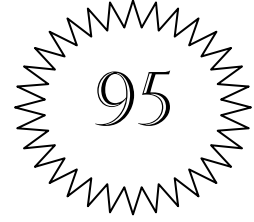


## LITERATURE OF THEYYAM - THE RITUAL ART FORM OF NORTH MALABAR

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### Abstract

Theyyam; the word itself is a derivative from Daivam, the most extravagantly colorful ritual dance form of Kerala. It is performed in Northern Kerala in the northern part of Kozhikode, Kannur and Kasargod district. Theyyam is perhaps the most ancient and authentic ritual art, distinguished by its beautiful literature of Thottam Pattu, with heavy, highly colorful make-up and huge headdresses. Theyyam is rich in ritual, dance, song and costume. Theyyam originated from Kerala's ancient past and is widely performed today in front of village shrines. These temple shrines celebrate annual festivals during which the Theyyam Koladhari himself represents the temple deity. The ritualistic songs appropriate for Theyyam are known as "Thottam Pattukal" which describes the origin of the deities, their beauty, grandeur, their journey, power and boldness. A distinguishing component of Theyyam performance is that of its beautiful literature and Thottam. Thottam literature helps us to understand a lot about the social, culture and linguistic characteristics of North Malabar.

**Key Words:** Theyyam, Thottam Pattu, Varavili, Kolam, Koladhari.

### Theyyam Literature:

Theyyam art consists of four types of acting; Aangikam, Vachikam, Aahaaryam and Sathwikam. Vachikam consists of prose mixed with poems like Thottam, Vachal, Munpu Sthanam, Varavili etc, can be considered as Theyyam literature. They are further treated as Ballads - country songs, which exist only through oral tradition as their authors are unknown. But apart from other country songs, these are exclusively owned by Theyyam artists of a particular caste. The Theyyam artists pass the rare literatures from generation to generation.

The originality of the Theyyam literature is kept up through generations. They think that any change in these would destroy their clan, so a deliberate change doesn't happen. Comparing the recent and fifty years old literature we can easily see minor changes in the Vachal and Thottam songs. It may be as a result of the education of the new Theyyakkoladhari generation or the Kavu authorities. We too accept and approve the changes with the passage of time. But the words, vocabulary associated with Theyyam worship remain the same.

We can see some archaic usages in the Thottam of Theyyam, which were used in the old Sangham literature, Kannassa Ramayan and Ramacharitham. Likewise the characteristic language of Leela Thilakam can be seen in them along with a lot of Sanskrit words of hymns and description in the local language. Therefore the time of the origin of Thottam Pattu can't be easily identified. Even many words used in Unni Chiruthuvi Charitham – a classical Manipravala work of the thirteenth century, can be seen in them. Some example are – Pulam (land), Kuzhattuka (imitate), Nirambuka (to be equal), Pang (prosperity), Thuyir (sorrow), Maruthala (wet) etc. Some other words are used in North Kerala during 14<sup>th</sup> century Ramacharitham like Thekana, Ithaviya, Pukunthu, Aaravan, Athikottuka, Meethal, Ekir, Chuzhala, Thirand, Panni, Nannuka. Briefly we can find many words and grammatical specialties of the Kannassans in Theyyam literature which originated from 13<sup>th</sup> century.

A comparison of evolution of literature through centuries can be seen between Thottam songs of Vettakkorumakan and Vishnu Moorthi. Even before the advent of hymns there might have been Theyyam dances. It may be because of the necessity that arose that the songs in the particular rhythm and tune were written subsequently. It is further believed that the author of Thottam song of Vairajathan and Madayil Chamundi Theyyams was Anidil Ezhuthachan of Payyanur who lived between 1774 AD and 1824 AD. Thottam Pattu of Pottan Theyyam is with pure Malayalam words, it was written by Koormal Ezhuthachan and some additional lines written by Kayyoor Tondachan, a great Theyyakkoladhari. Manakkadan Gurukkal created Thottam and Theyyam form for Muchilottu Bhagavathi.

Each Theyyam has its own particular Varavili. This is prose uttered in the particular rhythm. The last line of invocation reveals the type of Theyyam performed. Some Theyyams like Kathivannur Veeran, Perumbuzhayachan have particular custom where the pedestal singing is separate Varavili by the persons of the same castes.

Anchadi of the Thottam indicates the rhythm. The history of the Theyyam is sung rhythmically with beating the drum. Sthuthikhandam in Thottam song is a hymn to Gods who are responsible for the prosperity on earth, blessing it with their power and prowess. Polichu Pattu is the collection of stanzas praising the magnanimity and greatness of the goddess. This part enables to invoke the life force and vigor fully in to the Theyyakkoladhari. Aniyarakkavil or Aniyara Thottam is another hymn sung at the time of wearing costumes and ornaments by the Theyyam in the green room. This is sung with the rhythmic accompaniment of drum beats.

In the slow cadence when the Thottam is sung under the rhythm of a single drum, the performer will begin to tremble in frenzy as if by a delegation or instruction. Simultaneously more helpers with the accompaniment of drums begin to sing Thottam at a faster and tighter rhythm. This faster song is called Urachilthottam.

Thottam at this stage will begin to tremble speedily. By this time the pedestal in front and the drum might have been removed for this Urachil. The Thottams of Vishnumoorthi and Puthiya Bhagavathi will make these frenzied jumps with the sound 'Heeye', while the oracles join with them with the same mood. The long section of Thottam song details the story of reincarnation and the heroic deeds of Gods and Goddesses. Munpusthanam is the rhythmic prose poem uttered by Theyyam towards the last of Theyyattam. The advent of the God and Goddess to the Earth, the special deeds executed, the places of Kavuvu of abode, the devotees who welcomed them with piety etc are the topic mentioned in Munpusthanam.

When Theyyam performs this activity pacing up and down in front of the Kavuvu there won't be any uproar or the sound of musical instruments. All the title-holders of the Kavuvu will listen to it with great devotion.

The Theyyams like Vettakkorumakan, Muchilottu Bhagavathi, Oorppazhassi and Vairajathan used to say Swaroopacharam which is the history of the kings or lords who ruled the locality. This is called by other names like Keezhaachaaram, Tharakkalikkoottam or Madakkola. SwaroopaCharithram is uttered by the Theyyam in a special tune for more than an hour.

Theyyam literature is a collection of local language literary culture which has been retained through centuries by Theyyam, Theyyakkavu and society. When the country society and cultural life have been changing with the passage of time, language too gave in to such a trend. But Theyyam language and rituals have not been transformed hitherto because of the fear of sin. A lion's share of this vocabulary is strange to the new generation.

In the Thottam and Vachal of Theyyam we can see the abundance of the figures of speech like simile and metaphor. Some shades of the Dravidian meters like Keka and Kakali also can be seen in some songs. All these songs are written according to the rhythm of drum beating. The lack of artificiality and the use of pure Malayalam (which can be understood even by the villagers) are the trademarks of Thottampattu.

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**GLOSSARY:**

1. Koladhari or Kolakkaran- The person who perform the ritual Theyyam.
2. Thottam- A ritualistic, invocatory, chanting of the narrative, as a special theme song that recounts the story of a particular Theyyam, which is sung on the day before the performance, with the accompaniment of drum beats, invoking the presence of God in the performer. It narrates the history of myth behind the Theyyam.
3. Varavili- Narration about a particular Theyyam which is prose uttered in a particular rhythms.
4. Urachil-The faster rhythmical stage of a Thottam.
5. Manipravalam- It is a macaronic language found in Kerala. It is a combination of Sanskrit and Malayalam.