DEIXIS OF MUTHAPPAN: DEBRAHMANISING THE DISCOURSE OF THEYYAM

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation titled *Deixis of Muthappan: Debrahmanising the Discourse of Theyyam*, submitted by **Keertana S** is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy of this University. This dissertation has not been submitted for the award of any other degree in this University or any other University and is her original work.

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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15 – 07 – 2019

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation titled *Deixis of Muthappan: Debrahmanising the Discourse of Theyyam* , submitted by me at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in Theatre and Performance Studies, is an original work and has not been submitted so far, in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of this or any other University or Institution.

Keertana S

15/07/19

*I dedicate this to my most loving and caring **Amma**,*

&

*In loving memory of **Ammamma**, **Tany** and **Sunimaman***

&

to all those students who could not get into MPhil at SAA because of their identity, their political stand or the people whom they associate with.

The fight is real.

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I thank Vishaka for inspiring me to do whatever I wanted to do in life. Thanks for pushing me to find my own path in life.

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I would like to thank the department of Theatre and Performance Studies as well as School of Arts and Aesthetics for helping me grow as a person. I learnt certain life lessons from this school and I got to know myself because of the issues many of us had to go through in this department. I have to appreciate the opportunity that I got to complete my MPhil here, but at the same time, I can't help mourning for those who were denied of such an opportunity to continue their studies at the School of Arts and Aesthetics because of their political opinions which, for some faculty here it is an

'attitude' problem. I didn't know a Muslim who has a political stand was such a threat to the liberal faculty here. Is being a Dalit or a lower caste person who considers themselves equal to the people here at the department such a threat to the so called 'liberals' in this department? I can't help but mention these things for all the people who couldn't get the opportunity to continue their academic venture in this department because of their 'attitude' problem or because of the people they associate with. I can't help but wonder if such discrimination and open threats are happening because of one's political stand or opinions in an Arts department such as SAA, what has the world come to? At the same time, I value such experiences because they exposed the false pretences that I was too naïve to be believe. The issues going on in the department inspired me to come up with such a topic for my dissertation as well.

KEERTANA S

CONTENT

INTRODUCTION

Abstract

Muthappan, a popular local deity in North Kerala has worshippers and followers from many different communities. Muthappan is also a part of the Theyyum spectrum. The deity's popularity has spread across regions as far as Maharashtra where there are shrines especially for Muthappan worship. There are multiplicities attached to this figure at every level of investigation and hence it seems to create a difficulty in placing this figure in the socio cultural context of the region. At the same time, it is also necessary to understand that the singularity in structure of rituals and the repetition of the same structure appears to create a unified figure of Muthappan. Hence, there is a need to look at the figure of Muthappan as a whole rather than in parts or multiples.

Taking Muthappan as a unified figure, this dissertation aims to investigate Muthappan, approaching the performer embodying the deity and the figure of the deity as a unified whole. Using the concept of perspectivism here, this project is an ethnographical study from the perspective of the unified whole of Muthappan and tracing the trajectory of movement from the space of forest community to caste-based society through a deictical approach where the perspective of the participant- Muthappan- and his relation to space is dependent on the context of performance. The trajectory of the movement from forest community to a caste-based community leads to the question of the identity of Muthappan in the caste-based society, where Muthappan is considered either as a superior brahmin figure by the patrons of Theyyam ritual or as an outcaste shamanic figure who is inferior to the patrons or organizers of the ritual. The aim here is to debrahminise the idea of Muthappan in such a context which leads to the possibility of debrahmanising the discourse of theyyam performance ritual.

Key words : perspectivism, animism, deixis, discourse, Muthappan, theyyam,

Rationale and Intervention

Amongst the many deities in Kerala, Muthappan, a popular local deity in North Kerala finds place in the belief system of his devotees and the performance rituals that take place in affirmation to the belief system. Though the patron or the organizer of these performance rituals might be an individual or a group of people associated with the *madappuras*(shrines), the people in the whole neighborhood is invited to take part in the ritual without any censorship of the audience based on their caste, class or religion. The figure of Muthappan has different roles in different communities. While organizing Muthappan *vellattam* (a pre theyyam ritual) at houses is said to be propitious to the family, there are annual Muthappan theyyam festivals organized at different shrines all over Malabar. In the north most part of Malabar region, Muthappan theyyam performance ritual is called as Muthappan thira. Thira is popularly considered as an unrefined form of Theyyam whereas, theyyam has gained much recognition and popularity over the years.

The word 'Muthappan', in Malayalam, denotes the figure of grandfather or elder of the family. Some communities perform ancestor worship of Muthappan whereas it is hero worship in some other communities, or Muthappan is considered as a local deity. Parassinikadavu Muthappan madappura in Kannur is one of the most widely known Muthappan madappuras in all of Kerala. Kunnathurpady, a hilly, forest region on Karnataka border is also associated with the figure of Muthappan. According to the myth that is sung in the thottam pattu(invocatory song) of Muthappan, The movement of Muthappan across caste lines as well as the movement from forest to a caste-based society also shows the liminality of Muthappan when placing him in a particular space, be it cultural, social or performative. The performative and ritual practices around this

figure are also associated with his movement from forest to caste-based society and the movement across social hierarchy- that is, born a tribal, brought up as a brahmin and choosing to live a tribal or lower caste life when it comes to food habits, clothing, and every day practices and beliefs. Muthappan, who partly fall into the definition of a cult figure, has many followers from different communities although one cannot entirely place him as a cult figure since Muthappan is associated with multiplicities in ritual and performative practices around the deity, myths and narratives regarding the deity, the communities who worship the deity and the nature of these communities and even the multiplicity in the word 'Muthappan'.

This multiplicity of the figure cannot go unnoticed even if we are taking the logic of Muthappan as one, or considering Muthappan as a whole and not in parts. In the context of this project, I would like to look at Muthppan as a whole, that is, Muthappan as one figure whose views and relations changes according to the different contexts of the forest communities, caste-based society and theyyam. Here, I would like to use the deictical approach, which is rooted in linguistics and Levi-Straussian theories, where the context becomes extremely important for the relations between 'I', 'you' and 'it'. Taking the concept of perspectivism into account, I would like to study Muthappan through a perspectival method where, as explained by deCastro (1998), the different subjectivities in nature (animals, spirits etc) are viewed through prey-predator relationships and while spirits (predator) devour on humans (prey), fish (prey) is preyed upon by birds (predator), that is, the subjectivity or point of view of the other is considered and hence, one looks at oneself from the other's point of view. Here, the predators consider their species as humans (people) and the others as animals. deCastro also says 'The original common condition of both humans and animals is not animality, but rather, humanity'(1998). Hence, animism is also related to this perspectival logic.

All subjectivities live in a socially organized manner, where what they eat is viewed by them as food eaten by humans and their fur or skin is considered as decorations or clothing. Therefore, I would be studying and understanding the relation between Muthappan and forest communities, caste-based society as well as the theyyam spectrum through the perspective of Muthappan without the separation of the figure or deity from the performer of Muthappan theyyam.

While there are many academic works on different theyyam deities as well as the performance form of theyyam, Muthappan, a local deity most popular in Kannur district of Kerala seems to be ignored in the academic works on Theyyam and local deities of Malabar. This may be because of the complexities attached to this figure and also the fact that one cannot associate one particular community with this deity.

Along with Kathakali and Kudiattam, there has been an increasing interest in Theyyam in the recent years. The existing studies on Theyyam have looked at Theyyam from postcolonial, socio-political and performance studies perspective. In his book *Ritual as Ideology: Text and Context in Teyyam* (2006) T.V Chandran has discussed in detail the myths and narratives around certain theyyams. He has examined   the theyyam narratives in the context of caste politics. According to T.V Chandran, there is an active subversion of caste politics inherent in the structure of theyyam. He has read the performance ritual of theyyam as a tactic for the attempt of transgression or subversion of caste hierarchy by the lower castes. My argument here is that this is a brahminical reading of theyyam where the lower caste is seen as actively taking part in theyyam for subverting caste hierarchy. Muthappan in a theyyam performance is seen as either a brahmin patriarch who is superior to the brahmin patrons of the theyyam performance or Muthappan is seen as an outcaste shamanic figure who has an important role in the

ritual logic for bringing luck and wealth to the family, similar to other lower caste communities who have ritualistic roles in serving the landlords based on the occupational status of these lower caste communities. From this, we can understand that though such readings may seem antibrahminical and an appropriate way of reading and interpretation, there is a serious need for deconstructing our interpretations in order to have a debrahmanised and non colonial view of things. In the context of Muthappan, this can be achieved through a deictical approach where the perspective of Muthappan is what is considered to be important rather than the perspective of the ethnographer or anthropologist.

While T.V Chandran is talking only about caste politics in relation to the performance aspect and the narrative aspect of theyyam, my intervention here is the exploration of the role of the relation between space, narratives and performance of Muthappan in the caste politics of the region. Here, I will be looking at the cultural, social and geographical aspects of the performance space. Here, material culture and materiality also plays an important role since community beliefs and community behaviors are reflected on to the material that is used in the performance rituals and also in the material culture of the communities. Although community beliefs may be reflected on to the material culture of the communities, my concern here is how Muthappan relates to the material culture of that community.

In *Muthappan puravruttam*(2007), Y V Kannan talks about community imaginations and beliefs regarding the figure of Muthappan. He also talks about the sheer number of personas attached to Muthappan and imagined by different communities, especially communities from North Kerala. Though Y.V.Kannan is implying on the multiplicity on popular imaginations regarding Muthappan, the books stays at the level of

description and does not give way into interpretation. The extent of the multiplicity of popular imagination regarding Muthappan is further proved in an article named *African slaves and spirit of Kappiri Muthappan: Kochi's culture under Portugese Dutch rule* (2016), where the author talks about there is a worship of the spirit of Kappiri Muthappan which is popularly believed to be the ghost of an African slave under Portugese Dutch rule. Though there is a whole range of different personas, materials and myths attached to Muthappan, I would like to take Muthappan as a unified whole since there is a common structure for all the multiplicities regarding Muthappan and so, it would be more appropriate to consider the figure as a unified whole of many personas, characteristics, myths and so on. And hence, by taking Muthappan as a unified whole, one is able to place Muthappan in specific space and context without concerning with the multiplicity of Muthappan.

Research methodology

I would like to use deictical approach for this project where I will be looking at the myths and narratives, performance or ritual space and the relation of Muthappan with the participants in the ritual through the perspective of Muthappan. Here, Muthappan cannot be separated from the performer who is embodying the Muthappan. The methodology for this would largely be topographical and ethnographic, taking into account the myths, narratives and material culture along with the performance space. I would be looking at the concept of contemporary animism derived from the methodology of Eduardo Viveiros deCastro(1998) in a study on contemporary Amazonia. The concept of animism can be used here in the sense, as said by deCastro, primitivism is retained in contemporary rituals as well and hence, to explore this aspect in relation to Muthappan in both the space of forest community as well as in the space

of caste- based society in relation to Muthappan in both the space of forest community as well as in the space of caste-based society in relation to the myths and material culture around Muthappan. I will also be referring to Phillipe Descola for the concept of animism.

The main focus of this project would be on decolonizing thought, which means, this project would be a rejection of dominant western thought which is constantly appropriated and used even in our everyday interactions and instead striving for the rise of an alternative thought which is rooted in the cosmological attitudes and ideas of the communities and the region I am working on in this project. The cosmological ideas and attitudes of the communities can be studied through the myths and narratives that have evolved around the communities which is ingrained in the belief system of these communities.

Myths and narratives

Different communities have different stories to narrate about Muthappan. These stories play a big role in propagating the beliefs of the community and also establishing values within the community. Many of these narratives would be taken from the performance texts. In the context of myths, I will be referring to Stuart Blackburn's *Singing of Birth and Death*(1988)which focuses on the performance art of Villupattu and Blackburn tries to weave through the myths and narratives, analyzing the aspect of caste politics, oppression and appropriation of myths regarding the deity. William Sax's *God of Justice*(2008) and *Mountain Goddess*(1991) also provides methodological means in this context. Levi-Straussian theories and concepts would be referred to for analytical purposes and Deleuzian metaphysics and philosophy will be used for critical and conceptual purposes. The possibilities of the event of performance changing the

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performance text or the myth will be taken into account and given much consideration by taking multiple interviews of the participants of the ritual as well as of the performers. For factual references regarding the events of performances, the archive available would be the records in the temples or shrines regarding the particular events of performance rituals and the sponsors for the event and so on. The myths associated with particular shrines would also be taken into account.

Tentative Chapterization

Introduction

The introduction will foreground the research topic and lay out the reasons and rationale for the research. I will also discuss related terminologies and methodological framework in this section. This section will provide a background of the figure of Muthappan while simultaneously discussing the dominant myths on Muthappan. This section will briefly provide a socio-cultural background of Kannur district of Kerala. A brief description of the performance ritual of theyyam, focusing particularly on Muthappan theyyam/thira and Muthappan vellattam will also be provided in this section. This section will provide a concrete base for the arguments and questions that are going to be posed in the three chapters.

Chapter 1: Discourses on Theyyam

In this chapter I will be looking at the different discourses on theyyam. This chapter looks at the 'moral community' as called by Dilip Menon in his research article *The moral community of Theyyattam*(1993) since this chapter will draw on the caste politics and power politics that are played out in theyyam as mentioned in Menon's article and how the perspectival and deictical approach can change the way we read, interpret and

analyse the politics taking into account the indigenous nature of such politics according to the social and regional context and how to analyse it in a way which does not need an appropriation of western thought or the direct influence of the hegemony of western thought. Here, I will be discussing the complexities of placing Muthappan in a caste based society where the complexities of caste politics within the context of theyyam will be discussed as well as problematizing caste politics and power relations in the myths and narratives around Muthappan in relation to the caste politics and power relations in the moral community or caste based society. In this chapter, I will also be problematizing the perspective of Muthappan as a figure of superiority, identifying with the brahmin caste and hero worship or as a shamanic figure who has a specific role to play in the ritual which is considered as a service to the upper caste, feudal household. The role of material culture in rituals as well as myths, focusing particularly on myths and rituals around the figure of Muthappan will be discussed in this chapter. This chapter also traces the movement from forest to a caste based society, not just taking the caste based society as its site of research but also looking at the movement by itself as a site of research.

Chapter 2: Debrahmanising Theyyam

This chapter will deal with the deconstruction of popular imagination of the figure of Muthappan, debrahmanising the idea of Muthappan by looking at the socio cultural and socio economic context of Kannur region through the perspective of Muthappan. With the entry of Muthappan into a caste-based society or community of Kannur especially in Thalassery, Parassini kadavu and Payyannur region where Kaliyattam festivals take place now and then in which sometimes Muthapppan is a part of the festival like other theyyam figures. Here, while placing Muthappan in the context of theyyam, the

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objective is to debrahmanise the discourse of theyyam through the deixis of Muthappan. The question is not just whether one can debrahmanise an idea of Muthappan which is culturally deeply rooted in the minds of different communities, the question is also whether one can place a debrahmanised idea of Muthappan within the socio cultural context of north Kerala. The real challenge here lies in not just debrahmanising the idea of Muthappan , but The questions and complexities which arise from the analyses in the first and the second chapter will dealt with in this section, keeping in mind the context of the whole project. Hence, all the bits and pieces of observations and analyses will be brought together in this section.

Conclusion

I will conclude my dissertation by linking this project with the larger context of caste and identity politics in India. I will also briefly discuss the possibilities of using the deictical approach for the deconstruction of the colonial and post colonial discourses and whether deixis, perspectivism and animism can be used as tools for deconstruction of the dominant western thought or idea that has been appropriate to accommodate the context of India.

CHAPTER 1

EXPLORING THE CURRENT DISCOURSES ON THEYYAM

"The victims are deified, partly representing a triumph over death, and partly creating an access to the 'power' seen to be possessed by those killed violently."

-Dilip M Menon

In this chapter the current discourses on theyyam will be analysed and compared in order to understand the different approaches employed for research on theyyam by various scholars and to investigate whether these discourses validate a true understanding of the theyyam community of north Malabar, especially in the current scenario.

As compared to central and south Kerala, the northern Malabar region of the state was much less influenced by the migration of the *nambuthiris* (brahmins) from north India and certain parts of Maharashtra. And hence, while more temples were established by *nambuthiris* in central and South Kerala, there were more *kavus* (shrines for local deities) than temples in north Kerala. And consequently, the popularity of local deities was much more immense in north Kerala than the south. Another distinction from the central and southern regions of Kerala was that the Nair landlords and *naduvazhis*(local rulers of that region) in the north Malabar region were considered to be the highest authorities in their society. The rest of the lower castes worked for the Nair *tharavadus* (households) and families as labourers and such.

EMS Namboothiripad has argued that marathi brahmins brought the caste system prevalent in Maharashtra with them to Kerala. We can, however, understand through

the workings of the society in North Kerala that there was certainly a sense of hierarchy among the different communities who lived there.

According to certain discourses put forward by researchers like Dilip M Menon and T.V Chandran, theyyam as a ritual performance can be perceived as essentially transgressive in nature, shaking up the order of hierarchy in north Kerala. While Dilip Menon uses the phrase 'Symbolic strategies' to refer to the various instances of transgression by the oppressed classes, T.V Chandran talks about the dissemination of ideology in theyyam. Both scholars have approached theyyam using historical methodology- various historical instances, the use of myths in *thottams*, and theyyam as performances in general. It is also to be noticed that neither of them have explored the current scenario of theyyam performances and the working of the theyyam community by bringing focus on the ethnographical approaches. In my study I will be employing an ethnographic approach to understand Muthappan theyyam, so as to gain a deeper understanding of theyyam taking resistance, debt and justice as some of the themes to analyze the aforementioned discourses.

In his research article '*The Moral community of the Teyyattam: Popular Culture in Late Colonial Malabar*', Dilip Menon says, "In this essay, I approach the teyyattam as one of the strategies by which a living space is created by the dominated through which they attempt to stave off the exercise of arbitrary authority by those in power." (Menon1998, 189). The 'living space' that he is referring to is the space of the ritual performance of theyyam which acts as a political or ideological tool to stop or prevent the exercise of severe and arbitrary authority over the oppressed classes by those in power. A 'living space' in this context is a term used to convey parallel ideas, thoughts and ways of being and living, and sometimes intersecting, in a single space of the performance.

This 'living space' is created by the process of the ritual as well as the performance of theyyam, where a sense of community is created among the people who participate in the ritual performance. Dilip Menon has further explained that there is a clear transmission and dissemination of culture within theyyam along with infringement of the separate caste spaces. Dilip Menon is referring to the myths and stories as well as certain incidents which took place during the colonial period to validate these claims.

But, what are the characteristics of the 'living space' created by theyyam in the current scenario? Is the living space permanent or are there any effects of the living space which are permanent or which linger on even after the ritual performance ends? Do these effects of the living space affect the power hierarchy or the power structure in the theyyam community? These questions can be answered only once we explore the discourses and study the current scenario by concentrating on ethnography.

Resistance and Justice

Dilip Menon also talks about the moral community of theyyam, which according to him is a method in which theyyam as a performance ritual is strategically used by the lower castes to check the actions of the higher caste. The lowest of the lower caste communities, according to the caste hierarchy of Kerala, are considered the most volatile and dangerous by the higher castes. The performance creates a sense of fear in the minds of the Nair and other landlord communities towards the lower caste communities. This sense of fear stems from their ignorance about the lower caste ritualistic practices which are contrived to be diabolic and detrimental. Dilip Menon talks about an incident of conflict between a lower caste person and a person from the Nair community,

Writing in 1952, of an incident that had taken place a generation ago, a Nayar remembered a lower caste youth who had started harassing the Manakampat family through sorcery. The Nayars bided their time, brought a charge of murder against the youth, and killed him. Subsequently, when the Manakampat family became prey to inexplicable misfortunes, the murdered Paraya had to be deified as Kandath Raman and worshipped alongside the Nayar ancestors.&dquo; This story is interesting for several reasons. First, by becoming a sorcerer, the otherwise powerless Paraya could challenge his superiors. It was a 'symbolic strategy' through which he gained in status in his own eyes as well as in the gaze of the community. Nevertheless, it was a status that was highly ambivalent and tinged with the prospect of sudden demise. Secondly, the Nayars felt that restitution had to be made for the murder; violence had to be deployed with caution, and if excessive, atonement was necessary.

(Menon 1998, 194)

Here, while analyzing this story in detail, we can understand that the Paraya gained power only after his demise. But at the same time, the Paraya community as a whole did not gain any power. The Paraya mentioned in this story could not actualize the power since he wasn't alive anymore. The power was transferred in the form of worship of the new deity and hence the manifestation of such a power was symbolic rather than being real, if you look at it in this manner. Also, the question to ask here is, who gains anything from the power that is manifested in the form of worship of the Kandath Raman? Neither the demised Paraya, nor the Paraya community as a whole gains from this deity worship since Kandath Raman deity does not manifest any Paraya characteristics of identity. Besides this, the Paraya was also stripped of his real name and worshipped as 'Kandath Raman' which is a name different from Paraya names. At the same time, Kandath Raman seems to be a name from a higher caste family (footnote).

To evade the wrath of the Paraya community for murdering one of the members of that community, the higher caste family had to deify the victim. But, they were not ready to negotiate their caste privilege. Instead, they stripped the victim of his caste, name and

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so on and gave him a new name, indicating that he is now of a similar caste of status as theirs and Kandath Raman began to be worshipped along with their ancestors. In the whole story, the real name of the Paraya is not mentioned even once, which clearly shows that the 'symbolic strategy' as mentioned by Dilip Menon lead to the demise of a lower caste and nothing else in real.

Along with such an analysis, can we really consider this particular incident as part of a 'symbolic strategy' by lower caste to gain power against the higher caste families? Upon a deeper investigation regarding the question of power, in whose hands does power lie and who is taking advantage of such power in this context, it seems quite obvious that the power is in the hands of the higher caste since they could escape from the consequences of their heinous crime by deifying the victim according to their own conditions and now target at appeasing the soul of the victim—an entity higher than humans and consequently the higher castes.

From the above analysis, we can observe that if at all theyyam can be considered as a symbolic strategy, we should read it as stemming from logic of higher castes to ascertain their position of power. For a ritual such as theyyam to be performed and be validated, it needs active participation and contribution from the lower castes for it to be efficacious and successful. Hence, there is a negotiation or some kind of support or acceptance of the ritual from the lower caste since the idea of inversion of role at least in the duration of the ritual seem liberating for the lower caste. But this manner of approaching theyyam is more of a surface analysis of theyyam using myths and historicisation based on generalized assumptions validated through writings from the past.

T. V Chandran further explains the above theory by corroborating Althusser and Gramsci to justify his argument.

> Through ideological construct or "imaginary representation of the world" (Althusser) found in an ideology, the dominant group seeks to naturalise its ideas and conceals behind it it's "real" intention. The lesser groups in society would also come to accept it, although the fact is that they indeed have their own ideological conception of the world. More often it happens so when the conduct of the lesser group , as Gramsci says, is not independent and autonomous, but submissive and subordinate. Later in the course of historical process there would emerge a lack of concord between the ideology and its affiliation with the dominant social group, which finally results in heightened conflicts between the dominant and subordinate social groups.

(Chandran 2006, 12)

Connecting to the above said narrative of Kandath Raman as well as taking a few other theyyam deities who were deified after the injustices perpetrated upon them. We can trace a pattern of murder and honour killing that was perpetrated by the dominant on to the victims such as Palanthai Kannan and Makkam. Kannan was a Tiyya boy who was banished from his home and his native place for having fallen in love with his landlord's (from Kurup caste which is a Nair sub-caste) daughter. He returned to his native place after a few years of exile during which he served as a priest at a small shrine. Kurup murdered Kannan when he heard of his arrival. After this, unfortunate incidents start taking place at the Kurup family. The family consulted an astrologer who guided the Kurup family to compensate for the killing by deifying the victim, constructing deity Vishnumurth as one of the Theyyams.

Here, we can see the conflict between the castes leading to honour killing. At the same time, it cannot be perceived as mere honour killing where a boy of a lower caste fell in love with a girl from a higher caste. The story mentions Kannan's service as a *komaram* (priest) during his exile, his position as a temple priest disturbs the caste structure. As

being a member of the lower community he cannot perform public rituals. The killing of Kannan, a Tiyya boy becomes more volatile due to his service as priest. Here, we can sense the hand of a higher authority (God) at play.

Makkam's story and position differs from that of Kannan's. Makkam was the only beloved sister of many brothers of a famous and powerful Nayar family. Her sisters-in-laws were jealous of their husbands' affection towards Makkam. According to the myth, one day when the brothers were out, the sisters-in-law schemed to make the brothers resent Makkam. A Vaniyan oil presser came to the house to deliver oil. Makkam was on menstruation and so was not allowed to step out of the house. While knowing this, the sisters-in-law did not come out of their rooms, forcing Makkam to deal with the oil presser. Since she was under restriction on stepping outside, Makkam had to ask the oil presser to step into the kitchen to deliver the oil. Later on, after the brothers came back, the sisters-in-laws made up stories about Makkam getting involved in a physical relationship with the Vaniyan oil presser. Boiling with anger, the brothers took Makkam and her children to the forest and murdered all of them. They also killed a witness who had seen the murders. Later on misfortunes started to befall the family, killing them one by one. And so, Makkam was deified to restitute for her and her children's unjustified murders. Makkam remains as one of the few Nair theyyams performed today.

With Makkam's story, we can see that it is not a direct conflict between the castes similar to that of Kannan. Though the victim is of higher caste but at the same time the aspect of purity involved brings the focus on the dominant caste structures ruling the social norms. The caste of Vaniyan is an important aspect to this story because honour killing took place in the name of protecting the respect of the family. The sexual

relations that Makkam apparently had with a person from a lower caste community effects the notion of purity. But the analysis of the story can work at the level of a woman's purity as well. Women being regarded as a mother and divine entity, any kind of sexual implications on the individuality of women are considered a taboo in the society.

Muthappan theyyam deals with the aspect of hero-worship in the associated myth as well as performance. The question that arise from this context is who can be signified as the hero here? Is Muthappan the figure of hero who is being represented as theyyam in the performance? Is Muthappan the hero in a mytho-historic sense in approaches of T.V Chandran, Dilip Menon and several other scholars? Does their belief in the deeper mytho-historical meanings need to be unravelled for us to understand the politics in this society? The issue of the space between the real and the mytho-historical is too vast. The real is getting sidelined to a position where it becomes more interesting and aesthetic to only focus on unravelling the hidden meanings in myths. The combination of myth and history provides us with an acceptable story which is consensually validated in the performance, though not focusing into its problems. But the question is whether Muthappan is a hero as the myths in the *thottams* portray or is Muthappan a soul of the lost identity? Is Muthappan a character trapped in the vicious circle of domination through ritual practices? Is Muthappan the saviour that we desperately need to feel a sense of safety and security?

Muthappan thottams talks about Muthappan being the biological son of the Karimkurathi, who lives in the forest and as an infant, he was found on the Tirunetti rocks next to the banks of Tirunettikkadavu when Padikuttiamma had gone to bathe. Paadikuttiamma, being a childless Brahmin woman, adopted Muthappan and brought

him up as a Brahmin. Paadikuttiamma and her husband Ayyangaravazhunnor were from the Ayyangara family and were the devotees of Vayathoor Kaaliyaarishwaran. Parvathi Andarjanam, popularly known as Paadikuttiamma, tried to bring up Muthappan by teaching the conventional practices of the Brahmin caste, but Muthappan, seeing and understanding the issues and problems surrounding lower caste people, sought to be with them, work amongst them and help with these issues. He helped these people in farming, interacting personally with them while going hunting with them. He would take a bow and arrow and would hunt animals and eat them like the forest dwellers. Muthappan involved in these lower caste practices such as hunting and eating animals would not accepted by the Ayyangara family and so he decided to leave home, understanding what Paadikuttiamma has to go through when she smells the cooked meat of the animals which Muthappan had hunted and killed himself. He decided to move to a hill which was higher than the place where he was staying so that Paddikuttiamma didn't have to suffer because of him. He went past Vattyamthod and Payyavur temple and reached the hills of Kunnathurpaady. He spent his days there sitting and meditating while worshipping Kaliyaareeshwaran. He got enlightened and again started living in forest and villages, interacting with these people and helping them out and working for their progress and development.

The sad truth about Muthappan is that scholars who have researched on the subject of theyyam are either interested in the exotic and primitive aspects in their approaches to theyyam or the performative and spectacular aspects. Compared to the other theyyams, Muthappan is a theyyam which is not as visually or performatively spectacular. Theechamundi theyyam and other such spectacular theyyams become the object of fascination for most theyyam scholars. Even though Muthappan's fame is widespread,

being the only theyyam who is a savior and friend to everyone, this does not spike the aspect of exoticism for the scholars to particularly research on Muthappan.

T V Chandran has said,

> For many veterans in this field, study of teyyam is meant to be an elite, esoteric practice striving to explain the meaning and function of tantra, mantra and other Brahmanical rituals and their preconceived "indispensable relationship" to theyyam. The schizoid nature of such studies in effect comes to legitimize the dominant ideology of the religious nationalism. My attempt is, therefore, to analyze the myths of (thottams) of various teyyams so as to seek the inner meanings in relation to the "real" world from which they originated.

<div align="right">(Chandran 2006, 13)</div>

T.V Chandran assumes that his approach is different from that of the current discourses on theyyam though the structure of the discourse does not deviate from the research undertaken by theyyam scholars till date. The gaze of these scholars is similar in nature and hence, the minute difference in research produced on theyyam does not really bring a new or 'revolutionary' direction to the discourse on theyyam.

Desperate need to hold on to culture and traditions and the urge to revive the forgotten past has raised fascination towards the form in the society. Though these kind of ritual performances and traditions were existent throughout, the popularity and belief in these rituals increased because of the need to find connections to the community. When the notion of individual identity as a member of diverse community started to develop, these rituals started coming to the forefront both in terms of performances as well as academic scholarship. Hence, the need to have a cultural identity ensconced in the belief system started reinforcing the interest in such ritual performances and practices especially in Kerala. Even the Communist Party and people who believed in

communism started supporting such belief systems in an attempt to revive the local beliefs and culture as an opposing force to the dominant Hindu belief system.

Dilip Menon in one of his works on communism in Kerala says,

> The discipline that marxist/socialist ideology provided allowed the communists to take over the political organisation of the Congress by 1939. They became 'communists' first and discovered marxism later. To use Dirlik's evocative phrase, they had "walk(ed) backwards into Marxism". It is also possible that a widespread unawareness of marxism was encouraged by the very organisation of the party...

(Menon 2006, 35)

In a conversation with Madhavan Parassini Madappura, Menon says that during the time when things were getting volatile in Kerala, Parassini Madappura was a hideout for communists. Dilip Menon has also mentioned in one of his works that many communists in Kerala are embarrassed of the fact that they enjoy temple festivals and somewhere they relate their cultural identity with these festivals. Cultural identity has become a parameter for situating one's identity. In this sense, the rootedness in one's cultural beliefs and identity has become a necessity to define oneself. These days we hear a lot of people define their native place to others by referring to theyyam. For natives of Malabar, theyyam has become a parameter to define their native land, a native person defines North Malabar as place of theyyam performances; theyyam becomes exotic almost as a fantasy. The form is also gaining popularity from the media as an exotic performance ritual which inverses the social and caste hierarchy in the durational temporality of the performance. The spectacle elements of the form also drive this gaze of exoticism. Due to this exoticism in the outer world, the local cultic and cultural beliefs regarding theyyam and individual identification with the theyyam belief system transforms into mere exotic gaze. Theyyam becomes an entertaining, exotic and overpowering form at the same time. Hence, a ritual with its roots in a

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community becomes an object of exotic gaze even within the community that is actively involved in the ritual; instead of becoming a defining factor of his cultural identity, the forms becomes an 'other'. This exotic gaze is arising in the postcolonial way of thinking under which there was a necessity for the revival of ritual performances such as theyyam after colonisation. But the issue is that while exoticisation of theyyam helped in raising its popularity and assurance about one's own cultural identity, the exotic gaze prevails in understanding of theyyam by researchers, media and people from the theyyam community who tend to approach the form merely from a spectators' point of view.

In performance studies, the spectator holds an important position who also presents diverse points of view in the performance. But in the context of theyyam the participants of the ritual have now also adopted a spectator's point of view rather than that of a performer. Dilip Menon has referred to the festival aspect by referring to Bhaktin's theory on carnival where there is an inversion of hierarchy in every sense during the carnival. But this idea about the carnival is itself coming from a spectators point of view and is also rooted in exotic gaze.

K N Panikkar also looks at theyyam from a performance studies point of view, looking at the performer and differentiating him from an actor. He talks about the performer being in a half conscious state during the performance, where he has control over his mind. The performer prepares himself for embodying the theyyam (god). Panikkar talks about the performer entering a trance state when he loses control of his mind and the people around him have to forcefully bring him back to consciousness. But, this is a generalisation of the theyyam performance. In a conversation with two performers, Sunil Kumar, who is a Muthappan theyyam performer at Parassini Madappura and

Pramod, who is also a Muthappan theyyam performer, both of these performers had the same opinion regarding consciousness of mind during the theyyam performance. They reveal that what is important is that they completely prepare or surrender their self to god. It is only with this mindset that they can become the theyyam. It is as though their body becomes an instrument for god to communicate with the people. During the course of the performance, they might get into a trance state, but it is not necessary that this happens every time they perform. When asked particularly whether they are in a semi-conscious state when performing, the performers responded that they are mostly conscious of everything that is happening during the performance. It is only at times or at certain moments that they fall into a trance state. So there is no aspect of half consciousness here. Either you fall into trance or you don't.

But this is also to do with the structure of ritual. With the repetition of preparing oneself for the theyyam performance, it becomes a routine for the performers. They perform the preparatory duties as well as performance as a routine where everything is repeated for each performance because of the structure being that of a ritual. So, there might not be active thinking or consciousness involved. At this point we can say that KN Panikkar is looking at theyyam from a spectator's point of view. The half consciousness that he talks about is more of an unthinking consciousness that comes with repetition of routines. This is where the point of exoticisation comes. Comparing a ritual performance such as theyyam to non-ritual stage performances is a dangerous way to read the performer without looking at the basic characteristics and structure of ritual. KN Panikkar also talks about the *rasika* enjoying these kind of performances. What is the role of the *rasika* in the space of a subaltern ritual performance like theyyam? A *rasika* is somebody who is entertained by the performance. This term is usually used in the context of Rasa theory, though this has become a general term used

for a person who understands and is thoroughly entertained by a performance. Bringing this kind of a term in the context of theyyam is itself an indication of the approach which KN Panikkar is taking. Trying to find classical elements in theyyam in order to make theyyam a canon in performance studies means detaching it from its subaltern identity.

Currently, theyyam is being performed as an art form and as stage performances in many places. Kerala tourism has also used theyyam for advertising, especially placing theyyam at the forefront of cultural identity. There are training and coaching centres for theyyam these days which provides lessons and training from experts in the field. With the transformation of theyyam from a ritualistic performance form to purely an art form, there is a transformation in the structure and the elements of theyyam. While talking to Sunil Kumar, a Muthappan theyyam performer, he mentioned that there were a few people from the theyyam community who started tourism related stage performances and started performing theyyam on stage.

A debate has risen amongst the theyyam performers regarding performing theyyam on stage. Most of them were enraged at the thought of something that was part of their belief system and way of life was stripped away from them and given an entirely new form. The rest of the theyyam performers arrived at a consensus regarding how to deal with the appropriation of theyyam in this manner by a few who have started performing on stage. And so, they shunned them from the community. This was not just because of the ritualistic aspect of theyyam. There are several social factors which are infused with the theyyam belief. Traditionally, theyyam cannot be performed everywhere. The theyyam families who are from a particular place can perform only at shrines around that area. For example, Pradeep, a performer from Kolassery, which is on one side of

Eranholi river is not allowed to perform at shrines on the other side of the river. There is a rule of *janmam* or *jammam* which means, if a performer wants to perform at a shrine in another area which is not designated to their family, they have to get permission from the theyyam performers who are designated to that particular area. When theyyam is appropriated into stage performances, none of these rules become valid.

If one is to categorize the theyyam discourses, we can say that the theyyam discourse moves in four different directions. One looks at theyyam from a so called decolonising, post colonial approach which is that of TV Chandran and Dilip Menon as has been repeatedly mentioned in this chapter. The second one is the aestheticization of theyyam into a classical performance which deny the ritual characteristics to theyyam. For example, K N Panikkar's views on theyyam performance is only from a performance studies point of view, looking at just the performance aspect without reading the ritual characteristics along with it. K N Panikkar reads theyyam in a similar manner as he reads a classical performance like Kathakali. He talks about the performative aspect of theyyam performances. The third way of looking at theyyam is through the ritual structure and the hinduised elements of theyyam such as the ten avatars of Vishnu which are symbolically incorporated on Muthappan's theyyam ritual costume and the *manthras* related to theyyam. And the fourth discourse on theyyam is through a romanticism of folk culture of theyyam which mostly looks at how local ritual performances connects the people to their landscape and such, environment and such.

Most of the current discourses on theyyam are looking at it through an exotic gaze. They fall into this trap of decolonising where the attempt at decolonisation of theyyam tends to fall into the cycle of colonising theyyam again and again. All of these

approaches become versions of each other. Maybe the issue arises from the fact that almost all of these approaches are eurocentric in nature or at least have originated from the western context. Though there have been many attempts to create methodologies and approaches to study indigenous performances and such from the point of view of the indigenous people, the parameters that have been taking in all these approaches, anthropology, etc. are from the western context. The gaze of the researcher towards theyyam is a brahminical, exotic and colonising gaze. The point of break here which can change the direction of the discourse of theyyam is through the decolonisation of gaze.

CHAPTER 2
PART 1

26th December 2018, Kunnathurpady Muthappan Devasthanam

Kunnathur pady Thiruvappana Mahotsavam starts from 15 th December for approximately one month.

Kunnathur pady is a hilly region near Kannur which is known for the Muthappan festival there. Transportation to Kunnathur pady is quite difficult since there are only a few buses to get to Kunnathur pady from Kannur, and the frequency of the buses is also less. Travelling alone to Kunnathur pady by public transport for the Thiruvappana festival is not convenient especially for women who are travelling alone because the preparation for the vellattam starts at around 5.30 pm and the thiruvappana ends at around 12.30- 1.00 am in the morning. There are no shelters or anything else around for lodging. And the next bus after the last ritual ends is at 5 am in the morning. So one has to either spend their time waiting at the madappura (shrine) or the ootupura (the hall where the meals are served for the devotees).

Once you get to Kunnathurpady, it is a long walk to the shrine. There are a lot of temporary shacks on either side of the road which sell balloons, cheap jewellery and knick-knacks along with small prints and idols of Muthappan. Some of these shacks are eateries which have rabbit meat, chicken and pork dishes in the menu. This is quite interesting since meat is considered impure in Hindu rituals and Theyyam has often been argued as being a Hindu ritual. One can see that these are the elements that make the ritual still retain its non- hindu, cultic characteristics.

Once you pass these shacks, you come across an arch on which there is the image of Padikuttiamma theyyam (Muthappan's mother) on the left pillar of the arch, Vellattam on the right pillar and Thiruvappana on the head of the arch with Kunnathurpady Shri Muthappan Devasthanam written on it. This arch is said to be built recently. From her memories, my mother told me that around 40 years ago, there were no roads or a proper path to the shrine. The forest covered the whole area and so, they had to trek a long way to get to the shrine. Even then, people used to travel all the way to the shrine to watch the ritual performance during the Thiruvappana festival. The path from the arch is newly built and still under construction and so, authorities of the shrine still ask the devotees for contribution to complete building the pathway. On the way to the shrine, there are multiple shacks which sell food, including different kinds of meat, fresh juice, toys and such. After a short trek, a clear space is seen which is where the performance ritual take place. Before entering the ritual space there is a small shack on the left for registration and payment, for the *vazhipadu* (ritual offerings and ceremonies done for that particular deity), and on the right there is another shack which sells toddy as offering for Muthappan. There are signs that declare that Arak is not allowed as offerings for the god.

Within the ritual space, the performance space is in the middle which is flanked on both sides by sheds for different communities and placards with community names are hung from the top of each shed. There communities were *anjoottan*, *karthavu*, *panikkar* and so on. There was one for Karakkattidam Vanavar which is for the Karakkatidam family. They are from the Nayanar caste which comes under the Nair sub caste. Karakkattidam Vanavar is considered as the local ruler of that area. In the shed for Karakkatidam vanavar, a person was sitting in an entitled manner and he is supposedly considered as the ruler of that region. Though the Vanavar is considered the ruler who

organizes and deals with the finances for the festival, only *Chandan* has the right to go inside the Madappura and make major decisions. *Chandan* is a person from the family of Chandan from the myths related to Muthappan. Chandan is from Moothoran family from the Adiyan community.

The myth (Muthappan Puravrutham, page no. 36) is such that one day Chandan found somebody on his areca nut palm tree drinking toddy which he had tapped for himself to drink. The thief who had climbed the tree was drinking and laughing loudly in an intoxicated stupor. Chandan got angry at the thief and started scolding him loudly. He then took out his bow and shot an arrow at the thief. Suddenly, Chandan got transformed into a stone statue. Chandan's wife started getting worried since it was already night and her husband who went out in the noon had not yet returned home. Tensed and worried, she went out in search of her husband. As she reached the place where the areca nut palm was, she saw a stone statue of Chandan under the tree and a godly male figure with a halo around him. As she saw the figure on the tree, she understood that he has some godly power. She begged him to transform Chandan back to his earlier self. She promised to perform ritual ceremonies in the figure's name and also serve him various offerings. Once Chandan got transformed back into his earlier self, he started serving Muthappan at the cave where he was serving penance to Kaleeyareeshwaran. When Muthappan left Kunnathurpady to move to Puralimala, Chandan served him even then. Chandan was completely devoted to Muthappan. At times when Chandan couldn't serve Muthappan, it was his wife Kallaikkodi Adiyathi who took his place. Even when Chandan became old, he was still consistently serving Muthappan and is believed to have passed away because of old age while he was on his way back to the Muthappan shrine.

Even now, the only person who has the right to go inside the shrine for performing ritual ceremonies is a person designated as 'Chandan' from the Moothoran family. And in case Chandan is not able to perform any services in the shrine, the only other person who has the right to enter the shrine is the Adiyathi. Kunnathurpady is considered to be one among the few shrines which allow women to perform rituals inside the sanctum sanctorum.

When we reached the performance space at Kunnathurpady madappura it was around 5 pm. I was informed that the Vellattam performance would start at around 5.30 pm. People were slowly gathering around the Vellattam performer who was sitting at the performance space and painting his face and body by himself for the performance. Some people were taking videos and photos on their phones. The authorities of the shrine were also preparing for the performance. I learnt later that the sheds at the ritual space were for particular communities who had certain responsibilities or duties regarding the rituals and performances that would take place. Some people who were not from these communities were seated on one side of the ritual space. The seating area was at a heightened angle since the hill was on the side of the seating area. A person was collecting money for the pavement of the pathway to the shrine. The performance started at around 6pm. By that time a large crowd of people had gathered at the seating area. The same person who was asking for contribution for the pavement, started collecting money for the *roopams* (small, flat metallic figures of dogs, cattle, pigs, arms, legs, human figures as well as cradles). These roopams were to be offered to the Vellattam or Thiruvappana for blessing the people who are offering these. They were people who have some illness regarding arms, legs, the whole body or regarding pregnancy etc. The animal figure symbols for hunting or for safety and health of these

animals. These roopams were for either Rs 20 or Rs 30, depending on which *roopam* we buy. These roopams were to be offered to the Vellattam right after the performance.

For every Muthappan performance there is a ritual ceremony called *pallivetta* where the performer shoots an arrow towards a coconut, this act being symbolic for hunting. At Kunnathurpady both the Vellattam and Thiruvappana do not perform together since in the *thottam* Muthappan met Vellattam after moving from Kunnathurpady. Hence, in the first ritual, in place of Thiruvappana, it is the Komaram who performs with the Vellattam. The Komaram address the Vellattam as '*cherukka...*' like how the Thiruvappana would call him. It is only in Kunnathurpady that such a replacement happens. During the ritual the Komaram and Thiruvappana drink toddy from the *kindi* (a small tumbler) as part of the ritual and they can drink it whenever they want during the ritual as well. Towards the end of the ritual, some people would tease the Komaram about his level of intoxication. Komaram has the same role as the *madayan* (*madayan* is the priest who does most of the ritual services and helps the Vellattam in placing the headdress and so on). The ceremony where the Vellattam puts on the headdress is done before the sanctum sanctorum of the shrine. This shrine in Kunnathurpady is a temporary shed built of dry coconut tree and a temporary wooden structure. There is a printed and framed image of theyyam with just the Thiruvappana with his bow and arrow in the picture. Usually in printed images and idols, both Thiruvappana and Vellattam are always together. Even during the worship, one does not differentiate between Thiruvappana and Vellattam, though Thiruvappana is considered to be the Muthappan, according to the myths.

Once this performance ritual gets over, the Vellattam goes to the Karakkattidam Vanavar and blesses him first by giving him a few flower petals from his headdress.

Then he goes to the shed for the *anjoottan* community and gives his blessing to the people sitting in that area. After that he gives his blessing to the people who performed the accompanying instruments. Then he comes to the side of the general seating area and gives his blessings. While the Vellattam does this, the Komaram gives his blessing to the people and interacts with them. Since he has performed as the Thiruvappana, it is believed that he is the valya Muthappan. Hence people don't identify him as the Komaram, and in the duration of that ritual they worship him as the Thiruvappana. Once the ritual ends, both the Komaram and the Thiruvappana start interacting with the people. Thiruvappana seems to be asking questions to the people and finally he says 'Muthappan ind koode. Pedikkanda...' , which means 'Muthappan is there with you. So don't worry'. After he interacted with the people, he was standing near the shed for *Karthavu* community and he was interacting with somebody there. The person he was talking to was holding a child who was crying and Muthappan said ' This child wants to go home . He has a lot of things to do it seems', this was entirely out of context to what he was talking to the person.

After this performance of Komaram and Vellattam, there was a gap of around one and a half hour during which the authorities served meals for the devotees. One had to walk all the way back to the arch to reach the eating area. This *ootupura* was right next to the bigger shrine which was newly built. The original shrine is apparently the temporary shrine next to the performance space. This shrine is the one that was built because of Karakkattidam Vanavar. There were rumours going on about the funding for the newly built shrine. But the *devasthanam* or the main point of location for the god according to astrology is the temporary shed and not this permanent shrine. I was informed of this during a conversation with Madhavan Parassini Madappura. Offering meals to the devotees is a practice observed at almost all the theyyam shrines during festivals. At

Kunnathurpady, the devotees are offered all three meals of the day for a stretch of one month during which the festival takes place. This practice is also observed at Parassini Madappura on a daily basis.

At around 9.30 pm, the Thiruvappana performance started. More people had come by then and because the seating area was already filled, people started to gather towards the boundary of the performance space. There was a clear distinction between the communities who actively participated in the ritual and those who didn't. I noticed that there was an iron fence encircling the ritual space, keeping the audience separated from the participants of the ritual. Besides that, all the people who were not amongst the communities participating in the ritual were asked to leave the ritual space. The Thiruvappana performance was more spectacular and theatrical in nature. Though the performance space was well lit with white lights, there were two big torches lit which were made of multiple logs of wood tied together and held on either side of the thiruvappana. There was also a big decorated umbrella which was held over the Thiruvappana at the beginning of the performance when the *mudi* was placed over the performer's head. The drum beats had a different and more fierce rhythm for the Thiruvappana performance. Unlike elsewhere, the Thiruvappana performed alone and not with the Vellattam because of reason mentioned above. When the intensity of the performance reached its peak, they switched off the white lights making the performance more intense and theatrical. The tempo of the beats started slowing down towards the end of the performance. I was informed that there might be a chance of the theyyam performance of Paadikuttiamma taking place right after the Thiruvappana performance. But this is decided by Thiruvappana. It is said that if the Thiruvappana wishes to see his mother, he will say that and the Padikuttiamma theyyam performer has to get ready then. Throughout the festival, the *mudi* and other decorations for

Padikuttiamma are kept ready for the performance. There were announcements made on the microphone regarding the various rituals and when they begin and end. There was a festive mood all around and people were drinking toddy a little away from the performance area. This practice of drinking toddy and having meat was encouraged especially in Kunnathurpady since according to the myths, Muthappan used to go for hunting and cooked and consumed meat and toddy like the forest dwellers of that region. The symbolism of the bow and arrow and the practice of *pallivetta* arises from this aspect of the myth hinting at Muthappan indulging in hunting and other lower caste and tribal activities. The main performance ended at around 1 am and after that there was one more ritual of the Thiruvappana removing his headdress and the performer returning to his normal self.

Kattiladooda Madappura Theyyam festival, 16 February 2019

Kaatiladooda Madappura is located near Kolassery and is a famous Muthappan shrine in that region. The Muthappan festival at this particular shrine is the most awaited one amongst the people around that region. During this festival, many people gather to watch the theyyam performances. It is not just the Muthappan theyyam that is performed here during the festival, but many other theyyam performances also take place. For the *mudivekkal chadangu* or the ritual ceremony for tying the headdress on the performer's head, first the Cheriya Muthappan places the *mudi* onto the Valya Muthappan's head and then the Madayan places the *mudi* onto the Cheriya Muthappan's head. Here, unlike how it was in Kunnathur pady, the Cheriya Muthappan is always around the Valya Muthappan. This space was much more of a festival space where people where selling food and ice cream within the compound of the shrine. Mathrusamithi women in their uniform were handling the crowd and several of the

arrangements. The crowd at this madappura was bigger as compared to Kunnathur pady. People came dressed luxuriously and from all age groups. Most of the youngsters were playing or chit-chatting and the older people were talking to acquaintances. People were also selling lottery tickets at the seating area. There was no boundary between the performance area and the seating area. But, it was mostly men standing near the performance area. Even during the performance, it was mostly men who were standing there, most of them from the family associated with this Madappura. The women of that family saw the performance from a distance, standing on the steps of a structure which represents the ancestral home. There was the Karanavar theyyam(representing the ancestors of that family) walking around. There were two performance spaces for this shrine- a small shrine-like structure behind the main shrine and near that structure, there was a stage. Towards the side of the stage, there were other theyyams already prepared and waiting for their performances. The Karanavar theyyam while walking around, was also interacting with these theyyams.

The Muthappan performance was in front of the main shrine. Once the ceremony for tying the headdress was over, the Valya Muthappan circled the shrine while laughing loudly. Two people accompanied the Valya Muthappan. One carried a hand fan and the other person was escorting the Muthappan. The Valya Muthappan carried his bow and arrow in one hand and a mirror in the other hand. After the *mudi* was placed on the Cheriya Muthappan, the Cheriya Muthappan also laughed loudly in a theatrical manner like the Valya Muthappan. The laughter is symbolic, portraying that the performer is no longer a performer, he has completely transformed into Muthappan. The movements and gestures of the Valya Muthappan were matched with the movements of Cheriya Muthappan. Since Valya Muthappan's costume and headdress were much heavier and because the Valya Muthappan always wears *poikkannu* (false eyes), his movement is

limited. According to the myths, *poikkanu* was given to Muthappan by Padikuttiamma(Muthappan's mother). Hence Cheriya Muthappan , performing along with Valya Muthappan intensifies as well as balances the performances. After the performance, both the Muthappans gave blessings, first to the organisers of the performance, that is, the family associated with the shrine. Then to the people who performed the accompanying instruments, and finally he came towards the seating area and gave his blessing to the people. After that, people were in a rush to interact with Muthapan and there was a long queue organised to interact with him. While Muthappan sat on a stool next to the donation box in front of the main shrine, Cheriya Muthappan sat at another corner of the performance space.

While listening to what Valya Muthappan was saying to the devotees, there were phrases like 'Believe that Muthappan is always there with you' or 'You have suffered a lot isn't it? There is a solution for everything. Don't worry'. At times, Muthappan scolds people for not being responsible or for not performing their duties. He says something like 'Do you think all that you are doing is right? It is time that you become responsible'. There is a paternalistic tone to Muthappan when he speaks to his devotees. Generally, Muthappan is considered as a king or a ruler, in the sense that his appearance is that of a king.

Muthappan *vellattams* are performed at houses and at other places. In a conversation with a Muthappan performer, he said that they had arranged a vellattam performance in front of a bar.

Parassini kadavu Muthappan Madappura, 26 May 2019

The previous night I had called a few people and had arranged for an interview with a Theyyam performer who performed at the Parassini Kadavu Madappura and someone

from the family which is associated with this Madappura. The next day, I reached Parassini kadvu madappura at around 9 am in the morning. I was informed before that though I would not be able to watch the ritual performance of both the vellattam and thiruvappana. I would be able to interact with them. I had been to Parassini kadavu multiple times before. But that was many years back, when I was a child. What I remember of those times were that there weren't many people in the madappura and once you are done with praying to Muthappan, you are supposed to go to the *ootupura* and have the *prasadam* (foot note). The prasadam would consist of chunks of dried coconut pieces and boiled Bengal gram. The devotees would sit and have the prasadam and they leave only once they finish the prasadam. This practice of having boiled grams and coconut pieces is considered be how Muthappan would like to treat the devotees as guests.

Along the short walk from the parking are to the madappura, there were multiple shops which sold various little things. While some sold sweets and confectionaries, others sold CDs and DVDs of Muthappan devotional songs. And some shops sold small idols of Muthappan and other Hindu deities. But the thing that struck me was how crowded it had become. Madappura was extremely crowded and I could hear people speaking in different other Indian languages. We rushed to the main madappura where the vellattam and thiruvappana were waiting. Because it was so crowded, there was not much interaction with both the Muthappans. I could just barely manage to go up to the vellattam.

While on the way back from the main shrine, I noticed a house with a lot of painting of Muthppan. This house is of the family which takes care of the temple. The madayan (priest) of the temple is the eldest person from that family. I met Mr. Madhavan from

this family at office of the madappura. He spoke to me about how things work at the Madappura. He also commented on the feud that this family had with the Karakkanat Vanavar from Kunnathurpady. Madhavan further told me that the area in which this shrine is located was under Karakkanat Vanavar's name and there was a court case regarding this. He gave me the details of the madayan's before the current madayan and what all each of them have achieved. An interesting aspect of Parassini Madappura is that the *nivedyam* (ritual offering) is given to the shrine by a Muslim. This practice has been conducted for years now. Many years earlier, people from other religions were not allowed to enter the shrine. There was incident of floods in that region and a lot of Muslims had helped with saving the shrine. In those days, the shrine was just made of wood and palm leaves and so on. It was just a temporary shelter-like-structure during those days. Madhavan also said that this shrine has been a hide –out for communists during emergency period.

According to Madhavan, Thiruvappana is the avatar of Vishnu and Vellattam is the avatar of Shiva. The symbolisms of the nine avatars of Vishnu can be seen on the clothing and ornaments of thiruvappana, whereas, the Vellattam has symbolisms of Shiva in his ornamants and costume. Madhava said, though we cannot say that this Muthappan completely a Hindu deity, we have to say that there are elements of Hinduism here.

Muthappan Theyyam performances: The Duality of Muthappan as Tiruvappana and Cheriya Muthappan

When Suraju or Vatsala of Thazhekachumbrath family from the *Tiyya* community talks about Muthappan, they are talking about Muthappan in the form of the Theyyam and not just as a deity in whom they believe. Coming to Muthappan Theyyam

performances, Muthappan Vellattams are performed in houses and shrines or *madappuras*. And Muthappan Teyyams are performed in major *madappuras* and temples and usually not at houses. For Muthappan Vellattams, only Cheriya Muthappan will perform and Tiruvappana will not be present there. After *thottam pattu*, the ritual priest will place the headgear on the performer's head and it is believed that once the headgear is placed on the performer's head, the spirit of Muthappan enters the performer's body and from that moment the devotees consider the performer as the deity himself, and so, they have direct interactions with the deity. The performance becomes very entrancing and affective with the accompaniment of the rhythms of *Chenda* (a drum instrument) and cymbals. Once the performance gets over, the performer sits down and the devotees of Muthappan get the opportunity to meet him personally and individually and also interact with him. Muthappan talks to them, asks questions about their family, sometimes being playful, he teases them about something and at times, looking at the seriousness on their faces, he talks them through the problems they are facing and he says 'Muthappan will always be there with you…Don't worry', or something like, 'Why worry when Muthappan is with you. Muthappan will take care of those things'. He gives assurance to the people who are stressed out and worried about something, he warns the people who are feeling guilty about something and then consoles them and teases the people very playfully and then also appreciates those who have done something appreciable. He is like a constant companion and a power over us who transfers some of his powers and strength to his devotees. Vatsala, when asked about how she feels about Muthappan, she says, 'Muthappan is very strong and with powers than no human has. But he is a deity who shares his strength and power with his devotees, the strength that Muthappan shared

with me is what is keeping me going'. The above mentioned context of performance happens in Vellattams.

The Tiruvappana Theyyam performances happen almost similarly to this. Except for the fact that Tiruvappana appears to be the higher power within the performance, since he is given a high ground here and Cheriya Muthappan becomes the minor form of Muthappan in the performance. Tiruvappana's movements are more restricted and he also looks more powerful than the Cheriya Muthappan, while Cheriya Muthappan becomes the character who moves around a lot, grabbing people's attention to the Tiruvappana.

But here, in both these performance scenarios, what is to be observed is the fact that, though there are two forms of Muthappans present in front of the devotees, there is only a single Muthappan deity for them. Muthappan is one deity who may appear in two forms or has two or more identities. Some believe that one of the either, the Tiruvappana or the Cheriya Muthappan, represents Shiva and the other represents Vishnu, deities from the Hindu pantheon, and they come together to form one deity called Muthappan and so, Muthappan has both the characteristics of Shiva and Vishnu. This duality is seen in his *vachalam* or his speech. He can be a mother and a father, he can be playful and serious and he refers to himself in the third person, which becomes the combination of both sides of characteristics. Even though the aspect of Shiva and Vishnu coming together to form a singular entity called Muthappan may seem a bit far-fetched or may be considered as an element of syncretism or even as the domination of popular Hindu deities over tribal or regional deities.

The devotee as the patron and Muthappan as the performer

As much as I would like to believe that Muthappan is a deity associated with some form of a higher power or that Muthappan was a great leader who worked for the progress and development of the lower caste communities, I would also like to explore another side of the Muthappan Vellattam performances. As mentioned before, Muthappan Vellattams usually take place in houses or *madappuras*. They are organized in houses either because the devotee of that household must have prayed to Muthappan that if his/her prayers are heard, then he or she will organize a Vellattam performance at that house or they are invoking the deity to enter the newly built house, bringing luck and fortune to the house. And for this performance, the extended families and the neighbours are all invited. Even if people come to know about such Vellattam performances being organized at some house, they can go for such performances uninvited, since, for that period of time, that house is considered to be within the ritual space. The practice or ritual of meeting or interacting with the deity and asking for his blessings, take place right after the performance. In this particular practice, it is quite evident that the performer tries to say what the devotees want to hear from him. Here, the theyyam itself becomes the performer giving what the devotees and the patrons (the people of the household) want to hear. And hence, there is an inversion of power here too since the deity becomes the performer and the devotees have power over what the deity says. The narratives about a strong character like Muthappan may not mean that Muthappan is the higher power though he is considered to be the deity, it can also mean that the myths and narratives can be manipulations done by people, which helps in inverting power relations, which in this case can be considered as employed by the lower caste. This is just one way of looking at the performance of Muthappan Theyyam ritual, it does not mean this is what the intention or motives are or if there is any

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awareness to this fact. This might even be an over-reading of the structure of the Muthappan Theyyam performance.

Multiplicity of Muthappan characters and syncretism

The above mentioned narrative speaks only about one Muthappan. It is to be realized that there are more than one Muthappan, though when worshipping, one worships the Muthappan thinking of Muthappan as one single deity. The various Muthappans known are Puramkala Muthappan, Naduvazhi Muthappan, Puralimuthappan and Nambalamuthappan. All these Muthappan figures have myths of their own and they are different from each other. Naduvazhi Muthappan is said to be identified with the ruler Harishchandra Perumal. When asked for or looked at pictures of Muthappan, one would find two figures standing next to each other. Though both these figures are considered to be Muthappans, one is called Tiruvappana and the other is called Cheriya Muthappan. Similar is the narrative of Puralimuthappan who found another Muthappan in one of his travels, who was also actively involved in social activism and helping the poor and downtrodden. This was Nambalamuthappan who was quite old, but a respected leader among the common people. Puralimuthappan decided to stay with him and work with him for the progress and development of the poor.

In almost the same manner, is the narrative of the Tiruvappana who chanced upon meeting another Muthappana and addressed him as 'Cherukka' (boy) and brought him along wherever he went. This 'Cherukkan' figure came to be known as Cheriya Muthappan or Little Muthappan. Though both these narratives talks about two different Muthappan figures, it is important to understand that for a devotee, there is only a Muthappan and not the plurality of Muthappans. In a small region near Kunnathurpaady, a Muthappanar figure is also worshipped. But we are not entirely sure

whether this Muthappana deity can be identified with Muthappan or whether this deity is different from the locally known Muthappan deity.

According to Dr. Y.V Kannan, in a similar pattern of multiplicity of identities, Paadikuttiamma is also identified with Moolampettamathavu. Some identify her with Mother Nature. Paadikuttiamma becomes symbolic of a universal mother like figure, with multiplicity of identities or characters which are identified with Paadikkutty like Thiruvar Kattu Bhagavathi, Kalariyal Bhagavathi, Someshwari, Chuzhali Bhagavathi and so on.

PART 2

Decolonising the Colonised eye: Muthappan and perspectivism

In the previous chapter, I have talked about how there should be a decolonisation of gaze to break away from the entrapment within the cycle of re-colonising theyyam when one looks at theyyam through the postcolonial or subaltern gaze. For this, I will be looking at Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's and approach to anthropology. His work Cannibal Metaphysics is both a philosophical as well as an anthropological project where "*a new anthropology of the concept capable of counter-effectuating a new concept of anthropology*" (Castro 2009:42-43). Here, he tries to posit a new approach which completely transforms the way one looks at the anthropology through bringing a new approach to anthropological practice. This approach aspires to decolonise thought through a post- structuralist way of looking at anthropology, as well as explore the hidden, unexplored territories of anthropology.

This reformulation of Anthropology is achieved through reconfiguring the complex ideas and practices that are already existant in Anthropology. De Castro takes Amerindian perspectivism to posit such an idea. He looks at both perspectivism and multinaturalism. A new kind of metaphysics is created in which perspectivism and multinaturalism will be the main characteristics. Even though de Castro is taking animism, an anthropological tool for this project, he is taking a different angle to animism or rather, reanimating animism making it both materialistic and speculative. This reanimated form of animism he calls as perspectivism. Perspectivism is like observing ourselves from the other's perspective in order to understand us better. With this we can understand why he wanted to name his work as anti-narcissus before. And

hence, in this chapter as a researcher I accept that I have a colonised gaze to everything as much anthropological and sociological methodology has or as much as any other discourse on theyyam has. But to break such a gaze, I would like to look at myself from Muthappan's point of view. Observing myself from Muthappan's point of view will give me an entirely different perspective of myself and hence Muthappan becoming the instrument through which i can break away from my narcissism.

Perspectivism provides multiplicities, multiple points of view. While the different points of view are explored, disjunctive in process of its creation, it is a process of becoming which doesn't fully actualise. This project of making anthropology anti-narcissistic also suggests the use of multinaturalism, deriving it from Amerindian thought, it is posited against the multiculturalism which anthropology usually banks upon as one of its tools. Multinaturalism is derived from the inversion of multiculturalism that is seen in Amerindian thought. And hence, while multiculturalism looks at nature as universal and cultural as diverse, in multinaturalism, culture is considered subject and nature is considered as the object. This means, that in multinaturalism, soul is considered as universal and body is considered as multiple. Taking perspectivism and multinauralism together, we can say that the point of difference is the body. In perspectivism, the point of difference is the body. This means, according to Amerindian thought, everything has the same soul and hence everybody is human. That is everything and everybody who has a soul is a human. Amerindian shamanism allows communication and understanding between species by crossing the barriers.

Here, I will be taking Muthappan into the logic of the forest, that is, multinaturalism and taking parts of certain myths completely into this Amerindian logic. In the logic of

the forest, every being is considered as human. There is the logic of shamanic consumption of the other to see through the eyes of the other, that is, to understand the gaze of the other. If we looks at the Myths of Muthappan, taking the myth of Muthappan and Chandan(as described in one of the earlier chapters) for example, the point of contact between Muthappan and Chandan is when he Chandan shot an arrow at Muthappan and Chandan got transformed into a stone statue. If we look at the deixis of Muthappan here, how does Muthappan identity as himself? What is the 'I' for Muthappan? And how does he look at Chandan or Chandan's wife who comes wailing to Muthappan to transform Chandan back to his old live self?

From the various myths we have understood that Muthappan always had a way of going back into primitivism, going back into that kind of life style, wandering in the forest and depending on hunting for food. When we look at the myth of Chandan from this point of view, we can see the logic of the hunter getting hunted. In animism, the aspect or characteristic of humanity is attributed to every being. But the prey-predator logic exists within this the logic of animism. And so, when a predator consume the prey, it is kind of considered as cannibalism since one being with human characteristics is consuming another being with human characteristics. (footnote: refer to cannibal metaphysics) . Hence, in the context of the myth of Chandan, Muthappan feels threatened from the actions of Chandan. In the predator-prey logic, you either kill or get killed. Hence, when something or something is attacking someone , especially in the primitive, forest logic, either you attack and kill the being that is attacking you, or you get attacked and killed and consumed by that being. In the myth, Muthappan doesn't realise of private property. In the forest logic, the forest inhabits many beings and nothing is permanent for these beings. Their home, their shelter, the things that they own, another clan can easily come and forcefully take these things away from you.

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Within the forest community, it is very horizontal or more rhyzomatic social structure where it is more of a clan based society. The logic here is different from that of the caste-based society which is more vertical or a tree like structure.

Coming back to the myth of Chandan, taking the deixis of Muthappan, for Muthappan, looking back at himself, Muthappan, he is a person who left his home to lead a more primitive kind of life. For him, drinking the toddy from the tree is something that he has the right to do. More than a right, we can say that at that moment, for Muthappan, Chandan was somebody who was trying to stop Muthappan from what he normally does. And Chandan, according to Muthappan is from another clan or is somebody he doesn't know or understand. At that moment, Chandan is equal to Muthappan. There is no power relation to be considered here. But, such analysis can be done especially using this methodology on the basis that, according to this myth, taking myths which fit into the primitive or forest logic.

With this logic, if we look at the other myths of Muthappan, we can say that Muthappan has always considered the others as equal to him. While in a conversation with Mr. Madhavan from the Kunnummal family who is in charge of the workings, rituals as well as administration of the Parassini Madappura, he said that Muthappan is considered as a king. Even in the madappura, the devotees of Muthappan are considered as his guests. But, if we look at Muthappan in the above described context, if anything he would be considered as a leader or he might be considered as leader of a clan, but not as a higher authority. And so, even according to the myths, he used to interact and spend time with the people from different tribes as well as lower castes.

Another interesting analysis that I thought might be apt here is looking at the performer of Muthappan as the interlocutor. Since, even in the performance, I would like to look

at Muthappan and the performer as a single entity. Here, we can say that Muthappan as well as the other theyyams act as interlocutors to looks at the people, to read the people, to understand the people, to understand the issues and the solutions as in , Muthappan becomes and instrument for perspectivism. Especially the part of the ritual where Muthappan interacts with people, this falls under the logic of perspectivism. When Muthappan talks about the issues that the devotees are facing, and that there will be solution, or when Muthappan comments on the bad habits of a devotee and scolds him/her for that, all these instances fall under the logic of perspectivism where these conversations with Muthappan, or these small interactions help the devotees in understanding themselves better. He performs as an interlocutor where Muthappan has always been considered as the people's person, where all the people who were discriminated against (lower caste people, pregnant women etc) in the dominant belief system of that region, were considered equally by Muthappan. In one of the few books written on Muthappan, I have read about Muthappan thottam or a ritual in which Muthappan says that- even when you are giving birth without any support from anyone, even in that moment you can call Muthappan and Muthappan will give you the strength to go through the pain, Muthappan will be there with you even if there is nobody else with you.

There is much more interesting analysis to read into Muthappan aswell as theyyam in general using this methodology, opening up unexplored territories. This work becomes just an introduction to the bigger project that requires much more time and effort.

CONCLUSION

I will conclude my dissertation by linking this project with the larger context of caste and identity politics in India. I will also briefly discuss the possibilities of using the deictical approach for the deconstruction of the colonial and post colonial discourses and whether deixis, perspectivism and animism can be used as tools for deconstruction of the dominant western thought or idea that has been appropriate to accommodate the context of India. I feel there is a need to break the colonial gaze that is transmitted to everything that we see through anthropological research especially. There is a need to debrahmanise the way we look at thyyam as well as ourselves. Animism, perspectivism and such gives a different turn to look at anthropology. But these are applicable mostly in the cosmology of the forest. The structure of the cosmology is more horizontal we can say rhyzomatic in structure as compared to the vertical structure of the caste society. Hence we can say that this kind of approach might not work at the level of social hierarchy and caste based society. But the need to debrahmanise our thought is becoming more and more necessary. Hence, I would say that we need to explore different other hidden territories of anthropology to find other possibilities of methods or approaches to decolonise our mind.

Here, I this project, I have given the process of debrahmanising and decolonising much more importance than the end in itself. This project is more to do with 'becoming', like in perspectivist , multinaturalist understanding, than the end. Though I would say I could not completely decolonise my gaze or give a complete methodology to decolonise the ethnographer's or reseacher's gaze, the process has begun and it is in the 'becoming' phase. The drawback of this project is that I couldn't yet figure out completely a methodology to suggest the decolonising of gaze when taking the context

of caste-based society. Though I have an idea about which I would direction I would take to analyse the caste-based society, (I would probably look at the debt logic, service, liturgy and explore a bit of Ambedkar's philosophy which is placed neither here nor there when it comes to research), this would bea long term project which is both personal as well as political.

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Notes:

1.   Pramod – Muthappan Theyyam Performer, telephone conversation with author,May 21,2019.

2.   Sunil Kumar, interview by author,Parassini Madappura, May 26,2019.

3.   Madhavan Parasini Madappura, interview by author, Parassini Madappur, May 26,2019.

ANNEXURE

Cheriya Muthappan and Komaram at Kunnathurpady festival

Thiruvappana performance at Kunnathurpady

thiruvappana and vellattam at kattiloodada madappura

Karanavar(ancestor of the family) theyyam helping another theyyam

Thiruvappana and vellattam at a small family shrine

People from the Komaram's family sitting and watching the ritual

Roopams kept for Muthappan's blessings

Vellattam interacting with people

Kunnathurpady madappura near the Performance space

Painting of Thiruvappana and Vellattam at Kattiladooda Madappura