference of his body and *Chandala*'s body; means idea of ‘pure’ and ‘impure’. But the agency of *Chandala* to ask such philosophical questions is negated. The untouchable *Chandala* who is not even included in the caste system is incapable to bring such novel idea of non-dualism. Through these liturgies what is get consolidated and sustained, is nothing but Brahmanic domination of Vedic knowledge. But what is most striking when we compare both versions of the liturgies, the complete missing of *Sankara* in second version. But what is the similar thread that runs across both of the version; it's nothing but the notion of caste difference. The discrimination on the basis of caste is criticized by substantiating the biological similarities. The metaphor like “blood” “eat” are used deliberately to expose the similarity even at the rudimentary level. These performative and poetic expressions and the ritual contestations of every day social categories provide a space to the individual for social criticism. The institutionalization of counter culture and its incorporation to the metaphysical domain give a kind of permanency to the ‘symbolic behaviour’. Thus the social categories become the part of ‘taken for granted’. Therefore, the cognitive and intersubjective dimensions of social and cultural categories never melted away. As far as north Malabar is concerned, *Theyyam*

¹⁹⁰ K M Tharakan “Thottam of Pottan” (translated) in Appendix-2 of ‘*The Sacred in Popular Hinduism: An Empirical Study in Chirakkal, North Malabar*’ Abraham Ayrookuzhiel , The Christian Institute for the study of religion and society, Madras, pp-178-180

performance acts as site for reproduction of caste habitus. The classificatory schemes of culture and its sustenance are assured through the various forms of behaviors both symbolic and non symbolic every day. The categories are derived out of 'fixed principles' and continuously reproduced through the discursive practices of culture itself. The intersubjectivity is contingent to these categories and that are generated through the discursive practices.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The subjective experiences are seminal in constituting the cognition of an individual. These experiences are socially grounded and culturally shaped. Human beings are born into already constituted patterns of culture. These already constituted components of the culture are *performatively* 'embodied' and experienced in a *relational* way. The socially situated life of individual, and his/her life among the similarly 'situated', and 'embodied' fellow members, constraint individual in achieving a transcendental intersubjectivity. The ontological primacy is not possible as long s/he is born into the already constituted patterns of culture and socialized by its own models and schemes. Intersubjectivity is relational and is mediated by the models of culture itself. The specificities and unique features of culture have definite role in building a specific modes of intersubjective relation across the members of the culture. As far as the most of the people of India is concerned, caste is one it's seminal of mode of perception and categorization of people both horizontal and vertical level. Caste system and its fixed principles monitor the intersubjective relation. The existential questions and related crisis of the subjects are resolved through specific metaphysical conceptualization of life. The everyday life and its experiences are organized on the principles of caste system. The immutable and relational variables of 'pure' and impure' are handed over through cultural practices. Theyyam performance, as liminal ritual performance as well as 'liminoid' theatrical performance, is associated to caste dynamics of north Malabar. The culturally situated understanding of interrelationship among theyyam 'performing' castes and 'organizing' castes in the context of larger cultural matrix destabilize the monological base of intersubjectivity. The liminal is free from the stringent rules of culture, and the subjects are freed from the taken for granted. The social situation of theyyam epitomizes the

notion of anti-structure, but the roles played by each caste are institutionally predetermined. The performatively generated social roles, metaphors, and symbols of theyyam reinforce intersubjective universe of caste system. *Theyyam* as theatrical performance is not free from the bondages of categories. Of course, intersubjectivity is discursively generated in the context of power metrics in a culture. The specificities of a culture like caste system has significant role in deciding what should constitute the intersubjective relations among those share the similar patterns.

CHAPTER-5
CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

Approaching cultural performance with the frames of a particular discipline would not result a comprehensive understanding, it often reduces the performative events “to illness, exorcism, to healing ritual and possession mediumship to divination”. The culturally situated understanding of performance in an interpretative mode avoids reductionism and offers a better conceptualization of performative genres, because it locates the performance in the context of larger cultural metrics. It encompasses the structural elements; text and context of culture, in the analysis of these genres. For instance, it never takes ‘possession’ as the central event of performance; however it perceives possession as “just one part of the performance”¹⁹¹. The fascinated engagement of western scholars with the cultural specificities of India in a monotonous way has given a dismal understanding of Indian cultural realities. Many of the traditional institutions like *Varna* system are not empirical categories as it’s prescribed in the scriptural text, because they are ‘normative model’ and it is manifested in a diverse ways and forms. The “folk cosmology” and “art” are seminal in representing the alternative forms of nature and philosophy¹⁹².

Since the mid 1980s, the scholars have turned their attention to performative genres and contributed comparative analyses, critiquing ethnocentric categories and situating the studies in the broader frame work of power relation and embodiment of culture. They came up with the countering theories of body which primarily perceives it as “site of inscription” and they have articulated that body is a cultural signifier which enables its possessor to “reinvent identities”. They have contested the existing dualistic notions of

¹⁹¹ Elisabeth Schoembucher “Possession in South Asia” in *Flags of fame : Studies in South Asian folk culture* (edt) Heidrun Bruckner, Lothar Lutze, and Aditya Malik, Manohar Publishing , New Delhi, 1993, pp- 257

¹⁹² Amit Kumar Sharma *Religion and Culture in Indian Civilization: Essays in Honour of Prof C N Venugopal*, DK Print world, 2011, pp-4,5

body, and they criticized “evolutionary, colonial, and nationalist typologies” of “classical”, “folk”, and “ethnic”¹⁹³. The culturally situated understanding of symbolic practices undermines the grand narratives of modern episteme. The diachronically evolved ritual cosmology of Hinduism has been deciphered through the reconciliation of cultural text of Hinduism and western empiricism which was predominant among western scholars. This search of textual images in empirical situation brought a universal claim of totality of system, the whole which is constructed by interlinking of parts. As Appadurai mentioned that, the genealogy of the concept of ‘whole’ can be traced to the “archaeology of modern Western ideology”. Dumont’s model of hierarchy which is based on the “fixed principle” of “purity” and “pollution” is an epitome for this particular leaning of western scholars; however the immediate reality of caste represents multiple idealities. There is an implicit critique in the popular belief and practices to these dominant claims¹⁹⁴. Coming back to the performative order of liminality, it raises some critical questions to the notion of consensual hierarchy.

In Kerala, the ‘hierarchy’ was maintained by “use of power” rather than as custom which imposition of power not essential. The liminal order of *Theyyam* acted as “site for transmission and dissemination of culture”, the stringent punishment for the violation of caste principle caused the emergence of cult of defied victims. The notion of purity and pollution ceased to exist in the symbolic space of shrine. This liminal order is said to be “strategy of dominated” to prevent the arbitrary exercise of power by those in power. It created a moral community through establishment of a sense of limit¹⁹⁵. The diachronically evolved popular culture of Malabar was the result of these “transmission and dissemination” process. A shared religious culture was brought out, “*tharavadus* and cultivators, upper castes, and lower castes were bound together” and this was evident in the liminal order of *Theyyam*; the “alcohol and blood sacrifice were part of both upper and lower caste culture and the deities worshipped spanned cosmologies”. For instance, the lower caste “*Tiyya- Panthalayani kannan* was as much part of the *Nayar* pantheon as

¹⁹³ Susan A Reed “The Politics and Poetics of Dance”, Annual Review of Anthropology, Vol. 27 , 1998, pp-527

¹⁹⁴ Partha Chatterjee “Caste and Subaltern Consciousness” in ‘Subaltern Studies VI: Writing on South Asian History and Society’ (edt) Ranjit Guha, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1989, pp-189

¹⁹⁵ Dilip M. ,Menon “The moral community of theyyattam”, Studies in History, 9, 2 Sage Publication, 1993, New Delhi, pp- 189

Vishnu was of the lower caste pantheon”¹⁹⁶. This meta-structural modality is contrary to what we conceptualized through the binary schism of structuralism. This new movement has unleashed unique and complex inner dynamics of Hinduism. The “religious imagery”; the “hermeneutic of the visible”, of both “classical” and “ordinary images of people’s traditions, rites, and daily activities” are being approached for a deep engagement with the meanings that are embedded in these images. The ‘collective unconscious’ of the popular is encapsulated in these images. This new movement among the scholars has unveiled the limits of “distorted perspectives that has persisted in two hundred years of indological scholarship owing to overreliance on *Brahmanical* texts for interpreting Hinduism”¹⁹⁷.

Theyyam performance provides this frame to deal with the issue of caste and how it constructed the diachronic structure of social life in North Malabar. Through the liminal order of *Theyyam* performance, I have exposed the undercurrents in the system which is contrary to the claims of monotonous understandings of social structure. I have approached this particular cultural performance in the context of larger social transformation of North Malabar. However, the entire journey of this engagement is framed in the context of three issues. Firstly, the performance as ritual; how the social and cultural categories are *performatively* enacted in the liminal order, how this liminal is contingent to the social history. Secondly, since the performative capacity of lower caste performer derives from a particular social corporeality, so it is taken up to contest the immutable and dualistic categorical understanding of social corporeality. Thirdly, the idea of ‘intersubjectivity’ is investigated through looking at the social history of interrelationship among castes. The question of what constitutes the intersubjectivity and how the cultural patterns shape the intersubjective relationship is exposed through the frames of *Theyyam* performance. It is said that ontological primacy of individual is not feasible due the predetermination of social world. The already constituted patterns of culture monitor the individuals and their social world. As far *Theyyam* performance is

¹⁹⁶ Dilip M Menon *Caste, nationalism, communalism in south India: Malabar, 1900-1948*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 1994, pp-61

¹⁹⁷ Eck Dianna L. *Darsana: Seeing the divine images in India*, Chambersburg: Anima, 1985, in ‘Studying Hinduism: Key concepts and Methods (edt) Sushil Mittal & Gene Thursby , Routledge, New York, 2007, pp-3

concerned, the existential questions and related crisis of the subjects are resolved through specific metaphysical conceptualization of life. The culturally situated understanding of *Theyyam* performance and the diachronic patterns that is significant in constituting the social order of north Malabar unveils the complex dynamics of interrelationship among diverse castes specific to north Malabar. Such an engagement destabilizes monological base of intersubjectivity.

The social and cultural specificities of everyday social life in north Malabar are approached through the frames of *Theyyams* to expose how the technologies of subjection is structured and evolved over time. The power dynamics which is embedded in the performance unveils the ways of *embodiment* of cultural and historical categories. As far as *Theyyam* performance is concerned, what most is striking in the process of diachronic evolution from a 'ritual' to 'theatre' is that its incapacity to choose performers from the castes other than the traditional *Theyyam* performing castes, its means that the ritual content is not completely vanished even if it is being performed as a theatre. The upward social mobility of certain castes, socio-religious reform movements, political awakening, and emergence of rational social institutions undermined the ritual content in *Theyyam* performance.

Theyyam has been subject of intense discourse of global community; Colonial administrators, Christian evangelists, Marxists, nationalists, folklorists, anthropologists, dramatists, reformist Hindu saints, and local caste elites, of course everybody participate in the discourse on theyyam and contribute their own views, however, what is implied in all these debates is nothing but "the interpretation of locality" and the conceptualization of interlink between "locality" and "with what are perceived as universals"¹⁹⁸. All these discourses *theyyam* are supposed to define some specific identities like 'nation', 'region', 'caste' 'Dravidian', etc. The major public involvement of *Theyyam* was participation in Republic Day function in Delhi in 1960 and then later in the opening ceremony of 9th Asian Games in 1982; and this transformation of *Theyyam* from a ritual practice to the national cultural heritage and theatrical performance abroad must be contextualized in the

¹⁹⁸ Gilles Tarabout "Malabar Gods, Nation-building and World Culture: On the Perception of the Local and the Global" in Jacki Assayag & C J Fuller (edt) *Globalizing India: Perspective From Below*, Anthem Press, London, 2005, pp-205

emergence of 'local' and its commodification for international clients¹⁹⁹. Of course, the transformations of cultural specific realities are mediated by large historical forces like globalization and the old cultural forms are reconfigured, however, what is get consolidated is nothing but the specificities of 'locality' and its inherent categorical expressions. Despite *Theyyam* has been deterritorialized, the specters of divinized "lower castes" still constitutes the ritual cosmology of North Malabar.

The limitations of this analysis derive from the methodological devices of interpretations and the materials that I have used for my articulation. Since the analysis is preceded by various theoretical understandings of the major issues that I have explored, the empirical issues which are represented in the secondary sources are pigeonholed in the metrics of various episteme. This inclination to certain genealogy of theories and oversight of many possible approaches might have generated some omission of certain conspicuous issues belonged to the major themes of the study. Since I have mainly approached *Theyyam* performance through the existing literature, this study is very limited; it lacks the currents of empirical dimensions of the topics at large.

Theyyam performances as a subject for academic discourse, it captivates the eyes of academicians due to multiple reasons. However the existing literature on theyyam has various limitations; mainly the issues related to *Theyyam* are addressed in the context of the models in a number of disciplines. Further study on *Theyyam* should frame the issues in an interdisciplinary way, the adaptation, appropriation and merging of diverse cultural traditions in the context of larger social transformations and historical experiences. Because *Theyyam* is an example how modernity is contingent on tradition and its perennial dynamism; despite the deep social transformations since the early decades of twentieth century, still *Theyyam* constitutes the ritual cosmology of Hindus in North Malabar²⁰⁰. The sources like liturgical songs in *Theyyam* performance provide a unique platform to construct an alternative subaltern history of North Malabar. Such a movement

¹⁹⁹ Ibid: 198

²⁰⁰ Rich Freeman "The teyyam tradition of Kerala" in *Blackwell Companion to Hinduism* (edt) Garin Flood, Blackwell companion Publishing Ltd, New Delhi, 2003, pp-324

is indispensable in deconstructing the western episteme and its categorical understanding of eastern cultural specificities.

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