

Gender, Space and Performance: A Study of the Visual

Narratives of

Kodungallur Bharani Festival

*Thesis submitted to University of Calicut
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by

NIMISHA K. JAYAN

(U. O No: 9795/2015/Admn)

Under the supervision of

DR. C. S BIJU

Associate Professor of English


Centre for Research and Postgraduate Studies in English

St. Thomas' College (Autonomous)

Thrissur

Affiliated to University of Calicut

July 2020


Dr. Martin K. A.
Assistant Professor
In-charge of Principal
St. Thomas College (Autonomous)
Thrissur - 680 001



Dr. C. S Biju

Associate Professor of English

Centre for Research and Postgraduate Studies in English

St. Thomas' College (Autonomous), Thrissur, Kerala

Certificate

This is to certify that the thesis entitled *Gender, Space and Performance: A Study of the Visual Narratives of Kodungallur Bharani Festival* submitted by Nimisha K. Jayan to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English is a record of the bonafide research carried out by Ms. Nimisha K. Jayan under my supervision and guidance and that no part of the thesis has been submitted for the award of any degree, diploma, or any other similar title before.

Place: Thrissur

Date: 27-07-2020



Dr. C. S Biju

(Supervising Teacher)

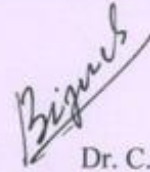
C.S BIJU Ph.D
Associate Professor
Dept. of English
St. Thomas College Thrissur

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This is to certify that the adjudicators of the Ph.D. thesis of Nimisha. K. Jayan, titled "*Gender, Space and Performance: A Study of the Visual Narratives of KodungallurBharani Festival*" have not given any direction for change or corrections in their reports except one of the Examiners have specified that the pictorial figures in the Library copy of the thesis should be in colour. Therefore, submitting herewith the hard copy of the thesis with suggested changes herewith. The content of the CD is the same as in the hard copy.

Thrissur

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Dr. C. S Biju

Supervising Teacher

C S BIJU PH.D
Associate Professor
Dept. of English
St. Thomas College Thrissur

Declaration

I, Nimisha K. Jayan do hereby declare that the thesis entitled *Gender, Space and Performance: A Study of the Visual Narratives of Kodungallur Bharani Festival* submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English is a record of the bonafide research carried out by me under the guidance of Dr. C. S Biju and that no part of the thesis has been submitted for the award of any degree, diploma or any other similar title before.

Place: Thrissur

Date: 27-07-2020



Nimisha K. Jayan

Research Scholar

Department of English

St. Thomas' College, Thrissur

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Nimisha K. Jayan

Dedication

To my father

A Note on Documentation

I, hereby, would like to acknowledge that the documentation in the thesis is prepared in accordance with the style format suggested by the *MLA Handbook* (8th Edition).

Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter One	
Kodungallur Bharani: History, Rituals and Narratives	15
Chapter Two	
Performance and Conflict	93
Chapter Three	
Bodies in Performance: Gender and Power	145
Chapter Four	
Visuality and Space: The Politics of Seeing and Being	195
Chapter Five	
Language, Abuse and Ribald Bharani Songs	237
Conclusion	281
Works Cited	295
Appendix	317

Introduction

The Kodungallur Sreekurumbha Bhagavathi temple in Central Kerala is illustrious for its singular annual festival called Kodungallur Bharani Festival observed at the asterism of *Meenam-bharani* (in the month of March-April) drawing international enthusiasts and intelligentsia alike. For several decades, on this day, the temple inherited by the erstwhile royal family of Kodungallur is thrown open to the subaltern sects for a unique ritual called *Kaavutheendal* ‘polluting’ the coveted sanctity of the temple and the residing Goddess Bhadrakali herself through every imaginable mode. This abrasiveness is further augmented by drunken dancing to the tunes of traditional percussion instruments, recital of *theripattu* (“ribald song”) using ‘vulgar’ or ‘acrid’ gestures directed towards the Goddess, spilling of blood by smiting the crown using ritual swords and the legally banned animal sacrifice.

This unequaled fest is famed for its ‘aberrant’ behaviors, animated features, and theatricality essentially proclaiming a definitive slot in the cultural make-up of Kerala. In this performance, temple premises along with the performers undergo a massive transmutation and the whole area is infused with vibes that emanate from the freewheeling ebullient oracles in vermilion costumes, thick streams of blood on their foreheads, the heavy jingling of ceremonial swords, *aramani* (“waist let”) and *chilanka* (“anklet”) and the sprayings of turmeric powder. Ransacking the past reveals that though held mainly as a religious ritual, Bharani has a foundational socio-political link with the history of Kodungallur and has extended into the current terrains through several aggregations and realignments. Bharani is generally reckoned as a loud and violent

celebration of a particular segment of subalterns and by articulating the repressed desires and cravings, the performers attain a state of higher ecstasy and transgress the human boundaries thereby progressing towards a catharsis.

The caste system in Kerala differs from that found in the rest of India. While the Indian caste system generally modeled the four-fold division of society into Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, and Sudras, in Kerala, the Nambudiri Brahmins acceded as the priestly class and stigmatized Sudras and untouchables arraying them outside the caste system entirely. Ajay Sekar in his article “A Broken Padmasana: The Fissured Buddha of Pattanam” etches out this dark period in Kerala history when grave and material violence was used to convert and modify the ethical and egalitarian spiritual practices and instructive places in Kerala during the early middle ages by Brahmanic Hinduism and its strategic appropriating tropes like Saivism and Vaishnavism. The Brahmanic henchmen belonging mostly to the Maravar and Kallar clans demolished and buried all the traces of Buddhism and its non-violent culture in Kerala with true Sudra allegiance and slave-like fidelity to their caste- sovereigns, the earthly gods or *Bhudeva* (Alexander 15). The lower castes or Avarnas were treated as sub-humans and they were exploited, abused, and abjected in ways that transcend our imagination.

Glancing across history, we can see the barbarity of certain sects which claiming themselves to be the refined and pure class, helmed primitive and pagan rituals and practices, robbing the lower castes of their essential dignity and self-respect. Women, including the upper castes women were the muted, acquiescent group and being ‘doubly-marginalized’ were reduced to the status of mere pleasure objects. The elitist groups ceremoniously practiced and followed elaborate rituals to proclaim their superiority over other classes and

the patterns of chagrin subjugation were apparently more psychological than physical. These rituals unflinchingly served to condition the mental make-up of the lower castes and ensured that they resignedly accept their inferiority as an unalterable truth of nature. Egregious practices such as untouchability, approachability (maintaining specific distance from Savarna), and irrational tax systems such as *thalavari* (“head-load tax”) and, *mulakkaram* (“breast tax”), restriction on covering of breasts, *sambandham*, etc. reveal a dodgy pattern. Language played an accommodating role in these rituals of discrimination as power is encoded in its symbolic significations. The language was used to establish gender identities in addition to demarcating the upper castes from the lower castes. In articulating this language, the ‘other’ had no other choice than steeping into circumlocution or self-derogation. Any undertaking aimed at transgressing that rooted boundary was severely culpable. Thus, even the language of the stigmatized acquired the frame of the language of servitude and the linguistic signs and codes became the carriers of the germs of ‘shame.’ They seem to have resisted these humiliations through their recondite and abstruse rites and rituals. But the history of mankind has shown that one cannot live in shame forever. Abuse one for long, they will retaliate, for shame demands to be expressed. As noted earlier, in Bharani Festival we see the synergy of various caste groups from high to low which is questionable in the context of Kerala society. Low caste people were considered as untouchables and touching them or rather coming into any kind of physical contingency with them was weighed as an act of pollution. This forces us to ask the question: Whose goddess is Kali? Whether she is a tribal deity or subaltern goddess or a deity included in the long pantheon of Hindu-Brahminical worship is dealt with in detail in this dissertation.

Social reality is constructed by performances-actions, behaviors, and events. Much like a performance, in Bharani, we see a metamorphosis of the inner being of the performer. He is actuated to a higher state of intensity and there follows an intercommunication of performers and a smoldering communion with the divine. And it consists of a whole sequence of behaviors prior to and after the main event on display. This dissertation titled *Gender, Space and Performance: A Study of the Visual Narratives of Kodungallur Bharani Festival* reviews the 'performative' components that transform Bharani to a performance as well as aims to analyze the dramaturgy of *Kaavutheendal*. As Richard Schechner notes, "Performances exist only as actions, interactions, and relationships" (*Performance Studies* 30). Bharani is paradigmatic of a composite series of complex behaviors that took shape in a particular moment of history and were gradually imbibed and acculturized into the social milieu. Conflating at a common notch, that is, Kodungallur, its diffused roots have penetrated deep and far into the fecund soils of Kerala. Exploring such relationships will be one of the main concerns of this study. This study also intends to throw some light upon the exchanges and connections that Bharani has forged over years and inquire how such a tradition took birth.

Bodies do not themselves possess or lack meaning. The meaning is imparted by gendered and racial performances in particular socio-cultural contexts. Largely, people from lower caste groups such as Pulaya, Thiyya/Ezhava, Vannan, Kanakkan, and Mannan partake in this fest and it is in the scope of the study to learn how the attitude and sentiment towards Bharani vary in consonance with differences in performer's caste and place. Each group renders their exclusive tradition but on the day of Bharani, every devotee merges with the encompassing totality of *Kaavutheendal*. Over time, substantial

revisions have ensued in the temperament of the performers as well. With the incursion of modernization and education into these groups and eventual boom in their standard of living, it is a question to ponder whether Bharani has now been essentially commodified.

This dissertation *Gender, Space and Performance: A Study of the Visual Narratives of Kodungallur Bharani Festival*, thus, is an attempt to understand and analyze how Bharani functions in the socio-political context of Kodungallur. The study looks into the factors that helped to construct such a tradition, the mechanics of the Bharani, and the variations that have crept in overtime. Grounded in the context of performance studies, ritual studies, gender studies, visual culture, linguistics, and spatial studies, this study focuses on rituals of Bharani as a form of celebration as well as resistance within the cultural fabric of Kerala. No aspect of human expression-religious, artistic, political, physical, and sexual is fixed and anchored. Instead, they constitute an accumulative continuum that is shaped and reshaped in particular social and historical junctures. Thus every human activity appears to be a series of performances, behaviors which are “learned, rehearsed and presented over time” (Schechner, *Performance Theory* 15). This study approaches the repertory of several rites of passages involved in the transformative ritual performances of Bharani.

Concepts in relation to performance studies such as, ‘social drama,’ ‘efficacy and entertainment,’ ‘liminality and communitas,’ ‘body,’ ‘visuality,’ ‘space,’ ‘abuse and language’ are incorporated to give a theoretical framework for this study. Critical approaches by theorists such as Richard Schechner’s performer-centered notions of ‘trance and ecstasy,’ Victor Turner’s anthropological concepts of ‘social drama, liminality and communitas,’ J. L Austin’s ‘performative utterances,’ Arnold Van

Genep's celebrated notion of 'rites of passage,' Judith Butler's ideas on 'body, gender and gender performativity,' Michel Foucault's 'power and hegemony,' Gayathri Spivak's views on 'subaltern,' Catherine Bell's in-depth analysis of 'ritual,' Mircea Eliade's ideas on 'sacred and profane,' Max Gluckman's influential category of 'rites of rebellion,' feminist writers Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray and Linda Alcoff's perceptions on sexuality, Edward Soja and Henry Lefebvre's concept of space as a 'social product,' Philip Auslander's 'liveness,' Nicholas Mirzoeff, Paul Virilio and Martin Jay's concepts on 'visuality and visual culture,' Michel de Certeau's 'city and space,' Timothy Jay and, Steven Pinker's studies on cursing behavior etc. are made use of in this study.

A functional and performance approach is adopted to analyze the rituals apart from the historical approach. A systematic approach combining functional, performative, and historical approaches along with intensive ethnography and methodologies are deployed. The study is conducted placing the performance and performers at the center, and hence due importance is attached to the real experience of the performers than the textual information. To gain this knowledge, data is collected from the performers, the spectators, historians, scholars, and natives from all strata. Basically, three methods are employed in the study; a participant observation is primarily employed, both in Kodungallur and the native place of oracles to have a comprehensive view of the festival. The festival was viewed from two angles; initially as an outsider and then as an insider that necessitated intensive fieldwork in their performative realms. Further, ethnographic methods as interviews and personal discussions, over the phone and in-person were carried out to have a conceptual understanding of the rich and complicated ritual web of Bharani. The whole festival along with the rituals of oracles was recorded over three

years for a deeper analysis. For the sake of analysis, the performative space of Bharani has been divided primarily into two realms: Kodungallur and its premises and secondly, the native space of participants. A historical approach usually gave stress to the space of Kodungallur and understood other performances as secondary or proceeding from this ‘primary’ space. This position is inverted in this study, which considers the native space of the oracles as the commencing point, which is also intricately connected to their lives and belief systems. The myths, legends, tales, Bharani songs, personal narratives, rituals, and performances served as primary sources as they unconsciously unfolded their worldview and culture. Manuscripts, journals, gazetteers, district manuals, census reports, scholarly articles, and books served as the secondary sources. Admittedly, there was a shortage in secondary sources, owing to the dearth of authentic studies in this field, however, the studies of V. R Chandran, M. J Gentes, and Adarsh C. served as useful parameters.

The dissertation *Gender, Space and Performance: A Study of the Visual Narratives of Kodungallur Bharani Festival* is divided into six chapters apart from Introduction and Conclusion. The first chapter is titled ‘Kodungallur Bharani: History, Rituals and Narratives.’ In this chapter, a detailed description of the Kodungallur Bharani Festival is given, elaborating on the rituals of the festival. A historical approach is mandatory, as the festival has a very long tradition and past. To appreciate the significance of the festival, it’s rich and conflicting history must be undermined. The history of the temple, along with the history of Kodungallur, is traced down to provide a complete perception of the festival. Different narratives are at play in the festival, each participant offers their version of the story, adding to its polyphonous nature. An analysis

of these popular narratives is made, but any attempt to find the truth behind these tales can be exhaustible as they form the material of myths and legends. A study of the performance of oracles is undertaken, tracing their history, evolution, methods, practices, and lives. Two major archetypal cults fuel the festival, namely, the Kannaki/Pathini Cult and the Kali Cult, and they are studied in detail.

The second chapter is titled 'Performance and Conflict.' This chapter establishes the major theories that form the backdrop of the study. An attempt is made to trace the evolution of performance studies as a major discipline, and its various definitions and concepts, its ongoing relationship with ritual studies. In this chapter, an attempt is made to differentiate the three aspects of performance. Ritual and performance have a significant bearing on society. The chapter traces the interconnectedness of these two elements. In discussing the performance, I have drawn inspiration from the notions of Richard Schechner, who is a major theoretician who has contributed much to the field of performance studies. Along with it, the concepts put forward by Victor Turner, another notable anthropologist, as 'social drama,' 'liminality' and 'communitas' and 'rituals of rebellion' by Max Gluckman are detailed to establish the relationship of ritual to society and the role it plays in forging the identity of a community. Bharani is perceived in the backdrop of these notions of performance; besides, the element of 'conflict' in the festival is identified.

The third chapter of the dissertation is titled 'Bodies in Performance: Gender and Power.' The chapter details the congruity of gender studies in today's world, along with its evolution and propositions. The body is a key element in gender studies and performative bodily practices of Bharani participants are one of the focuses of this study.

One's gender is not a status or a fixed entity. How the body carries gender and devises identities, how it gets transformed under the imperious power structures is touched upon. A separate section is devoted to the study of Butler's idea of body and gender performativity. Her notion of gender as a fluid variable is immensely significant to the approaches of gender in the Bharani Festival. Her notions are used to analyze the bodies in performance in Bharani, and how they handle their gendered identities. The idea of pollution and taboo plays a leading role in contriving certain rights and privileges of the society, which works mostly in favor of a patriarchal norm. These restrictions that play a decisive role in shaping the general stigma towards sexuality and menstruation are the central concerns of this chapter.

The fourth chapter is titled 'Visuality and Space: The Politics of Seeing and Being.' In this chapter, how visuality affects our perception of the world, its credibility and validity is studied. Vision more than any other sense has been subjected to various technological innovations and manipulations. Visual elements are not the only ingredients important in a spectacle; other senses are duly important as we know that the sense of smell and sound is very powerful in evoking memories and experiences. The chapter is an attempt to develop a comprehensive analysis of how the body with all its dimensions constructs and occupies space. It explores the web of space, performance, the city, ritual, and the body, understanding how the premises of the temple create a lived space for its performers during Bharani. In contemporary discourse, there has been a considerable shift in the view of space; visual perception is stressed as fragmentary and unreal. To have a holistic view, it is necessary to bring the whole body into focus, what Lefebvre calls as 'rhythmanalysis' bringing the whole body into focus. Vision indeed is a

complex phenomenon. It cannot be hailed as true, authentic, and real as once it had been. In this chapter, how the experience of seeing a real, and a mediated performance is analyzed. In the section on spatiality, a detailed study is conducted on the performativities in the city, premises of the temple, bodies of performers, *avakashathara* (“Rightful platform of pilgrims in Kodungallur Temple premises”), and the pilgrimage paths or routes during Kodungallur Bharani Festival in the light of concepts of Henry Lefebvre, Edward Soja, and others. A pilgrim’s actual experience of space is markedly different from the geographical dimensions, and an attempt is made to trace the cartography of this human geography.

Chapter five is titled ‘Language, Abuse and Ribald Bharani Songs.’ The science of language is witnessing spectacular changes; new phenomena are being added to it every day. Humans are constructed in language, and simultaneously construct the world around them. Jacques Lacan considers language to be pre-existent, developing his theory from language. Further, Butler’s gender performativity views language as crucial in linking it to the higher levels of pain, trauma, and censorship. Abuse is yet again a prevalent trait of human language but one which has been ignored by serious academic disciplines of language. In the chapter, the study of abuse is made in the backdrop of various theories of curse and taboos by Timothy Jay and Steven Pinker analyzing the origins and effects of cursing behavior in human beings. Steven Pinker views language as an ‘instinct’ inverting the popular belief of language as a cultural invention. Language is a human model of reality reflecting space, sex, gender, and a multitude of emotions. Thereby any study of language can give an insight into human nature and temperaments. This view takes into account the curses, licentious jokes, and casual talks into serious

study and places them as a natural component of language. In another section of the chapter, an analysis of Bharani songs is carried out, and for the reader to have a better idea of the songs, some popular Bharani songs are translated into English and appended.

Concerning the songs sung in Kodungallur Bharani, varied terms have been used by scholars in the past to designate it. V. T Induchudan uses the term “obscene sexual songs” (128) whereas M. J Gentes makes use of the labels “explicit sexual songs” (296) and “obscene songs” (305); further, the act of singing the songs are tagged as “ridiculing,” “scandalizing,” and “insulting,” etc. Sarah Cardwell also refers to the songs as “obscene songs” (*Oh* 166) in her reading of Bharani. Also, Venu Menon in his documentation of Bharani of 1991, preferred the term “profane songs,” “scurrilous songs,” and “obscene songs” while cataloging the whole festival as “ribald rites” (32). A recent study by Swetha Radhakrishnan on the songs of Bharani translates *theripattu* to “songs of expletives” (203). She also uses the terms “filthy” (203), “obscene” (204), “vulgar” (206), and “abuses” (208) to indicate it. As evident, all the terms stress the sexual and invective nature of the Bharani songs; the songs generally mock the dominant groups and the authorities accuse the performers to be abusing the sexuality of the Goddess through these songs. For the upper castes, it is a verbal abuse, concurrently being a ‘ritual of worship’ for its ardent performers. According to *Wiktionary*, the term abuse has its roots in “Middle English *abusen*, then from either Old French *abus* (“improper use”), or from Latin *abūsus* (“misused, using up”), perfect active participle of *abūtor* (“make improper use of, consume, abuse”), from *ab* (“away”) + *ūtor* (“to use”).” It can mean: 1) Improper treatment or usage [from around 1350 to 1470] , 2) Misuse; improper use; perversion [from mid-16th c.], 3) (obsolete) A delusion; an imposture;

misrepresentation; deception [from mid-16th c. – mid 17th c.], 4) Coarse, insulting speech; abusive language; language that unjustly or angrily vilifies [from mid-16th c.], 5) (now rare) Catachresis [from late 16th c.], 6) Physical maltreatment; injury; cruel treatment [from late 16th c.], 7) Violation; defilement; rape; forcing of undesired sexual activity by one person on another, often on a repeated basis [from late 16th c.]. In the dissertation, the abuse being discussed is essentially verbal and placed in the ambit of language; signaling its precarious nature, the term abuse in relation to Bharani songs is placed in inverted commas. Though sexuality is a predominant feature of the songs, they are not inherently sexual; there are songs lamenting the pilgrim's agony, prayers to the Goddess, songs describing their journeys and rituals, etc. Besides, there are groups among pilgrims that do not sing *theripattu* at all.

Cambridge Dictionary defines 'obscene' as "offensive, rude, or shocking, usually because of being too obviously related to sex." Similarly, 'vulgar' is defined as "not suitable, simple, dignified, or beautiful; not in the style preferred by the upper classes of society." In this dissertation, I have used the term 'ribald songs' against the traditional and widely used term of "obscene sexual songs" or "vulgar songs" to denote *theripattu* sung in Bharani. Firstly, obscenity and vulgarity are subjective phenomena, varying according to the ideological positions one takes. Secondly, the songs are not exclusively sexual as in the case of Rabelaisian songs identified by Victor Turner; apart from celebrating the carnal aspects of life, the songs are also vehement denunciation of the oppressive societal norms. *Wiktionary* defines 'ribald' as "coarsely, vulgarly, or lewdly amusing; referring to sexual matters in a rude or irrelevant way." It is a Modern English word having its etymological roots in "Old French *ribaude*, *ribauld* ("rogue,

scoundrel”) (English *ribaudo*), from Old French *riber* (“to be licentious”), from Frankish **rīban* (“to copulate, be in heat,” literally “to rub”)....” Clearly, the terms as ‘ribald’ and ‘bawdy’ while suggesting its sexual nature, acknowledge the playful design of Bharani songs; incorporating its comic as well as contemptuous tendencies. The terms do not approach the songs from the ‘above,’ thereby not trying to ascertain its value by applying the confined parameters of morality and decency.

Much has been studied and written on the rites and rituals of the Bharani festival. It has been analyzed from religious, artistic, political, and social perspectives. This study endeavors to approach Bharani as a ‘social drama’ unconsciously enacted by its performers as they share many elements with the performing arts. It seeks to see the whole setting of the festival from a fresh perspective and thereby ask new questions and seek new answers. It attempts to go deep into the grass-root level and analyze its impacts on the psyche of the performer or ‘other.’ The rituals of Bharani have a profound history and perhaps due to various renaissance dynamics these rituals have lost its sting, abdicated, and retreated but they still exert their influence and have sought for themselves new modes and means of expression. These experiences remain the same throughout the world in essence though its outward manifestations may vary. They constitute a multitude, a shared experience, and produce a kind of swarm intelligence or a common body of knowledge. This research thus aims to give a globalized outlook and connectivity to heretofore unidentified rites and rituals of this unique festival of Kerala.

Chapter One

Kodungallur Bharani: History, Rituals and Narratives

Kodungallur Bharani Festival has evidently become a metaphor of resistance, amply providing a backdrop for the expression of paranoia inherent in the dispossessed sections against a constellation of hegemonic values. This chapter is an attempt to delve into its deep-seated memory banks, the bedrocks of traditions that have initiated its sprouting, and strategically find an answer to the disconcerting questions regarding the essential nature of Kodungallur Meena Bharani Festival.¹ Firstly and foremost, it is hailed as a festival in the tradition of manifold Hindu temple ideologies. Notwithstanding this, it is not a full-fledged revelry that would have diminished its pertinence with time. If it was a mere begetter of a transient gaiety, scores of the populace would not have conducted taxing journeys to pervade a foreign place. Evidently, a festive view is a constrained one, as the event is much more than that demarcation. To continue, Bharani has the semiotic and pragmatic pattern of a ritual. It has a magico-religious element in it that unconditionally bonds the devotees with their mother goddess. Thousands of devotees keep these few days of a year abiding in their memories and close to their hearts as it is their primary means of communion with their mother goddess Bhagavathi or Bhadrakali. Besides these accepted notions, this chapter seeks to juxtapose the performative qualities in the festival, accentuating its carnivalesque features, elements of play, spectacle, and social drama. We see an unmasked subversion of decrees and hegemonic underpinnings in Bharani. Seemingly, these few days, for the steadfast devotees, their mother goddess comes close to them and they can touch her, ‘pollute’ her, ‘abuse’ her, and subsequently

lay their entire anguish and woes in her feet and go back with a luminous heart and an allayed mind to their everyday concerns. Thus, Bharani is layered and byzantine, having varying import and utilities, ever-evolving and re-fashioning itself in accord with time. An understanding of the historical and cultural allegories of the space in which Bharani occurs would be imperative to apprehend the varying factors that have contributed to the genesis of this tradition and the philosophical and systematic transitions it has undergone through ages.

Kodungallur

Kodungallur is a small Taluk in Thrissur district, Kerala sprawling over an area of about 15.68 sq. mi. But though limited in area, it held a flagrant place in the tumultuous history of ancient India. Precisely, it was a bustling archaic commercial port that lost its importance probably due to the cataclysmic floods of 1341 AD. In *The Cochin State Manual* (1911) it is recorded that Kodungallur had distended trade relations with the Jews, the Phoenicians, the Greeks, the Romans and the Arabs even before the Christian era began (A. Menon 382). This is evident in the currency of its manifold names at various intervals of history; it was amply known as Muziris to Greeks and Romans, Muchiri to Tamil poets and later it came to be known as Cranganore. Joseph M. O asserts in *Villarvattom*, “If there is a word that equally excites the whole of Kerala, it is Kodungallur. It is the epitome of Kerala culture and progression. In each historical period it was known as Muziris, Muchiri, Muyirikode, Karoor, Kavoore, Karoura, Makothayapattanam, Vanji, Thiruvanjikulam, etc. respectively” (my trans.; 82). According to the book *Kerala Sthala Charitrangal: Thrissur Jilla*, the current designation, Kodungallur is in popular usage since the fifteenth century. To explicate

further, in AD 1444, Nicholas Condi called it ‘Columguria.’ In 1505, Barbosa mentioned it as ‘Cranganore,’ which is still prevalent. In 1510 AD, Assymany used a corrupted version of Cranganore namely ‘Crongallore’ (Vallath 114). Krishna Pisharody in *Kerala Charithram I* writes that Muziris can be assumed as the Muyirikode mentioned in *Baskara Ravivarmapataya* and located near Azhikode, called Murachi by Kalidasa, and Mariachi by Varahamihira, Karoura by Ptolemy and Karoor in Sanga literature (83). Arguably, this multiplicity of nomenclatures ostensibly points to the momentous shifts and the perennial jockeyings for power the land of Kodungallur has endured, thereby hinting at its historical value.

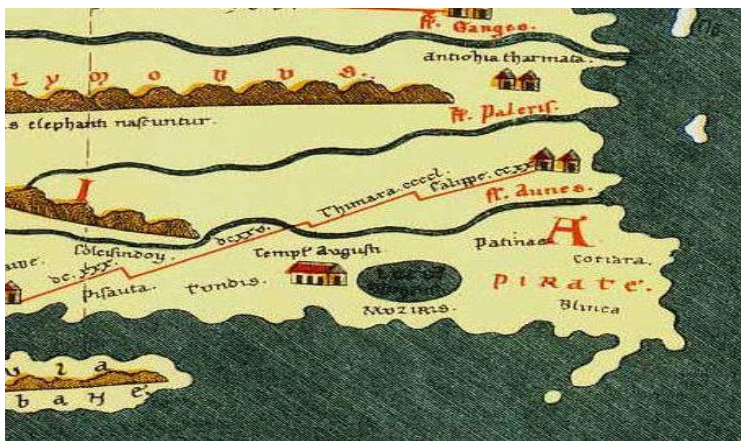


Fig. 1. 1. Peutinger Map. “Muziris.” *Wikipedia*. en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muziris.

Accessed 13 Jan. 2019.

To probe into its buried history, in the *Geographical and Statistical Memoir*, Ward and Conner note that regarding the early history of Kodungallur very little is known. The southern part of India was ruled by three great dynasties; namely the Chera, the Chola, and the Pandya. There is no clear data regarding the origin of the Chera dynasty. They assume that from one of the edicts of King Ashoka, it is evident that Chera

or Kerala existed as an independent kingdom in the middle of the third century BC whereas, from the accounts given by the Roman writers and old Sangam poets, it can be presumed that at the commencement of Christian era Chera dynasty had attained the summit of edification. The Chera Kingdom in its inception ruled over the *Kerala-Desam* (the coast territory between Gokarnam and Cape Comorin) and *Kongu-Desam* (Coimbatore and parts of Mysore and Nilgiris). But by the age of the Christian era, its territory was circumscribed to Malabar, Cochin, and North Travancore regions. Consequently, South Travancore or Venad belonged to the Pandya dynasty. Over time, the Kings of Chera came to be hailed as *Cheraputras* or *Keralaputras* (“the descendants of Chera/Kerala”) and they preoccupied Vanji (believed to be the present-day Tiruvanchikulam in Kodungallur) as their capital (10). Precisely, apart from being a business terrain, this land served as an important religious ground as well, for Christians, Jews, Muslims, and Hindus alike. Described by Pliny the Elder as “the premier emporium of India, (*Primum Emporium Indiae*),” (9) Kodungallur had a glorious past, being the capital of Chera Kings. The regal doyens of Cranganore belonged to an upper caste sect called *Kshatriyas*, predominantly a warrior class. In *Dutch Records* of 1743, it is argued that the claim was conferred to this group as one of their antecedents served as chief to King Perumal. But they were forced to succumb to the regal power of King of Cochin or that of Calicut from time to time. It is recorded that the Dutch company acquired the rights to rule Cranganore through a Treaty of Peace made with Zamorin on December 17, 1717. Nevertheless, the Dutch allowed the Cranganore Kings to continue their vassals (10). A view at Peutinger Map (see fig. 1. 1), an elongated stretch of ancient Roman road map probably dating to second century AD, offers us a perception of Muziris being

marked in capital letters, highlighting its prominence; besides, this spot is given an icon marked *templ' augusti*, widely understood as 'Temple of Augustus.'

This, ostensibly points to the Roman coalitions with Muziris or Kodungallur and the setting up of a temple hints that these connections were deep-seated. Further, in the introductory note on the *Report on the Administration of Cochin for the Year, 1906 to 1907*, it is categorically stated that Cranganore belonged to Cochin State, but was not a taluk, instead indicated as "estate of Cranganore." Other contiguous taluks were Kanayanur-Cochin, Mukundapuram, Trichur, Talapilli, and Chittur. In the note relating a brief history of Cochin State, it is stated that in 1502, Portuguese established themselves in the State and they assisted King of Cochin in its war with Zamorin of Calicut. In 1663 Portuguese was thrown out of power by Dutch groups, meanwhile, King maintained affable relations with the Dutch as well. In 1759, the Dutch powers began to wane and grabbing the opportunity, the Zamorin attacked Cochin. In 1776, the State was conquered by Hyder Ali and later by his son Tippu Sultan to whom she remained tributary and subordinate. In 1791 Cochin allied with the East India Company which helped the King to obtain the State from the hold of Tippu. For security and protection, the State paid a huge subsidy of rupees two lakhs in 1818 to the British government and through British power, the State entered an era of peace and progressive prosperity. This offers a pan view of the haphazard political allegiances ranging from inter-state collusions to European alliances.

Regarding the history of the name Kodungallur, different stories explicating the origin of the word are popular. The *Quarterly Journal of Mythic Society XIV*, October, notes that the term originated from *Kodum Kollur* meaning 'the land of great killings'

probably due to the sacrifice of roosters. But V. V. K Vallath rebuffs this version as he feels mere sacrifice of hens cannot be so gruesome. If the human sacrifice was involved, the name can be justified, he ascertains. Yet, another version is that *Kodum Nalloor*, meaning ‘the land of great goodness’ became Kodungallur. This narrative links the name to Kannaki, a mythological figure who reached the land and blessed it. This version too must be taken as an imaginary story, providing little information. A historical version is also available, provided by S. V Venkateswarayya that finds an ancient seafaring group called *Kolu* inhabiting this place, lending the name *Kodum Koloor*, meaning ‘the land of great Kol’ (115). Additionally, in the *Dutch Records*, it is asserted that the name “Kudungaloor is merely a corruption of *Kodi* (a crore), *Lingam* (the Indian phallus), *oor* (country). In the Kodungaloor, or Cranganore Pagoda, are numerous figures of the *lingam*” (11). Vallath feels that the most accepted version is the one that links the land with the Kurumba Bhagavathi Temple. Discerningly, Tamil word *Karuppa* meaning Masuri evolved into Kurumba. He argues that in Kodungallur Kavu, the first installed deity might be the Dravidian goddess Kurumba. With the onslaught of Shaivism, Bhagavathi entered into the arena. In the list of 108 temples created by Parashurama, Kodungallur Temple is missing. In his time, this temple might have been ignored as a Dravidian Kurumba Kavu (115). *Gazetteer of India*, Trichur of 1962 notes in this regard, “To the Greeks and Romans it was known as Muziris from the ancient temple whose goddess was called Masuri Devata on account of her power to ward off smallpox, a belief held even today” (612). The author thus gauges that the most appropriate version is that Kodungallur emerged from *Kodum Kal Oor* meaning ‘the land of great temple’ signifying the temple installed by the King Cheran Chenguttuvan. In ancient times, *kal*

was a term used to denote Jain temples. This also points to the fact that probably Kodungallur Temple was originally a Jain place of worship.

Also, Ward and Conner make a reference to Kodungallur Bharani in their report; it records that a village in Kodungallur named Lokamaleshwarrum (present-day Lokamaleswaram) was a *Bazar* kept by Konkanies:

...close to it is a *Kao* or temple of Bhagavadi one of the most celebrated shrines of this Goddess, in honor of whom or to deprecate her wrath (for she is the *Pandara* of those parts) myriads of house cocks (this fowl being peculiarly dedicated to her) are sacrificed at this temple. Its festival takes place in March, and its ancient celebrity and distant fame attracts multitudes of devotees during it (32).

This reference points to the relative import of Bharani festival in the medieval times. Also, from a close reading of the history of Kodungallur, it is discernible that its history is inseparably ensnared with the history of Kodungallur Bhagavathi Temple, seemingly deriving its name and force from the temple. Hence, the next section is an attempt to study the major features of Kodungallur Bhagavathi Temple that lend it eminence among other Kali temples of Kerala.

Kodungallur Bhagavathi Temple

Substantial historical evidence validating the current stories of inception, the forms of worship, and the particular political and theological associations of the Kodungallur Sreekurumba Bhagavathi Temple (see fig. 1. 2) is not available to us. According to the myth detailed in chapter forty one of *Kerala Mahatmyam*, Lord

Parasurama saw a divine spirit in a small temple that was dedicated to Kurumbamma, who was indeed a tribal deity. This was approximately one kilometer away from the locale of the present-day temple. Upon seeing the spirit, he ritually sacrificed a thousand pots of alcohol and roosters and reinstated the deity as Bhadrakali. When he informed Devi the impracticability in carrying on these kinds of practices daily, she asked him to perform such forms of worship on a particular day, that is, *bharani* in the month of May. And he insisted all Keralites to come and worship the Goddess on this day (Chandran 2). This account places the origin of the temple and Bharani festival as simultaneous events, however, this being a mythical narrative cannot be judged as a bonafide account.



Fig. 1. 2. Jayan, Nimisha K. Kodungallur Sreekurumba Bhagavathi Temple: A view from eastern entrance. 7 Mar. 2018. *Private collection*.

According to *Keralolpati*, the legendary history of Kerala, this Kali temple was built in AD 333, the same year, *Keralolpati* tells us, when Kulasekhara Perumal died after eighteen years of reign. But this view is erroneous as according to historical records, Kulasekhara Perumal ruled as late as the ninth or tenth century AD (Induchudan 101).

Thus, *Keralolpathi* cannot be categorically weighed as a reliable source of information. K. P Padmanabha Menon states that “in its present garb it is either full of anachronisms, absurdities, and contradictions or is an ill-digested and uncollated collection of different versions huddled together in inextricable confusion” (Alexander 10). It is undeniably a camouflaged combination of legend and history. As per the narrative, Lord Parasurama created the land of Kerala and subsequently invited Nambudiri Brahmins and installed them as overlords. Apparently, Brahmins then brought royal chiefs for their defense and security. It is also mentioned that Parasurama created a Durga temple on shores and a Sastha temple on the hillside. However, a close evaluation of the work shows that this story had been contrived and propagated by the Brahmins to establish their monopoly and superiority.

Sree Kodungallooramma: Charithravum Aacharanushtanangalum (Mother Goddess of Kodungallur: History and Rituals) of 1990 by V. R Chandran is a comprehensive and authentic work accounting the history, rituals, festivals, and myths of Kodungallur Bhagavathi. He chronicles another version that the Chera King Chenguttuvan came to know about the story of Kannaki and as informed by the priests that Kannaki is the reincarnation of Goddess Durga, he arranged for the installation of this spirit at Kodungallur. For that, he brought the stone from Himalaya and invited guests from neighboring countries like Ceylon. Chandran estimates this to have occurred in the first half of 2 AD. This is believed to have occurred in Kurumba Kavu, one kilometer away from today’s Kodungallur Bhagavathi Temple (10). Later, due to certain power shifts, this spirit was merged with Bhagavathi of Kodungallur temple.

Coming to the present scenario, the main deity of Kodungallur Bhagavathi Temple is Lord Siva. In earlier times, it was a visible representation of *linga* (“phallus”) but with the dawning of Aryanization, they were smoothed to form the present-day Siva *linga* (Chandran 14). This Siva icon lacks the appendage of Lord Nandi, scripturally a perpetual coalescence, which is peculiar. Also, no flagstaff is installed here, which is a customary feature of Siva temples. And, interestingly, no special festivals are celebrated in the service of the primal deity, Lord Siva. This pinpoints to the sweeping trends of Shaivism and Vaishnavism that Kodungallur has gone through. In the wake of Vaishnavism, many Siva temples were massively converted into Vishnu temples. In the ideological fluctuations that ensued later, the Goddess escalated to the seat of the primary deity of the sanctum, located south to Siva. As noted earlier, it was believed that the spirit of Kannaki merged with the Goddess. Thus, Goddess Bhadrakali professedly became the goddess of revenge as well. Induchudan makes a detailed study of the temple structure in his *Secret Chamber* and writes:

The *sreekovil* consists of an open air flagstone courtyard surrounded by a stone wall with an overhanging gabled roof that creates a veranda on the inside of the wall adjacent to the courtyard. The image of the Goddess Bhadrakali is an eight-armed, six-foot- tall figure carved from the trunk of a jackfruit tree and dates from the 19th Century. (192)

He calls it ‘a confused image’ and interprets the symbols involved. The lower right-hand holds the head of the demon king Darika, in the second right hand is a palm leaf text, the third right-hand holds a trident, and the fourth right-hand grips a sword against the chest.

The lower left-hand carry a bell, the second third left has an anklet, and a serpent and the fourth left-hand hold a vessel (see fig. 1. 3).



Fig. 1. 3. A portrait by Kakkanat Narayanamenon titled “Kodungallur Bhagavathi” completed in 1961. Chandran, V R. *Sree Kodungallooramma: Charithravum Aacharanushtanangalum*. Kerala Book House, 1990.

Adjacent to the Goddess, attached to the Western side of the *garbagriham*, is an oblong chamber. This chamber holds the Saptamatrikals, or the seven mothers: two-foot-high, shiny black stone icons lined up in a row and facing north: they include Brahmi, Maheshwari, Vaishnavi, Kaumari, Indrani, Varahi, and Chamundi (Chandran 192). Other major deities of the temple are Ganapati, Tavittimuthi, Kshetrapalan, and Vasoormala, etc.

The icon of Vasoormala deserves a special mentioning. It is in front of her icon that the ritual *Guruti* is carried through. Vasoormala most probably belonged to the non-

Brahminical pantheon, but she too at a later date was incorporated into the temple. Here, womenfolk from two Nair ancestral houses, Pilapilli and Tevarvattom have the prerogative to offer turmeric powder. All these practices unmistakably point to a non-Aryan tradition. “Seemingly, Kali, Nili, Kota, Kurumba, Chakki, Ottamulachi, and Ottappalli were the Dravidian deities belonging to lower strata of the Hindu community. Later they were categorically replaced by Aryan goddesses like Durga, Kartyayani, Parvati, Lalita, Bala, Tripura, and Bhadra” (Chandran, my trans.; 28). The image of Ottamulachi is placed outside the temple at Kodungallur, nevertheless, within the temple fortifications. Hence, the fact that these two Dravidian deities are still retained and adored in the Kodungallur temple attests to its prior Dravidian affiliations.

After the birth of Shankaracharya in Central Kerala in the ninth century, the *tantric* worship of goddesses increased in popularity. Kunjikuttan Ilayath in *Kodungallur Kshethrethihasam (Legends of Kodungallur Temple)* evaluates that since Chenguttuvan installed Kannaki in 2 AD, it must be Keralite Sankara and not Adi Sankara who might have reached Kodungallur and re-installed the deity. He installed Siva as Siva-Sakthi merging was essential to resolve the conflicts lurking in Kodungallur (72). Brahmins of Kerala were different from Brahmins of other parts of India and were heavily influenced by indigenous cults of the fierce goddesses and of serpent deities that involved blood sacrifice and spirit possession. *Guruti* is obviously a fragment of the *Saktheya* form of worship. In temples where Nairs are ritual specialists, by tradition, for a certain period, Brahmin worship is mandatory. Brahmin worship is deemed as *uttama pooja* (“a perfect form of worship”) and worship by Nair priest is hailed as *madhyama pooja* (“a mediocre form of worship”). This is apparently a relic of *Sakthi* worship. This amalgamated form

of worship most probably originated due to the incessant attempts by Brahmins to take hold of the temple. Clear evidence of Brahminical appropriation can be obtained from Kodungallur Bhagavathi Temple. The ritual *Kozhikkallu Moodal*, attached to the Bharani festival is an example. This outlier ritual is conducted a few distances away from the main shrine, mutely proclaiming its inferior rating.

Furthermore, a quick account of the nature of Hindu temples in the ancient periods will equip us with a sense of their organizational patterns and operational methodologies. In *Matrilineal Kinship* (1974) edited by David Murray Schneider and Kathleen Gough, it is stated that in Kerala, four types of temples were distinguishable among the higher castes. First were the large temples or the *sanketams*, whose estates were managed by Nambudiris. They were dedicated to all-India, Puranic deities, usually Siva or Vishnu. The second type were the private temples of individual Nambudiri families in villages owned by Nambudiris, which were small replicas of the first type. The third was the private temples of royal and chiefly matrilineages, dedicated to Bhagavathi or Bhadrakali- the Nair goddess of war, epidemic, land, and fertility. Finally, the fourth was the smaller Bhagavathi temples of village Nair sects, each collectively managed by an assembly of Nair retainers of one or more villages. In the first two types of the temple, animal sacrifice was rigorously forbidden. Fruit, flowers, incense, and fire were the typical offerings. Though Nairs had the privilege to enter the temple, only Nambudiri Brahmins could be commissioned as the priests. Priests mostly belonged to Ambalavasi or the temple servant castes. Moreover, in Bhagavathi temples, the regular priest was usually of a special low subdivision of Nambudiris known as *Adikal*. In addition, a Nair oracle, attached to the temple, periodically became possessed by the

Goddess and declared her will to the people. Daily rites in the Bhagavathi temple were similar to those in a Brahmin temple, but annual festivals involved animal sacrifice by Nairs, in which Brahmins and temple servants took no part. The caste assembly comprised the *Karanavar* (“head”) of all the property groups. It met periodically on *thara* (“platform”) near the Bhagavathi temple of the neighborhood to manage the temple’s affairs. It also judged offenses against the religious laws of the caste (310). Allegedly, temples were the seat of power apart from its spiritual significations and persisted as a communal stratifying apparatus eventually conditioning the mental make-up of the public.

Regarding the origin of *kavu* (“grove”) in Kerala, two notions are prevalent. In the earlier *Tamizhakam* that included Kerala, the first inhabitants were a group called Villavar or Veenavar. They were conquered by Nagas whose preponderant deity was Kali. They may have created the first Kali *kavu* (grove) in Kerala. It is also asserted by scholars and historians that the initial inhabitants belonging to the Araya, Pulaya, and Veda community constituted their kingdoms and resisted the subsequent conquest of Aryans, Nairs, and Ezhavas. But they succumbed to the larger power structures, and eventually, the tribal natives were thrust to the lower strata and they dwelled in *kavu*. Later these groves became the worshipping centers of lower caste groups (Chandran 3).

Achuta Menon in *Kali Worship in Kerala* notes that in Kerala, *kavu* is usually dedicated to deities like Kali, Vettakaran, Anthimahakalan, Karimkali, Ayyappan, and Naga, etc. Other deities as Siva and Vishnu are usually seated in temples. Discerningly, *kavu* is a support system for a large number of species. *Kavu*, in the earlier periods, notes Menon, was the public property of the respective villages and they looked forward to the

deity as their protector. In the earlier times, the Nair communities were the *Ooralanmar* (“the one who rules the place”). Later, with the coming of Brahmins into the scenario, all the persisting equations were altered. Brahmins entered into matrimonial alliance with royal families and thus gained power. In temples, they became an undeniable presence, and worship without their assistance was deemed to be incomplete. In some groves, Nair sect could be the priests but in such places, it is mandatory by custom to have worship by Brahmins for forty-one days a year. Groves, in its outset, was not under the managerial jurisdiction of a particular group but as time passed by, there were attempts to possess these groves being the icon of power and authority. As a result of such enterprises, sooner or later, the administration of groves came under particular dominant groups, mostly religious or political (11). However, originally being the property of a whole village, it was difficult to altogether transform the traditions of a grove. Faced with a fully developed religious system in which the control of the sacred power was in the hands of the lowest caste, Brahmins were forced to create an alternative system of purity and pollution and to ally themselves politically with local rulers to retain their position of privilege and superiority. They had to face antagonism and displeasure from many, and as a note of accord, the lower castes were also entitled to certain rights and privileges as a total usurpation was infeasible. In groves that were under the administration a particular person/family, this transgression probably took place easily.

Chelнат Achuta Menon, who has studied the various aspects of Kali worship, identifies Kerala Bhadrakali, who assassinated the demon king Darika, and Kannaki as the same. He also states that Kali or Kannaki is not popular in regions north of Kodungallur. When the influence of Kannaki began to spread in regions north of

Kodungallur, her name was changed into Sree Kurumba which again was transformed into Chirma (Choondal 27). It is evident that the temples played a cogent role in fixing the social, political, spiritual, and moral constitution of individuals, and the multiform ritual traditions associated with the worship of Bhagavathi reflect Kerala's eclectic historical and social development. The ensuing section seeks to analyze the Kodungallur Bharani Festival, which is the topic of this dissertation, and give an account of the various rituals that inform this festival.

Bharani: Festival and Rituals

In the book titled, *Geographical and Statistical Memoir of the Survey of the Travancore and Cochin States*, executed under the supervision of Lieutenants Ward and Conner, from July 1810 to end of the year 1821, quite surprisingly, while naming the major festivals of Kerala, Bharani is listed along with Vishu, Onam, Dipali, and Pooja, etc. which even today are prominent festivals celebrated throughout Kerala. This points to the state-wide significance enjoyed by Bharani in the earlier periods. Unfortunately, this is not the state of affairs in the contemporary scenario, where the Bharani festival, as well as its participants, have become stigmatized and peripheral in the society. Regarding its past, Induchudan, who grew up in Kodungallur, remembers the behavior of earlier devotees and their particular emphasis on sexual expression. "There are usually men and women, of all ages; women are comparatively less in proportion. When the pilgrims sing, they move their body in a rhythm. Sometimes, they imitate movements of sexual union" (128). This tradition persists; the songs they sing during the festival delineate the sexual organs of the male and female and narrate the sexual activity explicitly. L. K. Anantha Krishna Iyer remembers:

A grand festival, called Kumbhom Bharani (Cock festival), is held in the middle of March, when the Nairs and low caste men offer up cocks to Bhagavathi beseeching immunity from diseases during the succeeding year. In fact, people from all parts of Malabar, Cochin, and Travancore attend the festival, and the whole country near the lines of marching rings with shouts of “*nada nada*” (“walk, walk, or march”) of the pilgrims to Cranganore, her holy residence. (qtd. in Induchudan 238)

Tellingly, Bharani had a univocal significance in the cultural fabric of Kerala representing the sentiment of certain caste groups, and the dominant air of the festival is unquestionably *theendal* or ‘pollution.’ For some devotees, surrendering to the idea of being polluting agencies probably may have sprung from their desire to be a ‘sacrificial matter’ to the goddess (Gentes 309). M. J Gentes in the article, “Scandalising the Goddess at Kodungallur” asserts:

The message of polluting the *kavu* involves psychological, social, and ritual referents. At one level, the *tintal* (pollution) is an action of central importance in the temporal unfolding of the festival. At another, it manifests the conceptualization of states of purity and impurity, as well as pure and impure persons. At a third level...the act of polluting the temple may metaphorically enact a process of penetrating the Goddess’s body. (308)

To be considered polluting or act in a polluting way from a *tantric* perspective is a form of empowerment. Devotees take part in a ritual counter-structure in which an alternate view of the Goddess defines the reality. Their offering of themselves by blood

or vow appears to be subjugation to her and subsequently gives them the benefit of the Goddess's *Sakti* and protection (see fig. 1. 4). Perhaps the enactment of pollution preserves this power and revitalizes the devotees during the festival. Besides, during the Bharani festival a red cloth, one of the Goddess's symbols, worn by devotees and given in offering to the Goddess, is hung on the stone wall of the chamber between the tomb and the Kali sanctum.



Fig. 1. 4. Jayan, Nimisha K. An oracle during Bharani Festival. 06 Apr. 2016. *Private collection.*

An underground tunnel extends from the chamber out under the eastern entrance and surfaces on the eastern side of the shrine grounds. Induchudan concludes that Kannaki's mortal remains are conserved in the unopened stone tomb (the secret chamber) that abuts the eastern side of the inner sanctum (118) and puts forward the theory that the

true focus of the Bharani festival is Kannaki and that the worship of Kali is by and large suspended.



Fig. 1. 5. Jayan, Nimisha K. Scions proceed to place *thaali* on *kozhikallu* as a part of *Cheru Bharani Kodiyettam*. 14 Feb. 2018. *Private collection*.

To elaborate upon the lustrous and obtruse rituals of the Bharani festival, Meena Bharani officially commences with the execution of a ritual called *Cheru Bharani Kodikayaral* held at *bharani star of Kumbham*.² Malayan Thattan³ (chief of a caste group) belonging to an ancestral house called Kaavil Veetu seeks the grant from the royal chief of Kodungallur, denoted as Kodungallur Valiya Thamburan⁴ to carry out this ritual. Thamburan as a token of permission gives away two ruby chains to Malayan Thattan and his accomplice. Supposedly, they adorn themselves with this jewelry during the performance; one chain is made out of gold and the other is plain ruby. The doyen wears a gold chain whereas his nephew wears the other ruby chain. After this, at about 8 a.m, when *Pantheeradipooja* (“daily worship in the morning when the shadow lengthens to 12 steps”) comes to an end, they encircle the temple three times ringing a

bell and carrying *kodikkoora* (“colorful banners”) accompanied by percussion music. At this time, all the entrances of the temple are closed down and everyone stands outside the *pradakshina* (“circumambulating”) path. They offer *kodikkoora* on the *kozhikkallu* placing a gold *thaali* (“pendant usually tied in Hindu marriage ceremonies”) on it (see fig. 1. 5).



Fig. 1. 6. Jayan, Nimisha K. A man from Kudumbi community preparing the *kodikkoora* for *Cheru Bharani Kodiyettam*. 06 Mar. 2016. *Private collection*.

Soon after this, the priests of the temple known as *adikal* take ablution and appear at the northern entrance and inquire about the elder lady of Pilappilly House, “*Kshethram shudhamayo?*” (“Has the temple been cleansed?”) thrice. She replies, “*Adichu thalichu shudhamayi*” (“It has been swept clean and purified”). After this, the priests enter the sanctum sanctorum and begin over the worship. The Kudumbi community hailing from Edamukkam has the right to tie *kodikkoora* on the branches of trees that dot temple premises (see fig. 1. 6). After the ceremony comes to a halt, the Malayan Thattan informs

Thamburan that ritual has been rightly executed and thereafter ceremoniously returns the chains. Thamburan then presents them with *onappudava* (“white cloth wore during special occasions”). Banners are hung from the gargantuan banyan trees sprawling across the temple surroundings as well as on the porticos of the main shrine structure (see fig. 1. 7).



Fig. 1. 7. Jayan, Nimisha K. Raising of *kodikkoora* for *Cheru Bharani Kodiyettam*. 06 Mar. 2016. *Private collection*.

A distinctive feature that sets it off from other temple rituals is the relative absence of *mantra* or *tantra* having the trappings of a non-Brahminical legacy. Also, no *muhurtham* (“auspicious time”) is observed and *punyaham* (“cleansing ritual”) is inherently non-existent. By about 9 a.m, *Kodikayalar* ends. This is an important ceremony initiating the month-long festival; the first day marks the mythological battle between Kali and Darika; after *Kodikayalar* all caste groups have absolute access to the temple. All these rituals were part of a long-standing tradition before Brahminical

conquest and hint at the original privileges enjoyed by the subaltern groups in ancient times.

Following the *Kodikayal*, the ritual *Kozhikallu Moodal* is carried out on *thiruvonam* star at about 11 a.m. For this, the Cochin Dewaswom Board, under whose jurisdiction the temple operates today, sends its higher officials to seek permission and blessings to conduct the Bharani festival from the Kodungallur Valiya Thamburan; presenting him with *kaazhchakula*⁵ (“ritual of offering banana bunches to appease the other party”). On the day of *Kozhikallu Moodal*, Thamburan visits the temple precisely at 4 a.m, presents the first offering in front of the Goddess and returns.



Fig. 1. 8. Jayan, Nimisha K. Covering the sand mount with crimson cloth as a part of *Kozhikallu Moodal*. 22 Mar. 2017. *Private collection*.

Kozhikallu is two circular stones placed adjacently in a considerable distance from the shrine near the huge *deepasthambam* (“pillar of the lamp”) of northern entrance. These two circular stones are perched on a square platform and before the cock sacrifice, *Kozhikallu Moodal*⁶ is performed. For this, on the northern side of *kozhikallu*, by the

representatives of the Nair community belonging to a house known as Kodungallur Bhagavathi Veetu, two pits are hollowed out and the two stones are then pulled into it. These pits are then covered with sand and in the place of *kozhikallu*, a sand mount almost six feet long and one and a half feet high and two feet wide is sculpted. This mount is wrapped with a lengthy crimson piece of cloth and cocks are sacrificed upon them (see fig. 1. 8).



Fig. 1. 9. Jayan, Nimisha K. Devotees offering red silk cloth on *kozhikkallu*. 22 Mar. 2017. *Private collection*.

The sacrifice is commenced by the ancestral homes of Tacholi Otenan and Karampilly Kurup in Malabar. After the *Kozhikallu Moodal*, the elder member of Bhagavathi House speaks out, “*Thacholiveetile kozhi haajarundo?*” (“Are cocks from Tacholi house brought here?”) thrice. Upon receiving the reply “*Haajarund*” (“It is present”), each representative from the two Houses symbolically sacrifice the cocks. The next group which has the right to sacrifice the cock upon *kozhikallu* is the Pattarya community.⁷ To perform this act, the representatives of this clan seek permission and blessing from the Valiya Thamburan presenting him with *kaazhchakula*. With the

banning of animal sacrifice in India, the cocks are just offered symbolically on the *kozhikallu* (see fig. 1. 10) along with the crimson cloth (see fig. 1. 9).

Probably, this cock sacrifice is the relic of the ancient cabalistic practice of human sacrifice. In earlier times, the warriors captured from battlefield were sacrificed to appease the blood-thirsty pagan deity, Kali. Later this practice gave way to the sacrifice of elephants and buffaloes; in the course of time, goats were sacrificed. This practice is still acted with impunity in Bharani as well as in many parts of India and with the scarcity of goats, cocks too began to be offered.



Fig. 1. 10. Jayan, Nimisha K. Devotee sacrificing rooster at *kozhikkallu* after *Kozhikallu Moodal*. 22 Mar. 2017. *Private collection*.

Kozhikkallu Moodal occurs on the day of *thiruvonam* star in Malayalam Calendar, day seven in the countdown before Bharani. It is believed to represent the commencement of the Kali-Darika battle. Subsequent to *Kozhikkallu Moodal*, in the south-east corner of the temple, a long rope with scores of banners knotted is tied upon two huge banyan trees, known as *Venadan Kodyuyarthal* (see fig. 1. 11).

Soon after this, *theripattukal* (ribald songs) are traditionally sung inside the temple.⁸ V. T Induchudan observes that the Bharani song is in the tradition of *Kaula* form

of worship. He believes that *Bharanipattu* is similar to ritual art forms like *Bhadrakali Naataakam*, *Bhadrakalipattu*, and *Teyyam*, etc. This practice is customarily time-bound and on the day of *aswati* afternoon, it naturally halts. Thus, only for six and a half days, ribald songs are sung in temple premises in groups. The devotees view the songs as an offering and on their part, the dominant emotion is out-and-out *bhakti*. But with the concurrent transitions that have lurked into this ritual, the songs began to go beyond the threshold of temple premises and thereby faced repugnance from the natives.



Fig. 1. 11. Jayan, Nimisha K. *Venadan Kodiyuyarthal* in Kodungallur Temple during *Cheru Bharani Kodiyettam*. 21 Feb. 2017. *Private collection*.

In one kilometer east of the temple there is an important sphere of Bharani called Pulappadam (see fig. 1. 12). Here, we can perceive a small deity who is obviously a manifestation of Bhagavathi. Daily services and *guruti* ritual of this temple are carried out by a sect called Vallon⁹ which is a Pulaya caste group. The myth is that after killing Darika, Bhagavathi came to their congenial home and proclaimed to no more fear Darika and afterward displayed his severed head. She urged them to worship her and consented

that thereafter her numinous presence would be felt in Pulappadam. Hearing this, the Pulayas offered her alcohol, meat, and grains and worshipped her diligently for thirteen days. On the fourteenth day, Goddess departed from their home, gratified and pleased (Chandran 87). Customarily, on the day of *meenam*, before the event of cock sacrifice held in the main shrine, cocks must be offered in the Pulappadam at 2 a.m.



Fig. 1. 12. Jayan, Nimisha K. Pulappadam during Bharani Festival. 16 Mar. 2018.

Private collection.

On *aswati* day of Meena month, to be specific, on the day of *Kaavutheendal*, Vallon visits Kodungallur Valiya Thamburan and offers *thirumul kazhcha* (“a ritual in which gifts are given to appease the other party”) and soon after receives a shield, bangle, *onappudava*, etc. in return. He has to embellish himself in this *onappudava* and be present at Pulappadam during Bharani (see fig. 1. 13). On *revathi*, *Revathi Vilakku* (see fig. 1. 14) is performed in the main shrine and a *kalam* (“ritualistic figure drawn on the ground using colored dust”) of Bhagavathi is composed in Pulappadam by the Kadathanadu community. On the day of *Kaavutheendal*, an Araya faction known as

Chavalakkar reach Pulappadam and circumambulate the *kalam* and hand over one hundred and one rupees to Vallon as *dakshina* (“offering”).



Fig. 1. 13. Jayan, Nimisha K. Vallon blessing Bharani pilgrims at Pulappadam. 16 Mar. 2018. *Private collection.*

After *Kaavutheendal*, Kadathanadu sect comes over to this place and offers *dakshina*. To them, Vallon delivers one hundred and one rupees as *prasadam* (“any material offered to divinities which are then distributed to devotees”). Kadathanadu clan also gives *onappudava* to Vallon. On the day of Bharani, *kalam* of Kandaran (a tribal deity) is sketched out (Chandran 88). On Bharani day, it is mandatory for the devotees coming from southern parts of Kerala to reach here and conduct offerings and ritually break coconuts. Further, the *Trichandana Pooja* (“Smearing of Goddess with a concoction of turmeric, tender coconut water, and secret herbs”) on *aswati* is very important.



Fig. 1. 14. Jayan, Nimisha K. *Revathi Vilakku*, at the temple on the day before *Kaavutheendal*. 28 Mar. 2017. *Private collection*.

The secret mix is advised by a healer called Palaykal Velan,¹⁰ and in that regard he observes *vrata*; before the *pooja*, he enters the temple through southern entrance donning traditional costumes, a long pointed cap made with white cloth and *amshavadi* (“ancestral stick signaling power”) along with percussions and seats himself in the western entrance (see fig. 1. 15). After this, Valiya Thamburan arrives at *balippura* in a palanquin through eastern entrance. Soon after this, the rituals commence. After *Uchapooja* by noon, the original priests of the temple close the sanctum and come out. Then, the adikals assigned to perform *Trichandana Pooja*, along with Thampuran, the temple priest (main Nambudiri priest) and temple officials enter the sanctum through the eastern door and initiate the *pooja*. This is a restrictive ritual believed to heal the Goddess who is perilously wounded in the battle. The sanctum sanctorum is cleansed thoroughly, all the utensils are brought out and the jewelry is removed from the deity, and thereafter only new wares and lamps are used.



Fig. 1. 15. Jayan, Nimisha K. Palaykal Velan offering *prasadam* and blessings to devotees. 20 Mar. 2018. *Private collection*.

Only three *adikal* (ritual officiants) from three Brahmin houses known as Madathil Madam, Kunnath Madam, and Neelathu Madam participate in this *pooja*.¹¹ If one of them deceases, the other two officiants instruct the next fit representative, and thus, at a time only three persons have the knowledge of the esoteric rites of this worship. When the priests are finished, everyone necessarily leaves the shrine building and the doors are locked up. The nature of the participants allowed in during this ceremony and the exact form of the rituals they engage in is kept furtive. In *Kaula* form of worship, a mix of tender coconut water with turmeric symbolizes meat and tender coconut with its lower part removed represents alcohol. Sexuality is highly celebrated in Indian culture and it was seen as a holy act necessary for procreation and existence. Tellingly, this notion of sexuality resulted in the concept of *ardhanarishvara* (“half-male and half-female form of Lord Siva and Parvati”); in ancient times, sexual rites were conducted in farms for a good harvest. *Chakrapooja* is a part of *Kaula* worship in which men and women remain in a circle and perform *Panchamakara Sevanam* (“the intake of five

elements-sex, alcohol, grain, fish, and meat”) (Thomas 110). Women are the central source of power in this worship, men only playing a supportive role. In this women-centered form of worship, explicit *yoni* was worshipped. Later, it was emblematically worshipped as a cryptic triangle.¹² A refined version of this form is evident in Bharani rituals. The devotees of Bharani as part of their *vrata*, have to renounce sexual union but need not give up alcohol and meat till they reach back home. Since one of the five elements is restricted, instead of it lewd songs are sung (Chandran 116).

Before *Kaavutheendal*, the devotees hurl their offering packs on to the temple roof in the direction of *pallimadam* (where supposedly Goddess rests) which usually consists of peppercorn, turmeric, rice grain, coconut, coins, and roosters, etc. (see fig. 1. 16).

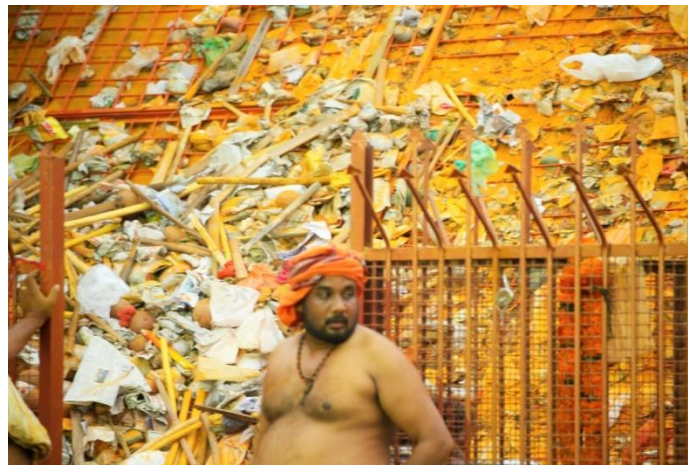


Fig. 1. 16. Jayan, Nimisha K. A temple official standing near the temple roof onto which offerings are thrown. 20 Mar. 2018. *Private collection*.

It is believed that this prodigious convention asserts spirituality as more important than material artifacts. Yet, others believe that this practice is a reminder of how

Buddhist monks settled in Kodungallur were barraged with filth or opprobrious objects in the bygone times. Late that morning, on *aswati*, a sizeable score of devotees convene for the ceremony of *Kaavutheendal* in the temple premises and on *avakashathara*.

There are about seventy *thara* in the temple premises, and each group has to pay tax to Thampuran and during Bharani days, the elder member of Arayamparamb House at Kothaparambu collects the tax and delivers to Thamburan.¹³ After *Trichandana Pooja*, priests and Valiya Thamburan comes out of the shrine through the eastern door, Thamburan then ensconces himself in the ceremonial seat furnished for him on the *Nilapaduthara* of the eastern entrance (see fig. 1. 17).



Fig. 1. 17. “Valiya Thamburan Opening Red Umbrella Giving Permission for *Kaavutheendal*.” *Mathrubhumi* [Thrissur], 08 Apr. 2019, pp. 04.

epaper.mathrubhumi.com/. Accessed 08 Mar. 2019.

As he unfurls the traditional crimson umbrella, a group of devotees led by Palaykal Velan approach the temple structure and deliberately and demonstratively ‘pollute’ it by approach and touch. From that moment, the mass of Ezhava, Araya, Pulaya, and other clans are released to race around the building three times and perform their acts of self-mortification (see fig. 1. 18).



Fig. 1. 18. K. N, Anil. *Kaavutheendal*. 20 Mar. 2007. *Private collection*.

After *Kaavutheendal*, devotees seek the blessings of Valiya Thamburan. Here, Thamburan gives *pudava* to temple officials and the officers from police-revenue departments.¹⁴ The next day being *bharani* in Malayalam calendar, twelve hours after the shrine building was locked, the priests re-enter the sanctum through the eastern door and serve the Goddess *variyarippayasam*¹⁵ (“sweet pudding”) to enervate her from the fatigue of battle and install the Goddess on *pallimadam*. Further, in the western and northern entrance, a ritual sacrifice of a whole ash gourd called *Kushmaandabali* is carried out. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic that affected the whole world in 2019,

Bharani festival of March 2020 was conducted with minimal participants with only Palaykalvelan performing the *Kaavutheendal* which apparently is an indication of the symbolic nature and validity of Bharani (see fig. 1. 19).



Fig. 1. 19. Palaykal Velan performing *Kaavutheendal*. *WhatsApp*, 27 Mar. 2020, 7. 30 p.m. Accessed 28 Mar. 2020.

After this, a pleated garment and *vaalkannadi* (“handheld mirrors”) are placed upon *kindi* (“water dispensing pitcher used in Kerala”) and caparisoned; a lamp is lighted towards the eastern entrance. Then, *venni kodi* (“Flag signaling the well-being of Goddess”) is raised in northern entrance thus marking the ending of the festival. On the morning of *bharani* day, a procession helmed by the Dheevara community, from coastal areas too ends at the temple. The next day, on *kaarthika*, the temple is swept out, depurated, and reconsecrated by Brahmin priests, who in this way re-establish the liturgical control. After Bharani, they perform *pooja* every morning of the following week behind closed doors. On the seventh day, *pooyam*, the doors are re-opened. To conclude, Bharani is a month-long festival, necessitating the involvement of plenitudes from miscellaneous caste groups, and comprising obstruse, labyrinthine rituals. It is

emphatically a gross reminder of the sexual hypocrisy and facade of the cultivated societal formulations. The following section attempts to delineate the role and the temperament of oracles, which form the central point of the festival, along with an inquiry into the history of their tradition and practices.

***Velichappaadu* (Oracle): Tradition and Practice**

Central to Bhagavathi rituals is the belief that the Goddess needs a vehicle to reach out to her devotees and subsequently enters a human body and therein lies the reason for the overwhelming presence of *velichappaadu* or oracles in Bhagavathi temples.



Fig. 1. 20. K. N, Anil. Oracle in trance. 20 Mar. 2006. *Private collection.*

The *velichappaadu* is in a special relationship to the Goddess, sharing her substance when possessed by her and functioning as her vehicle and oracle. He can both understand and control her (Caldwell, “Whose” 90). They are undoubtedly in the tradition of shamans associated with religious practices all over the world (see fig. 1. 20). After *Kozhikallu Moodal*, packs of *komaram* or *velichappaadu* from various temples across Kerala reach Kodungallur Bhagavathi Temple.¹⁶ They more or less belong to Nairs, Ezhavas, and lower caste groups. Their swords are worshipped in the Pilapilly House and Tevarvattom House at Kodungallur. On the day of *aswati*, before *Kaavutheendal*, the elder member of Pilapilly House from the east and elder member of the Tevarvattom House from north accompany these oracles with drums and music and they stand outside the circumambulating path in the places assigned to them. Also, after *Kaavutheendal*, these oracles seek the permission and blessings of the elder members who are seated at *aalthara* (“platform built around banyan trees”) of the northern entrance of the temple before leaving to their abodes.

The initiation ceremony of *velichappaadu* is known as *Vetti Theliyuka*. Once a *velichappaadu* passes away, he has to go to the ancestral home with which the earlier *velichappaadu* had affiliations, together with other peoples of *thara*; he has to dance and the elder member of the house provides him the sword; initiate has to receive it and lacerate his forehead. Only after this ceremony, he is elevated to the office of *velichappaadu*. It is believed that first *velichappaadu* came from a Nair House called Perinjeri in Kozhikkara, Palakkad. He received the calling from Devi and soon after this he reached Pilapilly House, from where he received the sword and incised his forehead initiating himself into an oracle (Chandran 93).

Some have an intense personal charisma and can heal and deliver prophecies through inspired contact with the Goddess. They are considered capable in varying degrees of reading her mood and desires and of channeling her ability to rid an environment of detrimental or inauspicious forces. Generally, in Kali temples of Kerala, *velichappaadu* or *komaram* is an indispensable part of the ritualistic ceremonies. He has to be present at all functions where the Nairs play any part in a rite. He wears a white cloth (*njerinjudukkal*) and a red cloth (*koora*) over it while performing religious rites, a waistlet of jingling bells (*aramani*) and a garland of *cetti* flowers around his neck; he has his untrimmed long and hanging loose hair on his back and his forehead. His forearms and chest are smeared with sandal pastes and he holds a sword (*val*) in his right hand and an anklet (*cilambu*) in his left hand. The term *velichappaadu* means one who throws a flood of light on any problem (Choondal 29). Visibly, the *velichappaadu* approaches devotees and make prophecy often in an obscure language. The gist of the message is that the Goddess is happy or unhappy with the offerings. The prophecy ends in a promise that the entire responsibility of the welfare of the community is taken up by Bhagavathi. At times with his sword, he cuts his head shedding blood to show the power of Kali. As the last item *velichappaadu* throws paddy and rice on the devotees which is called *Ari Eriyuka* (Choondal 30). After the performance, he mostly falls unconscious signaling his disrapture from the trance state.

Chummar Choondal proposes that the *Velichappaadu Thullal* (“frenzied dance of oracle”) has got a close affinity with the popular narrative of Kannaki. The whole function is reminiscent of the deeds of Kannaki after the death of Kovalan. Her uncontrollable anger, terrible spirit of revenge, the vow of destruction is reflected in the

performances of *velichappaadu*. The feminine costume, choreography, anklets, etc. relate closely to the *Chilapathikaram* story in the oracle performance in Kerala. The sword represents the destructive weapon of Kannaki (30). This explication cannot be dismissed taking into account the feminine embodiment and the irate nature of the oracles; but in Kerala, *velichappaadu* is primarily believed to be associated with the Kali Cult.

Reasonably, an oracle is a male elected from non- Brahmin castes, mostly the Nair community. Earlier, lower caste members were not allowed entrance into the temples of Kerala. Those times, the oracle stood as a mediator between these groups, thus channeling the divine power onto her marginalized devotees. He too was not allowed to enter the inner sanctum of the temple but could stand in front of the shrine. Upon receiving Bhagavathi's ritual sword from the priest, he begins to tremble, moan, and shake his whole body as he receives the divine power of the Goddess from the sword. He in ecstasy runs out of the temple and offers blessings and advice to the people. However, it is understood that the behavior of oracles participating in Bharani is considerably variant from the general practices of oracles. Firstly, most of them belong to lower caste groups, and secondly, it is not an exclusively male phenomenon; scores of women oracles occupy equal space. Sethu Madhavan has been one of the chief oracles of Kodungallur Bharani and in an interview held in 1990, for *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, when asked "What does it take to be a *velichappaad*?" he replies, "You cannot decide to be one. It just happens. You stand before the deity and your body suddenly vibrates as if an electric shock has passed through you" (V. Menon 32). Sethu Madhavan in the interview further claimed that he had never consummated his marriage as the couple (wife being an

oracle) felt that the sexual abstinence is a prerequisite to preserve their inner purity so that they can perform their roles as oracles.

In the Bharani festival, the chief oracles of each tribe ensconce themselves in their *avakashathara*¹⁷ and offer benediction to the devotees (see fig. 1. 21). Oracles in their frenzy yield in front of these chiefs who bless them with turmeric and also apply turmeric onto their wounds in the forehead. The oracles absolutely yield before the power of these chiefs and as a mark of submission deliver their swords with offerings.¹⁸ The heads then provide them with advice and blessings and afterward hand over the rejuvenated swords back to these oracles. Thus, even in this unstructured and disorderly state, they follow a hierarchical pattern and submit before the authority.



Fig. 1. 21. Jayan, Nimisha K. Oracle chiefs from Kozhikkode region seated in their *avakashathara*. 29 Mar. 2017. *Private collection*.

Apart from being a performative space, Bharani also serves as a site for the initiation of oracles. The initiation of oracles is performed with the assistance of a chief oracle. After seeking permission, the initiant dance in front of their chiefs in trance and

incise their foreheads (see fig. 1. 22). “Initiation can be the kernel of a performance” (Schechner, *Performance Theory* 58). If there is a young person to be initiated, the doyens make necessary arrangements within their *thara*, make space for them amidst the crowd and sing around to spiritually arouse the initiate. The initiate seeks blessings from the chief, places his head in the latter’s lap. If he displays any hesitation, the chief is seen reproaching him. Chief advises him, listens to his traumas, and offers a solution. For the initiation rite, the chief chants the word *Om* ritualistically into the ear of the initiate. If the chief feels that the person is not yet matured to be an oracle, he sends him away. Discerningly, to be an oracle, the initiate has to observe severe *vrata* for months. In the initiation ceremony, the chief hands over his sword to the initiate and blesses him; the latter cuts his forehead and break into tremors, thus entering into the higher domain of oracles. The sword is given back to the chief, turmeric is applied to his forehead by the chief, and he comes to the Bharani festival the next year as an outright oracle. Thus, the whole affair has a trace of the rustic and pagan element, signaling its prehistoric tradition.



Fig. 1. 22. Jayan, Nimisha K. Initiation of a female devotee by chief oracles in temple premises before *Kaavutheendal*. 28 Mar. 2017. *Private collection*.

Oracles, like shamans, undergo a trance eventually becoming something more than they are. In the case of oracles, it is believed that the spirit of Goddess permeates them and henceforth they are not bound by human limitations. They move closer to the divine existence, procuring the additional faculties of prophecy and divination. In trance, they actualize supernatural feats otherwise preposterous or not endeavored by a human being. The performers are carried away by the religious fervor and do seemingly impossible acts. Shamans pass through stages of ecstasy which culminates in the emptying of the body. This is more or less similar to performing *Parakaya Pravesha*, a practice in which the soul/spirit of the performer enters into different bodies. In contrast to this, the oracles are mostly ‘added to’ or ‘doubled’ in their graduation and are thus more inclined towards trance. But pure ecstasy or pure trance is not possible as Schechner opines (*Performance Studies* 60). Thus, in oracle, there is a merging of their spirit with that of the divine resulting in the erasure of their identity, personal memory, and existence.



Fig. 1. 23. Jayan, Nimisha K. Vasoorimala worshipped in Amman Nilayam Temple, Palakkad. 18 Mar. 2018. *Private collection*.

Before coming to Kodungallur, the oracles perform elaborated rituals in their respective temples situated alongside their dwellings principally dedicated to Bhadrakali, Vasoorimala, and Ghandakarnan (see fig. 1. 23). These special worships start days before the commencement of Bharani festival. The chief oracle as a priest conducts the worship, the devotees accompany him; offerings are made on their ancestral mounts as well (see fig. 1. 24). Cocks are also sacrificed, not symbolically but in actuality as a part of the worship (see fig. 1. 25).



Fig. 1. 24. Jayan, Nimisha K. Chief oracle performing ancestral worship in Amman Nilayam Temple at Palakkad two days prior *Kaavutheendal*. 18 Mar. 2018. *Private collection*.

On the day they come to Kodungallur, before *Bharani Purappaadu* (“leaving for Bharani”) (see fig. 1. 28), the chief oracle dresses up in his traditional costume and he performs the frenzied dance accompanied by the incision of his forehead with his saber (see fig. 1. 26). Other devotees in the temple premises sing Bharani songs in groups attended by percussion instruments. As the day progresses, several minor oracle groups

reach dressed up, singing songs on their way to a common locus, which is mostly the temple of the chief oracle.



Fig. 1. 25. Jayan, Nimisha K. Ancestral idol where cock sacrifice is conducted at Amman Nilayam Temple, Palakkad. 18 Mar. 2018.

On this day, the relatives, neighbors, friends, and devotees call on their chief's house and they share a ritual meal that comprises of rice and chicken curry prepared with ash gourd.



Fig. 1. 26. Jayan, Nimisha K. Chief oracle performing *tullal* at Amman Nilayam Temple in Palakkad two days prior *Kaavutheendal*. 18 Mar. 2018. *Private collection*.

Offering to the Goddess is a course of rice that is prepared by the chief oracle himself (see fig. 1. 27). Along with it, chicken curry is offered to the Goddess.

Subsequently, this is also served as *prasada* to the devotees.



Fig. 1. 27. Jayan, Nimisha K. Offering of rice and chicken curry to ancestors placed on their cremated mount at Amman Nilayam, Palakkad. 18 Mar. 2018. *Private collection*.

Months before the Bharani festival, they start performing *theripattu* (ribald songs) and other Bharani songs in their respective homes in groups.



Fig. 1. 28. Jayan, Nimisha K. Oracles resting before *Bharani Purappadu* in the temple at Palakkad. 19 Mar. 2018. *Private collection*.

Also, other oracles are invited to participate in the performance, thus categorically forging a sense of community.¹⁹ Further, the attire of oracles is unisex; women generally wear a blouse and a *mundu* (“men’s garment worn in India”) which is pleated like a sari. Across the chest, a cloth is draped in a crisscross manner. Some are also seen clad in a sari (see fig. 1. 30). Notably, the color of the fabric is crimson red or a garment where red is prominent. The devotees attach considerable importance to their attire; before *Kaavutheendal* they drape this costume ceremoniously; others assist them in arraying it.



Fig. 1. 30. Jayan, Nimisha K. A male oracle chief in Bhadrakali form. 29 Mar. 2017.

Private collection.

Some wear plush silk sarees; others wear plain red cotton cloth. They wear anklets, carry swords, and waist belt. Chief oracles wear a large number of gold jewelry, which belongs to the deity of their respective temples (see fig. 1. 31). Also, several ornaments are worn by the chiefs, denoting their clout and position. Seemingly, these oracles are very short-tempered and easily provoked. They assert their authority in their respective *thara* and none can occupy the *thara* without their consent. Also, *thara* is a space where deities are worshipped and hence sacred. As hinted earlier, oracles prepare

themselves for *Kaavutheendal* ceremony by donning the costumes and doing special rituals, after this point they generally do not allow the presence of outsiders in their *thara*.



Fig. 1. 31. Jayan, Nimisha K. Male oracles clad in silk attire and jewelry during Bharani. 19 Mar. 2017. *Private collection*.

In Palakkad district, before the Bharani festival, as a measure of fulfilling affiance made to Goddess, the participants beg for alms in several houses, and this money is unfailingly deposited in Kodungallur temple. This practice categorically serves to destroy human *aham bodha* (“consciousness of self”) and in today’s world where one is becoming more egotistic, this marks a firm step from self to society. They carry *irumudikettu* (“travel pouch used by pilgrims”) on their heads, which is made of white cloth, consisting of the grains they bring as offerings. Some carry the offerings in small baskets woven out of *thazhappaya* (“mat made from screw pine”). On top of it, two sticks are mostly placed. Some groups carry a long stick, one tip of which is rounded. They are used through generations and believed to have used in warding off animals while walking through the dense forests. Most groups also bring with them small sticks called *kottuvadi*

to strike and make a sound while singing songs²⁰ (Adarsh 150). Noticeably, the groups from Kozhikode and Kannur region before *Kaavutheendal* take ablution and wear white clothes in contrast to the red attire that is typically worn.

The pilgrims on the *revati* day enter the temple after taking ablution in the pond in the north-western corner of the temple. For them, *theenduka* (“to touch”) means a holy act. As the Malayalam word *chetta* used to denote the dwelling of subaltern groups eventually became a word of abuse, the word *theendal* may have eventually acquired the meaning ‘to pollute.’ This transgression of the meaning of the word used initially to denote the entry into a sacred grove with a sacred mind, to a meaning of pollution is due to the intervention of a greater political and ideological authority (Adarsh 158). It is only later that the festival acquired the connotations of a battle, and an activity performed to repel Buddhist groups. Adarsh C. further finds that for Bharani comparatively few oracle groups come from the eastern parts of Kerala. However, many bands of singers are coming from Aluva, Alapuzha, Cherthala, Karunagappally, and Kollam, etc. Usually, the oracles perform in a spot, singers accompany them. Like this, they encircle the temple halting at various points, cutting their forehead at times, yet unaffected continue their movement. After the performance, when they are spent up, they take rest in their respective *thara*. Since *bharani* star falls every year during the peak of the summer season, their pilgrimage is evidently painstaking. In the Bharani festival of 2019, when Kerala experienced heatwaves of about forty degrees celsius, the oracles were seen fainting from exhaustion. The chiefs of *thara* see to it that they have enough water stored in the *thara* to distribute among their group members.²¹

Intuitively, *velichappaadu* tradition is a non-Aryan tradition. This is very primitive and can be discerned in the tribal forms of worship. They represent divine on earth and their predecessors were tribal chiefs of primitive groups. *Velichappaadu* is probably a more sophisticated form of these primordial chieftains. Usually, non-Aryan gods or goddesses appear through *velichappaadu*. Aryan worship does not have this tradition; nevertheless, this cult was appropriated into Aryanism. One set of scholars observe that they were the leaders who resisted Aryanization, but as things went worse, they entreated Brahmins, and for their supporters, they arranged for a few days of worship and this resulted in Bharani festival. Others believe that these oracles organized people against Buddhists and that is why they received so many rights in this temple (Chandran 94).

Narratives

For a fact, different narratives are at play in Bharani. One of the main chronicles that are represented in the fest is the combat between Kali and Darika. Kali/Durga myth based on *Devi Mahatmyam* is as follows: Rambha and Karambha, the two sons of Danu went to the banks of the Indus and practiced asceticism. Indra killed Karambha and Rambha tried to kill himself. Fire informed the foolishness of suicide to Rambha. Rambha got boon from the fire that a son would be born to him who will conquer the three worlds. Rambha gets into intercourse with a buffalo and later Rambha was killed. The buffalo (wife of Rambha) jumped to the funeral pyre of her husband. Mahisasura rose from the womb of buffalo from the funeral pyre. Rambha also emerged from the fire because of his affection towards his son.

Mahisasura later became demon king and received a boon from Brahma that no divine spirit, demon, man, or animal can kill him. Mahisasura conquered the whole earth and asked Indra to quit heaven. Indra, the lord of the Devas, summoned Yama, Vayu, Varuna, and Kuvera among other Devas, held an assembly and urged them to be ready for war. Brahma, Vishnu, Siva, and the whole concatenation of gods joined in this battle but the invincible Mahisa emerged triumphantly. Then gods decided to create a female spirit; from the coalescence of divine verve from each god, a beautiful and radiant female form took birth. Her face was whitish; eyes were black, her lips red and the palms of her hands copper-red. She was adorned with divine ornaments and had eighteen hands. Each god gave her replicas of their weapons as *chakram*, *trissula*, conch, bow, and arrow, etc. She proceeded to the war front and Devi laughed hoarsely. Subsequently, Vasakala, Durmukha, Chiksura, Tamra, Vidalaksa, and Asiloma, commanders-in-chief of Mahisasura got killed by Kali. Hearing the death of his chiefs, King Mahisa in anger addressed the charioteer Daruka to bring his chariot. The Devi blew her conch shell when she saw Mahisasura. Enchanted by Kali, Mahisa begged her to marry him. In the battlefield, Durga killed Mahisa by thrusting the *trissula* on to his heart leaving the gods happy (Hashik 201-205).

In his book *Kali Worship in Kerala*, Achutha Menon recounts the story of *Darikavadham* and argues that the tales of most art forms related to Kali worship as *Mannar Thottam*, *Paana Thottam*, *Kalampattu*, *Brahmanipattu*, *Mudiyettupattu*, etc. are more or less same.

Version 1- *Darikavadham*

The dramatic story in detail as used in *Paana Thottam* narrated by Achutha Menon in *Kali Worship in Kerala (Part II)* is as follows:

One day Narada was on his way to Kailasa chanting verses of Lord Vishnu. Asura king Darika beholds him from his palace and asks; “Who is it? Is it not Narada? Where are you coming from and to where are you going?” Narada replies that he is coming from the abode of Lord Vishnu and is currently visiting Kailasa. This reply angers Darika who asks “Who is this Brahma, who is this Vishnu, who is this Mahadeva?” He goes on ranting against the gods. Darika brags that gods dread him and he will subsequently oblige Uma and Ganga (wives of Mahadeva) to be maids of his wife Manodari. He blusters that he will dig out Kailasa Mountain and fashion it as a field for Manodari to ‘bath and play.’ He further jives that he will capture Lord Siva himself. He then orders Narada to frequently come before him and sing verses of his praise. If Narada does not follow his orders, Darika threatens to trample him. Upon hearing this Narada, absconds in fear just as a snake flees from Garuda, a cow from leopard, a rat from the cat. In his jitters, Narada forsakes his *veena* (musical instrument) and holy books. That spurt ended only in front of Lord Siva. Then, Lord Siva enquires about his misery. Narada recapitulates the conversation between him and Darika, peppering it for effect. At this moment, Darika was following Narada to overhear the latter’s exchange with Mahadeva. Darika then ascended the northern plain of Kailasa and started cooing.

Angered, Lord Siva proclaimed, I have a reservoir of *kaalakooda* poison in my neck. From it, I can create a woman named Kali who can assassinate this demon. By

saying so, he channeled the poison into his third eye. Mahadeva was quivering with ire and the whole universe including Mahadevi scampered in fear. Consequently, from his third eye, Bhadrakali took birth. She was naked and dancing in mirth. Mahadeva decreed her to kill Darika and save the gods, sages, and Brahmins. She asked for weapons and warriors and Mahadeva provided her with sixteen kinds of weaponry. Siva gave weapons such as *kuntham* (“lance”), *murichopu* (“red color silk”), *kazhukada* (“a rod with handle”), *ishtivaal* (“a kind of sword”), *chandibhandi* (“shield”), *irumbolakka* (“iron round shaped rod”), *ambittachotta*, *paathravattaka* (“small sword”), *pettanattahasam* (“small axe”), *pallivaal* (“a sword with a curved edge”), *thrishoolam* (“trident”), *manihani* (“a bunch of bells”), *parashu* (“axe”), *vajram* (“hard metal”), *navachandrakala* (“half-moon”), and *valayam*, etc.

Then Kali asked for a vehicle. Mahadeva commanded her to make a *vethala* (“genie”) her vehicle. Mahadeva also gave her a battalion comprising of ghosts and demons. He informed her that before Kali, six goddesses went to kill Darika and they never returned. Kali assures Mahadeva that she will kill Darika and return to Kailasa with his severed head. Sitting on a red cloth sheathed over a rat she went to meet Darika in fervor and pomp accompanied by percussional music. As per Lord Siva’s order, she went to the forest and made a *vethalam* (genie) her vehicle. Afterward, the *vethalam* took her to the battlefield. *Vethalam* devoured the soldiers of Darika and made a call for the battle. Manodari, wife of Darika hears this alarming call and informs Darika four times. Every time Darika rebuffs her words; the fifth time Kali’s warriors make a noise so loud that it dismantles Darika’s empire. Alarmed, Darika sent a messenger to inquire who has come for the battle. Then, Kali’s retinue digs up a tree, pulls out its leaves, shred it into logs,

and fastens these logs onto the neck of the messenger. The poor messenger shows up at Darika's palace spinning and strolling. Darika seeing the pathetic condition of his messenger smashes these logs and saves him. He then asks, "Who is behind this? Is it a man or a woman?" Messenger replies that it is a woman and informs that he is leaving the palace as he is not ready to be killed by this woman. Darika gets angry, still, he hurls a gold bangle at the messenger for the service he has done so far. Before leaving, this messenger warns Manodari, that her husband will be slaughtered and asks her to prevent him from going to the battle.

At this time Goddess Karthyayani turns up in the battlefield and cautions Kali that Darika has with him two *brahmopadesha* ("boons from Lord Brahma") which defends him. He can be killed only if those *mantras* are known. Karthyayani tells Kali to hold Darika on the battlefield and by that time she would go to Darika's palace and procure the knowledge from his wife. Goddess Karthyayani appears before Manodari in the guise of a Brahmin woman and asks for *dakshina*. The pious Manodari gifts her with wealth and luxuriant apparel. But the Brahmin lady denies all these and asks for Brahma's advice. She also convinces Manodari that it will help her husband to win the battle. Then, Manodari reveals this *mantra* and Karthyayani goes to Kali and utter these *mantras* in her ears. At this time, Darika felt that odds are against him as his power was diminishing. He goes to Manodari and enquires what has happened. Manodari narrates in detail and she realizes the mistake she has committed. Manodari begins to cry but Darika consoles her and thereafter departs to the battlefield. Kali wipes out every one of Darika's soldiers and he fights by himself on the battlefield. Bhadrakali voices; "Hear Darika, it is not befitting to men to take arms against women." Hearing this Darika throws away his

weapon. At this time, Ganapathi destroys the vehicle of Darika. He collapsed from it and subsequently hid in the Naga world. Bhadrakali spots him and began to kill him.

Thereupon, Darika asks forgiveness to Kali and begs to spare him. At this time, Devi Manodari wakes up from her sleep and harkens the cry of Darika.

Bhadrakali hesitates to kill him as he has the benefit of many boons. Then Nandi coerces her to finish him off with her nails as Darika could not be killed by a man or using a weapon. Nandi demands her to place him in her lap as Darika could not be killed at sky and earth. And again, he asks her to kill him at dusk as he cannot be killed during day and night. Further, Nandi asks her to kill him at the threshold as he cannot be killed outdoor or indoor. Thus, Kali assassinates Darika using her nails inch by inch. She mutilates his parts and gives each part to demons to devour. But the demons were not appeased. Kali feels sad that she and her soldiers could not get enough to satisfy their thirst. They proceed to Kailasa in frenzy and Mahadeva feels that she will eradicate him too. Therefore, he bids two young sages to suck her breasts in order to calm her down. Thus, the one who sucked her left breast is Kshetrapala and the right breast is Veerabhadra. By this, half of her anger subsided. But still, she ventured to kill Mahadeva. Then Mahadeva started to dance in a furor. Seeing this Bhadrakali also danced alongside and thus she felt mollified. Mahadeva asked her, "Are your anger and thirst mitigated?" She replied, "Anger subsided but not thirst." Hearing this Siva ordained her to drink water from the oceans. She replied that it would not satisfy her. Then Mahadeva cuts his small finger and she drank his blood and got appeased. Mahadeva then ordered her to go to the earth and be the guardian of mortal beings. Kali feels that they will not accept her as a goddess and will call her a beast. But Siva consoles her that they will accept her and

worship her with *kalam* (“picture drawn on the floor using five colors as an offering to the deity”) and *pattu* (“devotional songs accompanying *kalam*”). Also, he proclaimed that those who do not worship her will be vulnerable to ninety-six deadly diseases. She accepts this and prostrates before Mahadeva with the severed head of Darika. Mahadeva asks her to hold Darika’s head in her left hand and she advances to earth (11-44).

Version 2- *Darikavadham*

Hashik N. K in his thesis titled *River as a Cultural Construct: Myth and Ritual on the Banks of Bharathappuzha* (2012) from his fieldworks identifies three versions of *Darikavadham* popular in Kerala: Darika received a boon from Brahma that from each drop of his blood thousands of Darika would emerge along with a secret *mantra* and special weapon. He began to torture and murder innocent people and saints in the wake of his newly acquired boons. When Siva came to know of this crisis, he created Kali and equipped her with weapons. Bhadrakali disguised as an old woman cunningly procures the *mantra* from Darika’s wife Manodari and thus killed Darika. *Vetalam* drank his blood on the battlefield not allowing it to spill on the ground. Mandodari upon discovering Kali’s trickery does penance and Lord Siva gives her the boon of the sweat of smallpox to take revenge for Darika’s death. She threw sweat drops on Bhadrakali and Kali soon fell sick and collapsed. Ghantakarnan licked the whole of his sister’s body except the face out of modesty leaving it scarred. In fury, Kali returned to Kailasam holding Darika’s head in her left hand. To propitiate her Siva asked his daughter Kali to dance on his naked body. She does so and was satisfied and thereafter was worshipped by mortals as Goddess Kali (210).

Version 3- *Darikavadham*

The demoness Danavathi after procuring boon from Brahma conceived and gave birth to Darika. When he grew up, he did penance and secured a boon from Lord Siva that no man can ever kill him. Fed up by his atrocities Lord Vishnu disguised as Narada appeared before Darika. He informed Darika that his boon is incomplete and could one day get killed by a woman. An angry Darika rushed to Kailasa and got into an altercation with Lord Siva. Angered, Siva cursed him that all his boons will go futile and he will die from the stab of a *shoola* (“trident”) essentially by a woman. Darika then did penance and received boons from Brahma. Later Siva, Vishnu, and Brahma created Karthyayani, Vishnukali, and Brahmanikali respectively to destroy Darika. However, these three leaders get defeated in the war. One day Narada was on his way to Kailasa, he crosses the gate of Darika’s fort and receives news about the dogmatism of Darika. Siva asked Narada to fetch two baskets of flowers from Darika’s garden. Narada was caught in this act by the guardians of Darika and a black colored mark was etched on the forehead of Narada. A furious Siva then created Kali and killed Darika as detailed in the first version (Hashik 211).

Version 4- *Darikavadham*

Dinapathi, a demoness receives a boon from Brahma and gave birth to Pilladanavan who became the King of Darikapuri. Upon realizing that his whole clan was killed by Lord Vishnu, he took an oath to take revenge upon Vishnu. For this, he started doing severe penance. Even after rigorous penance, Brahma did not appear before him. Exasperated, he began to cut off his head. No sooner had the first drop of blood fallen on

the ground, and then Lord Brahma appeared. He gave a boon of secret *mantras*, inevitability, and ability to create thousands of demons from his drop of blood. Further, he could not be killed by a man or weapon, inside or outside, at day or night, in sky and earth. But if a third person comes to know the *mantra* he would be killed. While leaving, Brahma asks him the reason why he does not want a boon not to be killed by a woman. He replies that such a thing is ridiculous and unthinkable. Enraged Brahma cursed Darika that a woman would kill him and no boon can save him. Ignoring this prophecy, Darika proceeds. Midway he meets Goddess Kartyayani and later *vethala*. He insults both of them dismissing the former as a woman and later as a demon. They curse him and vows to take revenge on the battlefield in the future. Gods then create Brahmani, Maheswari, Kaumari, Indrani, and Varahi to destroy him but they miserably failed. Later Kali was created by Lord Siva and the later events unfold as in the first version of the *Darikavadham* (Hashik 212).

Gender disparities, the overpowering sense of motherhood, and pagan cult forms surface in this narrative. Also, a performative element is very much conspicuous in this story of deceit, violence, blood, and gore. In applying Vladimir Propp's morphology of fairy tales to different versions of narratives behind Bharani, many 'functions' can be identified. Propp finds that 'function' is an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action. They serve as stable, constant elements in a tale, independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled. They constitute the fundamental components of a tale and the number of functions known to the fairy tale is limited in number (25). These functions aid in deconstructing the varying stories to certain similar recurring patterns and behaviors. Propp through the analysis of fairy tales

sought to bring out a universal trope of tales; however, his universalistic claims have been subject to criticism. By analyzing the techniques of the tale or narratives behind Bharani, an attempt is made to subvert the politics of omission, and marginalization as evident in the subplot of Manodari and nail down the major elements that are identifiable in various versions of the Kali-Darika and the Kannaki-Kovalan story.

Morphology of Durga/Kali- Mahisha/Darika Combat

Initial situation (α): Birth of Mahisha/ Darika is recounted

1. Villainy (A): Darika/Mahisha attains boons and attacks devas and sages
2. Lack (a.): The whole world is under chaos
3. Mediation (B^1): Realizing the danger, devas/Siva create Kali/Durga
4. Beginning counteraction (C): Kali accepts the mission
5. Departure (\uparrow): Kali leaves to find her vehicle
6. Receipt of a magical agent, agent is directly transferred (F^1): Kali is given weapons and boons
7. Agents placed at the disposal of hero (F^9): Vethalam becomes her vehicle
8. Spatial transference between two kingdoms, guidance (G^2): She on the back of *vethalam* goes to the battlefield
9. Struggle H^1 : Kali enters into a war with Darika in an open field
10. Victory (I^1): Kali kills Darika in open combat
11. Lack liquidated (K): Harmony brought back
12. Return(\downarrow):Kali reaches earth

The schema of the story can be noted as:

Aa.B¹C[↑]F¹F⁹G²H¹I¹K[↓]

Morphology of Subplot of Manodari- Kali Combat

Initial Situation: (α)

1. Absentation (β): Darika goes to the battlefield
2. Interdiction (γ): Manodari chants the secret *mantra* not supposed to be revealed to another person
3. Delivery (ζ): Goddess Kartyayani/Kali knows about the *mantra* and goes to her palace
4. Trickery (η^1): Kartyayani/Kali disguises as Brahmin woman and persuades Manodari to reveal *mantra*
5. Complicity (θ): Manodari submits to her deception
6. Villainy A¹⁴: Kali kills Darika in the battlefield
7. Lack (a.): Manodari set out to get boon from Siva
8. The first function of the donor (D): She does severe penance
9. The magical agent is directly transferred (F¹): She attains the boon of smallpox
10. Struggle, direct combat (H¹): She encounters Kali and hurls smallpox at her
11. Branding (J.): Kali cuts Manodari's hands
12. Victory (I.): Kali is defeated

Scheme of the story is: $\beta\gamma\zeta\eta^1\theta A^{14} a.DF^1H^1J.I.$

In analyzing the different popular versions, these stories seem to have one main plot of Kali- Darika conquest and two sub-plots of Mahisa/Darika birth and story of Manodari (absent in the story of Mahishasura). The main plot structure moves from a 'lack (a)' i.e, loss of natural order by Mahisha/ Darika to a relative 'liquidation of the lack (K)' i.e, reinstatement of order by the destruction of evil force by Kali. Also, the textual analysis of the subplot of Manodari reveals her underlying heroic nature. Though Manodari is the wife of a demon, she is a pious wife and falls a victim to the trickery of gods as in the popular Mahabali myth of Kerala where the noble demon King Mahabali is thrust to the netherworld by a Brahmin boy Vamana (Lord Vishnu in disguise). Thus, she

attains divinity and is worshipped along with Kali in Kodungallur temple as Goddess Vasoorimala (The goddess of smallpox).

Table 1. 1. Main Characters of Durga/Kali- Mahisa/Darika Stories

Story	Main Characters
Durga-Mahisasura story	Durga, Rambha, Mahisa, Indra, Agni, Buffalo, Mahisasura, Brahma, Yama, Vayu, Varuna, Brihaspati, Siva, Vishnu, Kartikeya, Tamra, Vasakala, Darmukha, Chiksura, Vidalaksa, Asiloma, Daruka
1 st version of <i>Darikavadham</i>	Darika, Narada, Siva, Bhadrakali, Vethala, Manodhari, Kartyayani (Brahmin lady), Ganapathi, Messenger
2 nd version of <i>Darikavadham</i>	Brahma, Darika, Siva, Bhadrakali, Kartyayani (Brahmin lady), Manodari, Gantakarnan
3 rd version of <i>Darikavadham</i>	Danavathi, Pannivakthan, Darika, Bhadrakali, Vishnu, Narada, Vethala, Karthyayani (Brahmin lady), Manodhari
4 th version of <i>Darikavadham</i>	Narada, Subrahmanya, Indra, Yama, Manodhari, Vethala, Karthyayani (Brahmin lady), Brahma, Vishnu, Bhikara King, Dinapathi, Pilladanavan (Darika), Bhadrakali

Another important point in question is the disparities detectable in the story of the Kali-Darika battle. Each region offers a different version regarding where Bhagavathi resided after the execution of Darika. In songs popular in Palakkad and Malappuram regions, it is believed that Kali merged with the deity of Kodungallur. Other versions note

that Kali resided at Tirumandhamkunnu. However, this story of conquest between Bhagavathi and Darika forms the major trope for many temple ritual dramas such as *Mudiyettu*, *Patayani*, *Teyyam*, *Tira*, *Vellat*, *Tiyattu*, and *Paana* of lower castes and *Chakyar Koothu*, *Kootiyattam*, *Krishnanattam*, *Kathakali*, etc. of upper castes (Caldwell 30). Caldwell notes that *Darikavadham* (“The killing of Darika”), is an oral tale apparently indigenous to Kerala and well known there. While this legend shares a number of motifs found in other goddess traditions throughout South Asia, its essential features are unique to Kerala. The origin myth of Bhadrakali is published in Malayalam and Sanskrit as *Bhadrakali Mahatmyam*, *Bhadrolpatti*, and *Dharikavadham/Dharukavadham* (Death of Daruka/Darika). Major elements of story resemble portions of the *Devi Mahatmyam* and the *Devi Bhagavati Purana*, but it is the *Linga Purana* which comes closest to the Kerala story, and actually mentions the demon Darika. Despite the presence of similar motifs in these sources, the full Kerala form of *Darikavadham* does not appear in any of the Sanskrit *Puranas* and appears to have its origin in oral tradition (Caldwell, “Whose” 92). This mythical battle has drawn various interpretations and has been seen as representing the conflict that occurred between Aryans and Dravidians, Bhagavathi representing the tribal or Dravidian form. Though the fest throughout represents the war fought between Kali and Darika and her subsequent victory, Darika is more or less absent from Bharani. He never materializes before us in any form. V. George Mathew argues that Kali-Darika combat represents the historical conquest of Kerala by Assyrian invaders who came by sea in pre-historical times. He further suggests that the *suras* (“divine beings”) were the ancient Syrians; whereas the *asuras* (“demons”) were Assyrians (Caldwell, “Whose” 94). It seems likely that Bhagavathi as she appears in Kerala temples

today represents an ancient indigenous deity, whose nature was modified and adapted over time to suit the ethos of various district groups. The Bhagavathi of high caste temple dramas is an Aryanized, Sanskritized, version of the tribal deity, who yet maintains many of her original characteristics, including possession, dancing to spirit-drums, and use of fire and blood sacrifice. Hashik proposes that Bhadrakali disguising as a Brahmin lady and learning *mantra* from Mandodhari (Manodari in other versions) suggests the migration of Brahmins into the Kerala soils and killing Darika with the knowledge (*mantra*) acquired from Mandodhari implies the Brahmin superiority over the locals. He also points to the ancient matriarchal tradition that discerns the feminine form Bhadrakali as supreme and Manodhari as the protector of Darika (218). The Goddess today, as in centuries past, represents the political, economic, and spiritual power. Whoever controls the Goddess and her temples control the important resources and earn repute. Thinking along this line, the identity of Kali is shifted conveniently between the two nodal points of Aryan and non-Aryan goddess to serve the purpose of despotic powers.

Achutha Menon opines that the Kali and Siva worship started long before BC 3000 and Siva worship is an important component of Kali worship (Kali is the daughter of Siva). The Dravidian groups who migrated from Indus Valley to Southern India embraced their deities and Aryans had no other choice than assimilating these gods or goddesses. In Kerala, Kali has other names as Bhadrakali, Karimkali, and Kandomkali, etc. (12). Chandran also observes that the Darika is unique to Kerala. His story might have originated before the coming of Aryans. But in the story, the presence of Narada (who is an Aryan god) is intriguing. Most probably, these characters may have been conveniently added on to the original story much later. He suggests that Darika is absent

in Aryan *Puranas* and places Darika in the Southern part of Kodungallur. He observes that Darika might have been a warrior in this region (77). Contrary to this opinion, in the Mahisa-Kali legend popular in northern parts of India, Darika appears as the charioteer of Mahisa.

In *Keralathinte Samskarika Charithram (A Cultural History of Kerala)*, it is stated that Dravidians predominantly worshipped mother goddess. Before Dravidians, Proto- Astraloid groups worshipped her. But she gained more popularity with the merging of the Dravidians and Proto-Astraloid groups. Lord Siva was worshipped in Indus Valley Civilization in *linga* form as well. By the time of Sanga age, the main deities of Dravidians were Mayon (Vishnu), Cheyon (Muruga), Karuna, Indra, and Kottavai, etc. (Gopalakrishnan 37). Kottavai was the goddess of Maravar clan. Chera Kings performed a ritual sacrifice to Kottavai in Ayirimala before proceeding to the battlefield. Kottavai later transfigured into Parvati, consort of Lord Siva (Gopalakrishnan 38). Additionally, Ajith Kumar N. in *Kerala Samskaram (Culture of Kerala)* assumes that since there is no *la* sound in Sanskrit, Kali is accredited to be a Dravidian goddess. It is also posited that her real name is Mahakali as the ‘Sakthi of Great Destructor Siva.’ Also, she is designated Kali as she is fancied to be dark in complexion. Principally, three types of worship are performed in Kali worship; *tamasa*, *rajasa*, *sathvika*. In temples facing east, *sathvika* worship is followed. In temples facing north, *rajasa* is prominent, where *guruti* and sacrifice of meat and alcohol, etc. are conducted. More so, performing arts as *Kaliyoottu* (Southern Kerala) and *Mudiyettu* (Central Kerala) are based on *Darikavadham*. According to Achutha Menon, Siva and Kali lost their unchallenged position during the Vedic and post-Vedic period, whereas in the previous period both

these divinities held sway in the imagination of the people. Menon assigns the myth of the killing of Darika contained in the group of ritual songs, to the period when the Vedic gods had not established themselves as supreme. The story centers around Siva and Kali and the Vedic gods are playing only a secondary role in the whole myth (16).

Sarah Caldwell discusses in detail the stature of Kali and makes an effort to place her in the realm of the religious and socio-political context of India. When we analyze the Kali worship, the geographical areas where Kali worship is prominent is at the margins; Nepal, Assam, Bengal, Bihar, Sri Lanka, Kerala, and Himachal Pradesh. One possible explanation is a historical “squeezed out from the middle” interpretation (Caldwell, “Margins” 261). According to this view, as successive waves of immigrants and dominant cultures from Aryans to Mughals entered South Asia, they imposed their languages, religion, and cultures on the central dominant areas, the seats of political power. She figures out that as Aryans and Mughal conceptions of deity were primarily male, an indigenous older female-centered religious tradition (typical of agriculturalists) might have been suppressed, forced into marginal areas, and allowed to flourish in regions of less political influence and importance. As rulers moved into these regions they co-opted existing goddess worship traditions, sanskritizing them and appropriating them into high-caste temples. Caldwell notes that Kali is neither marginal nor extreme in the places where she is worshipped. She is right at the center, the very source of life (“Margins” 250). Whether she is a demon/divinity is difficult to interpret and is open to the devotees. In her, perceivable is a coalescence of both these constitutions.

Seemingly, the original native deity was Kottuvai, who was later renamed by Brahmins as Bhadrakali. As hinted above, Aryan/Assyrians were patriarchal and male-

dominated whereas the Dravidian or tribal culture was predominantly matrilineal. They had a face-to-face conflict and although the story portrays an entirely different picture of the absolute triumph of the feminine power, the female-centered culture plausibly gave in for a more male-centered Aryan culture for real. This verifies the disappearance of female oracles from temple rituals to be replaced by male oracles. Narendra Nath Bhattacharya assumes that the incorporation of various local Kali-like goddesses into the Great Mahadevi Tradition was a tactic of the political center to assimilate non-caste tribal groups into the dominant commune. The pre-Vedic Mother Goddess Cult was negated by the Vedic religion, and the latter, in its turn, was also negated by other religious principles like Vaishnavism, Saivism, Buddhism, and Jainism, etc. These principles were evidently new in the form and content, but they had at their bottom the working of some pre-Vedic ideas. The differences between the original pre-Vedic ideas and their re-established forms are therefore qualitative (Bhattacharya 119). This is a reasonable attestation that can be traced back to the history of Kodungallur as well. In Kodungallur, even Brahmins felt the pressure to accept and assimilate Bhagavathi. But their earlier attitude towards the goddess is conspicuous in a popular story which expounds that the whole of Brahmins had to leave Kodungallur forever as they tantalized Kodungallur Bhagavathi calling her 'Kali Varasyaar.' Varasyaar is a term used to denote the upper caste women and their disgust is apparent.

Another popular narrative that is thought-out to be the setting of Bharani festival is the intriguing story of Kannaki and Kovalan from the Tamil epic *Silappadikaram* written by Ilango Adigal, the young brother of Chera King Chenguttuvan. It is an earthly story with humane bent though Jains believe Kannaki to be a Jain goddess and worship

her as Pathini Devi in Kodungallur. Various versions of this narrative can be figured out; however, this study focuses on three popular versions linking it to three major ideologies.

Version- 1

The story of Kannaki from the English translation of the epic *Silappadikaram* by V. R Ramachandra Dikshitar can be recapitulated as follows: Kannaki was married at the age of twelve to Kovalan, the young son of Masattuvan, a rich merchant of Pukar, the capital city of Karikalacholan. After a few years, Kovalan fell in love with Matavi, a dancer from the *devadasi* community and he departed with her. Later, their daughter was named Manimegalai. For twelve years Kannaki observed extreme penance and austerities and distributed her wealth among the poor. In time, Kovalan became bankrupt due to his extravaganzas and beseeched Kannaki for aid. The righteous Kannaki handed over one of her gold anklets studded with precious pearls and accompanied him to Madurai. On their way, they worship at several sacred places belonging to all three major religions, namely a temple of Manivannan, seven Buddhist viharas built by Indra, and moonstone built by Jains. In Madurai, they stayed with Kavunthi, a nun and she leaves them in the care of a tribal woman named Madari. While Kovalan left for town to sell the anklet, some youngsters began to woo Kannaki uttering licentious words in the belief that she would be elated to hear their erotic speech. But, she cursed them and as a result, they transformed into foxes. In the town, Kovalan fell into a trap of a jeweler and was dragged into the court of the King on the allegation that it was the stolen anklet of the Queen. The Pandya King Nedumchezhiyan ordered the beheading of Kovalan and was promptly executed. Kannaki hearing this cataclysmic tale hurried towards Kovalan but saw him lying in a pool of blood. Kannaki went to the King and asked him to produce the anklet.

She broke the anklet, and pearls fell from it. The Queen's anklet contained no pearls and the King lamented the execution of an innocent man and perished on the spot. Seeing her husband collapse the Queen also relinquished her life. Kannaki in rancor advanced to the jeweler to punish him. She plucked her left breast with her right hand and hurled it at the city of Madurai. The whole town went into flames except Brahmins, cows, the old, children, noblemen, and chaste women as per her command to the God of fire. She then proceeded towards the hills of the Chera Kingdom where she would meet with her husband on the fourteenth day. She reached Kodungallur and on the fourteenth day a young man bedecked in jewelry and crown approached her and Kannaki scorched her body in yogic fire and they both ascended to the sky. The Tamil poet Chathanar narrated these events to Chera King and later a temple was consecrated by King Senguttuvan in Vanji (Kodungallur) for Goddess Pattini (3-8).

Version- 2

V. G Nair in his article "Kodungallur Bhagavati" that appeared in Jain Journal in 1986 provides a Jain version of this story where Kannaki, Kovalan, and the King are seen as Jain followers; Kavunthi Adigal is posited as a Jain nun and Matari, a friend of Kannaki becomes the first oracle of Kannaki (57-64). Neelakanda Shastri claims that Kannaki is a Jain goddess. With the decline of Jainism in Kerala and the revival of Shaivism, the first target of the attack was Kodungallur Bhagavathi (64). V. G Nair opines that the Bharani festival is an attempt to degrade the Goddess and question "the impeachable character, chastity and fidelity of Kannaki" to Kovalan (64). The Kannaki-Kovalan story prevailing in Southern India is a similar version but the Jain element is evidently missing from the story. Kannaki is not a goddess but a loyal wife whose

pativratya entails her divine powers and after destroying Madurai she finally merges with the spirit of Kodungallur Bhagavathi.

Version- 3

Chummar Choondal in his book *Studies in Folklore of Kerala* (1978) records different versions of Kannaki cult. A version connecting Kali and Kannaki myth is as follows: In the second part of *Tottampattu*, how Kali assumed the form of Kannaki is construed. According to it, after the assassination of Darika, Bhadrakali incarnated as Kali in the form of a young child. The King of North Quilon (present-day Kollam) was childless till the age of sixty. He went to Kailasa to pray to Lord Siva. With the aid of Vishnu, Siva subjected him to the sufferings of hell, purged him, and granted his wish and gave him a boy Kovalan. His fate was sealed: the boy was to marry at the age of seven, to become a trader at nine and was to be executed at the age of sixteen for no reason of his at all. Siva gave Kali as a daughter to the King of Southern Quilon. At the age of seven, she was married to the King of North Quilon. On the way home via a sea route, a goldsmith presented her an anklet, but it accidentally fell into the sea as she withdrew her hand. The goldsmith threatened her that he would avenge the deed by the execution of her husband. At the age of eighteen, the King became a merchant. Kannaki gave him her anklets for sale. He took the anklet to the goldsmith and he in turn took it to the Pandya King and informed that it was the anklet stolen from the Queen. Instantly, the young man was tried and executed. An angered Bhadrakali exterminated the whole clan of the goldsmith. Pandya King was also exterminated and his head was taken to Kailasa and placed near the head of the Darika. Later a temple was built in Kodungallur where she installed her husband. In this narrative as well, the basic storyline is the same with

certain modifications made regarding the names and places. Underscoring all allusions, this story validates the singularity of Kali and Kannaki, tacitly appropriating Kannaki into the Hindu pantheon (19).

Apparently, in the first two versions, characters are to an extent the same, however, in the second version a conscious attempt to infiltrate Jaina epistemologies into the narrative is well perceivable. Probably, the third version is a much later account, weaved in the backdrop of Kerala, offering validation for the appropriation of Kannaki into the Kali cult. The epic *Silappadikaram* has held a major role in the emergence of Korravai and presents the epic as reflective of a time when no religious tradition had gained an upper hand (Rani 12).

Morphology of Kannaki-Kovalan Myth

Initial situation: (α)

1. Absentation (β .): Kovalan goes to Madurai to sell anklet
2. Trickery (η .): Goldsmith deceives him to take possession of his anklet
3. Complicity (θ .): King submits to this trickery
4. Villainy (A.¹⁴): King beheads Kovalan for stealing Queen's anklet
5. Lack (a.): Kannaki becomes a widow
6. Departure (\uparrow .): Kannaki leaves home and reaches the palace
7. Struggle (H.): King knows the truth, dies; Queen dies
8. Victory, killed without a preliminary fight (I⁵): Kannaki then destroys goldsmith clan
9. Lack liquidated, the slain person is revived (K.⁹): Finally, she moves to Kodungallur where she meets the spirit of Kovalan
10. Return (\downarrow): They both ascend to the sky

The scheme of this story can be noted as:

B.η. θ.A.¹⁴ a.↑.H.I⁵K.⁹↓

Table 1. 2. Main Characters of Kannaki- Kovalan Stories

Story	Main Characters
1 st Version	Kannaki (Hindu), Kovalan (Hindu), Madhavi, Manimegalai, Kavunthi, King Nedumchezhiyan and his Queen, King's jeweler, Chera King Senguttuvan, Indra, Kamadeva, Madari
2 nd Version	Kannaki (Jain), Kovalan, Madhavi, Manimeghalai, Machottan Chetty, KavunthiAdigal (Jain nun), Pandya King Nedumceliyan (Jain follower) and his Queen, King's jeweler, Chera King Chenguttuvan, Matari
3 rd Version	Kali, Kovalan, King of North Quilon, Lord Siva, Lord Vishnu, King of South Quilon, Goldsmith, Pandya King, and Queen

Apparently, in the first two versions, characters are to an extent the same; however, in the second version a conscious attempt to infiltrate Jaina epistemologies into the narrative is well perceivable. Probably, the third version is a much later account, weaved in the backdrop of Kerala, offering validation for the appropriation of Kannaki into the Kali Cult. The epic *Silappadikaram* has held a major role in the emergence of Korravai and presents the epic as reflective of a time when no religious tradition had gained an upper hand (Rani 12). In the few centuries that divided the *Sangam* age and Ilango, peninsular India witnessed several changes. Buddhism and Jainism had seeped into sections of the population. Similarly, deities of the north, notably Vishnu, Krishna,

and Indra had become the part of the religious life of the people. “Lesser gods like Narada and Kama had a role too. Goddesses like Lakshmi now shared space with Korravai of the *Sangam* era” (Rani 46). Thus, it was ostensibly written in a transition stage and the older and newer traditions co-existed without much friction.

V. G Nair states that Goddess Kannaki is popularly known as Kodungallur Amma and Bhagavathi among the people. The other scriptural names are Ottamulachi and Pathini Devi- the one-breasted chaste wife and goddess (64). He also associates *velichappadu* to the character Matari, who became possessed by the spirit of Kannaki in the consecration ceremony of Kannaki temple. Chummar Choondal suggests that the Kannaki legend of *Chilapathikaram* is deep-rooted in the folklore of Kerala. The geographical, historical, and linguistic features of the legend helped its spread throughout Kerala. The folkloristic tradition emphasizes the relation of Bhadrakali to Kannaki in *Tottampattukal* in general and particularly in ritualistic dances religious ceremonies, ancient art forms, traditional performances, etc. (17). Among the *Pazhayapattukal* (old songs), the earliest type of literature in Malayalam, *Tottam Pattu* (religious ballads) which is called *Bhadrakalipattu* is of sizeable collection among the other group of songs. *Tottampattu* originated with the Kannaki legend and flourished under the influence of the Kali Cult in Kerala (Choondal 17). The theme of the Bharani song is related to Bhadrakali in general. But Choondal suggested that the traditional songs sung during the Bharani festival are associated with Kannaki and Kovalan (22). This religious festival and the song recitals enrich the traditional belief that the Goddess Kannaki is installed at Kodungallur Temple. *Bharanipattukal* takes a diversion from the direct story but gets involved in the legend (22). In this explication, Choondal associates Kannaki to the

Chetty tribe and not to Buddhism/ Jainism. In *Kannaki Thottam, Manimanka Thottam, Nallamma Thottam*, the story of *Chilappadikaram* forms the main backdrop. *Mudippurai Thottam* plays Kannaki and Kovalan legend. It is popular in Southern Travancore especially in the villages of Trivandrum district. Choondal assumes that they have a similarity to songs sung in Kodungallur.

Ranjini Obeyesekere and Gananath Obeyesekere's comprehensive work on the Pattini Cult describes in detail the worship of this goddess in South-East Sri Lanka and argues that Kannaki/Pattini, as a goddess type, may have her origins in the worship of the *mate defame* of Mesopotamia, the grain mother celebrated for thousands of years in the orgiastic, sacrificial rites of initiated devotees (530-34). In the preface to *Secret Chamber*, P. G Govinda Menon questions V. T Induchoodan's theory that Kannaki's remains are kept in the secret chamber in the temple. He opines that being a Hindu temple, it is "repugnant to the Hindus to have the remains of the dead interred in their temples or anywhere near them." Detailing the idea, he asserts that *Kaavutheendal* is "symbolic of the capture of a non-Hindu place of worship by the Hindus" (iv). This assertion again leads us to the mysteries of the inception of this temple. Though Sankaracharya initiated the movement of the destruction of Buddhism, he could not have achieved it in his lifetime and must have been carried out by his predecessors. Thus, Govinda Menon feels that Kodungallur temple gradually transformed from a Kannaki temple to that of Bhagavathi temple because Hinduism as we know tends to absorb and assimilate cultural variations. He considers this transformation as the reason behind the relative absence of Kannaki figure in the Kerala folk songs and literature.

Induchudan directly links the Bharani festival to the Kannaki Cult and not to Kali. Be it Kannaki or Kali, the object of study here is to understand how the devotees view the deity and how they interact with it. It is understood that much of the occupants of the place are unaware of the presence of Kannaki spirit and they worship Kali as their mother goddess. It may be the humane element in the story that might have triggered this sentiment in the devotees. Kannaki is a human character who through her *paathivratya* (“loyalty to husband”) gets the power to curse and takes revenge upon those who wrecked her family. Though the plot structure of Kannaki- Kovalan moves from ‘lack’ to ‘liquidation,’ ostensibly, the story is a subjective one in contrast to the universal theme of Bhadrakali myth. The human mind has a fascination for the other-worldly and non-coherent forms of existence which finds expression in their forms of worship and behaviors.

To conclude, these assorted stories with a blend of myths and legends appear incredible to the modern minds but they communicate so much about the morale, social predicaments, and value systems of the times in which they burgeoned and disseminated. To the primitive minds, stories were a powerful apparatus instigating behavior and thought processes. Through the different versions of the same story, we can perceive certain unvoiced agendas or agencies at play. While articulating them, each group interweaved their sentiments and axioms into the fabric of the story and made it their own. We see such appropriations by Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism in different versions of the Kannaki chronicles. They certainly hint at the times when each group asserted their power and tried to take hold of the temple jurisdiction and the support of

common people. Its elementary oral nature veritably lends it a versatility befitting to the realignments in consonance with time and space.

Notes

1. After about 31 days of *Cherubharani Kodiyettam*, *Kozhikallu Moodal* is performed. These days vary each year according to Malayalam Calendar (*kollam era*) of Kerala. The twelve months are *Chingam*, *Kanni*, *Thulam*, *Vrishchikam*, *Dhanu*, *Makaram*, *Kumbham*, *Meenam*, *Medam*, *Edavam*, *Mithunam*, and *Karkitakam*. The first month corresponds to August-September months of the English calendar. Thus, Bharani falls in the eighth month of the Malayalam Calendar. Apart from seven days, there are 27 stars as *Aswathy*, *Bharani*, *Karthika*, *Rohini*, *Makayiram*, *Thiruvathira*, *Punartham*, *Pooyam*, *Ayilyam*, *Makam*, *Pooram*, *Uthram*, *Atham*, *Chithira*, *Chothi*, *Visakham*, *Anizham*, *Thriketta*, *Moolam*, *Pooradam*, *Uthradam*, *Thiruvonam*, *Avittam*, *Chathayam*, *Pooruruttathi*, *Uthrattathi*, and *Revathi*.
2. Details of Malayalam date, corresponding English date and rituals of Bharani 2019 as follows:

Kumbham Bharani- February 11- *Cherubharani Kodiyettam*

Meenam Thiruvonam- February 31- *Kozhikallu Moodal*

Meenam Avittam- April 1- Oracles start coming to Kodungallur

Meenam Chathayam- April 2 – Pattarya Offering of *kaazhchakula* to Thamburan

Meenam Pooruruttathi- April 3- Offering grain for *variyari* pudding

Meenam Uthrattathi- April 4- Groups of oracles come from native places

Meenam Revathi- April 5- Groups of oracles come from native places

Meenam Revathi- April 6- *Revathi Vilakku*

Meenam Aswathi- April 7- *Kaavutheendal*

Meenam Bharani- April 8- Festival ends

3. Kaavil Veetil Unnichekkann received *pattu* and *thaali* from Thamburan for *Cheru Bharani Kodiyettam*. “*Sreekurumbhakkavil Cherubharani Kodiyettu Innu.*” *Mathrubhumi* [Thrissur], 11 Mar. 2019, pp. 11. Kaavil Veetil Appukuttan and Kaavil Veetil Satheesh did the offering of *pattu* and *thaali* in 2019 Bharani. “*Kurumbhakkavil Kodikkoorakal Uyarnnu.*” *Mathrubhumi* [Thrissur], 12 Mar. 2019, pp. 12.

The myth that validates this exercise is that when Kali returned from the battlefield, her attire was immersed in blood. So, the Thattan community presented her with a *pattu* (red garment) and a gold *thaali* (Chandran 87).

4. The present Kodungallur Valiya Thamburan is Rama Varma Raja.
5. Devaswom Assistant Commissioner E. K Manoj and Dewaswom Manager Yahuladas offered *kaazhchakula* to Thamburan. “*Bharani Chadangukalkku Anumathi Vangi.*” *Mathrubhumi* [Thrissur], 30 Mar. 2019, pp. 4.
6. Representing Bhagavathi House, Ragesh, Sujith, Ananthakrishnan, Sujay, Prabav, Devadevan, and Brahmadathan performed rituals. Representing Tacholi House, Manikoth Vijayaraghavan, Parambath Balakurupp, Sooraj, Meppat Radhakrishnan, Ayanjeri Narayana Kurupp, Parambath Radhakrishnan, and Jayachandran offered cocks. “*Kozhikallumoodalinu Murathettathe Ithavanayum Avakashikaleti.*” *Mathrubhumi* [Thrissur], 01 Apr. 2019, pp. 4.

7. Pattarya Samajam Secretary V. Unnikrishnan and members offered *kaazhchakula* to Thamburan in 2019 Bharani. “*Pattaryasamudhayam Kaazhchakula Samarppichu.*” *Mathrubhumi* [Thrissur], 02 Apr. 2019, pp. 11.

It is their privilege to sacrifice all the cocks brought by the devotees. They have additional privileges of collecting the *vazhipadu* money from the thresholds and coin box and giving to the collection center of the temple during Bharani days, to perform the ritual *Thavidu Aadikuka* to the deity *Thavitumuthi*, to raise banners at northern portico at 3 a.m on the day of *bharani*, to end the rituals of Bharani by performing *Kooshmandabali* in northern and western entrance, etc.

8. Bharani songs are first sung by a group from Vallachira. Similar defamatory singing practices are found in Cherthala Pooram, Kottiyoor Temple, Sankara Narayanan Kovil in the district of Tirunelveli, and Gangamma Jatara in Tirupati (Chandran 83).
9. Vallon is a title given by Kodungallur Thamburan. They belong to the Pulaya caste group. Their ancestral house name is Payyambili.
10. Present Palaykal Velan is Devidasan. He is the son of Chiraykal Kunju from the west of Arakulam in Kodungallur and has been performing for 49 years. He has been part of Bharani festival from the age of eight. “*Devidasan Vrathathilanu, Aswathi Kaavutheendal Chadanginayi.*” *Mathrubhumi* [Thrissur], 04 Apr. 2019, pp. 4. *Thanthri* of Kodungallur belongs to Mekkad Thamarassery Mana. They claim this lineage to have a tradition of 400 years (Adarsh 326).
11. The three *adikal* (priests) privileged to do *Trichandanacharthu* is Guruvayur Kuranjiyur Neelath Madam Pradeep Kumar Adikal (62), doing pooja for 27th

time, Kodungallur Kunnath Madam Parameswaranunni Adikal (70), doing pooja for the seventh time, and Kuranjiyur Madathil Madam Raveendranathan Adikal (58), doing pooja for the eighteenth time. They observe severe *vrata* (“pious observances”) from the day before this *pooja* and it reportedly lasts for *ezharayamam* (“about three hours”), from noon to 3 p.m. It is conducted after shutting the door of the main shrine; *trichandanam*, a mix of tender coconut water (from cutting the lower part of tender coconut) with turmeric is smeared on the deity accompanied by occult chantings. “*Trichandanacharthu Poojakalkayi Adikalmar Sreekurumbakkavilekku.*” *Mathrubhumi* [Thrissur], 05 April 2019, pp. 13.

12. The *valkannadi* (“hand mirrors”) commonly used in worship in Kerala is symbolic of the *yoni*. Also, lotus stands for *yoni*. *Kumari Pooja* (“worship of girls”) is obviously a part of *Kaula* worship (Chandran 110).
13. Kothaparamb Arayamparamb Veetil Jinu Janardhanan handed over tax to Thamburan in 2019 Bharani.
14. Also, revenue officials, R. D. O Kartyayani Devi, Tahasildar K. V Thomas, Village Officer Jayanthi, Municipal Chairman K. R Jaithran, District Police Superintendent Vijaya Kumaran, DYSP Muralidharan, and Dewaswom Board President A. B Mohanan and members C. M Madhu, Asst. Commissioner E. K Manoj and Manager Yahuladas received *pudava* from Valiya Thamburan in *Nilapadu thara*.
 “*Aacharanushtanangalkayi Vrathanishtayode Avakashikaleti.*” *Mathrubhumi* [Thrissur], 08 Apr. 2019, pp. 04.

15. *Variyari* grain is offered to the Goddess by the representative of Keezhapattu House from Kuranjiyur of Guruvayur. The pudding is made out of 12 *idangazhi* (measuring vessel) *variyaari* (“medicinal grain”), forty kilos of jaggery, 101 coconuts, 101 *kadali* variety of bananas, 2 kilos of ghee, spices including saffron. “*Variyarippayasathinulla Nellu Kshethrathilethi.*” *Mathrubhumi* [Thrissur], 3 Apr. 2019, pp. 13.
16. Usually, the offerings received during Bharani is amassed without opening the packs and then sold in the auction. Once gold idols were discovered in these packs. Since then Dewaswom unpacks the offerings and is later given in auction (Adarsh 177).
17. *Avakashathara* belongs to each *desam* and their names are inscribed in a nameplate on the *thara*.
18. Madam in Kodungallur is a very important center in Bharani. Oracles believe that Bhagavathi’s spirit is present in the inner chamber of this Madam and hence they ritually recharge their swords from the chief oracle of this Madam. Before *Kaavutheendal* many oracles halt in the Madam.
19. These details are collected from fieldwork (2017 and 2018) in the regions of Koduvayur in Palakkad district and Amman Nilayam Temple under the chief *velichappaadu* Shibu Swamy.
20. Upper castes too participate in the singing of songs. The story of Kunjikuttan Thamburan singing songs in Bharani is popular (Adarsh 176).
21. Under Sevabharathi, *Annadana Yajna Samithi* conducts three-day *annadanam* (“the sacred tradition of offering food”) for about two lakh people in Bharani. The

ritual of filling the store-room is performed after the groceries being ritually carried around the temple. The function was inaugurated by Kodungallur temple priest Thrivikraman Adikal. The lighting ceremony of *annadanam* is conducted by Valiyathamburan Ramavarma Raja and Samithi chairman Ramankutti Nair. Samithi also arranges for drinking water, medical care, service of about twenty doctors, and ambulance in Bharani. “*Moornu Divasangalilayi Randu Laksham Perkkku Annadanam.*” *Mathrubhumi* [Thrissur], 02 Apr. 2019, pp.

Chapter Two

Performance and Conflict

Interpreting the meaning of Bharani, the nature of its ritual specialists and the rituals involve complex questions that can be approached from many perspectives that emphasize historical background, belief systems, ritual processes and, social organization. This chapter seeks to make a holistic analysis of the ritualistic process and its popular narratives, as well as the subjective variations and imaginings of Bharani. It also traces out the performative components, playful and carnivalesque elements apparent in the Bharani festival that lend it a unique status in the spiritual silo of India.

Performance, Ritual, and Society

Why does a performance, ritual, or spectacle continue to assume a dramatic significance in the face of an ever-evolving society at large? This simple yet pertinent question imports us into the inaugural moments of the history of humankind, its cultural legacies, discursive and religious epistemologies, and political allegiances. Indubitably, a life without any such activities is feasible, but whether it could be hailed as a meaningful life is worth pondering. Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* (1983) argues that “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined” (4), in the sense that the members never know most of their fellow members or meet them, yet they bear the image of their communion. Hence, the existence of a ‘pure’ or ‘true’ essential community is a historical fallacy. The concept of an imagined community implies contradictions and fluidity in identities, expectations, and perceptions of their members.

The utility of ritualistic performances has undertaken a marked deviation; from being a primary means of entertainment or efficacy, in the contemporary sphere, they have categorically become pivotal in configuring the identities of the egotistical humankind. Evidently, these ceremonies capacitate the participants with an opportunity to come out of their monotonous, drab and fixed identities to step into a newer domain of creativity. It is noteworthy that religion generally provides an ensemble of such performances, but several rituals are not imbued within the religious dossier. As such, these events cannot be dismissed as hollow or non-productive interactions; its repercussions are invisible to the naked eye as they are largely operational on the psyche of the participants. Collective memory and popular imaginings are key aspects of such events. Thinking in this line, the rituals backed by an archetype ostensibly commemorate or reclaim an archaic memory, and all the participants are inevitably bound by this awareness for a certain period. Such reconstructions create a sense of memory of times past among the participants reminding them of their shared affiliation with the past (Alcock 11). Thus, subjective memories of participation create nostalgic recollections that conclusively aid in soldering a homogenized group.

The schism between duty and choice that sets off spectacle from ritual needs to be looked into. In carnivals or festivals that are characterized by lawlessness or absence of stringent norms, the performers are in ease as they unequivocally derive an indiscernible pleasure or ecstasy from their maneuverings. But in rituals, which are mostly bound by scrupulous rules, the performers are more or less apprehensive and condescending thereby constantly realigning themselves to conform to the rules. Nevertheless, not all the performers in a ritual are forced to be a part of it. Even while they partake in the practice

by their overwhelming sense of duty, it is apparent that they too elicit immense pleasure and contentment from such preoccupations. They are conscious of the gravity of the role they have chosen to play but do not feel the drabness that often accompanies with routine.

As has been identified, rites and rituals have an important role to play in establishing the cultural significations of a society. They penetrate deep into the psyche of its practitioners adding structure and purpose to human lives. Together with myths, they constitute a rich intricate web of life lending material and substance to human existence. G. Mitchell states that “Ritual, like a poem, is a concentrated, focused marshaling of symbols redolent with arrays of meaning” (158). Also, in creating a sense of group solidarity and wellbeing, rituals help people to de-objectify themselves and to forget their sense of shame (Pattison 160). A generation encodes its emotions, thoughts, and angst in their rituals for the future generations to decode. Art forms often convey these candid feelings which are born out of their varied and traumatic experiences in life.

As hinted above, performance is integral to the sound functioning of our societies as it serves as a neutralizer and stabilizer of subjective attitudes and idiosyncrasies; this renders the study of performance important as well. Of particular interest is the intrinsic workings of performative sensibilities and its construal aspects that in time galvanize the unmaking of archetypes. Performance studies is, by and large, an evolving multifaceted branch of study actively interacting with the anthropological, cultural, and ontological dimensions of existence. Understanding what is ‘performance’ and what is not, amidst a slew of activities and behaviors, has been a major goal of the performance discourse since the inception of the twentieth century and in particular during the middle of this century. The relative intangibility

and confusion arise from the fact that the same event can be perceived as performance in one instance and not a performance in another.

To perform is to complete a more or less involved process rather than to do a single deed or act. On another level, Erika Fischer Lichte asserts that performances are created out of the encounter of actors and spectators; this interplay can be termed as the “autopoietic feedback loop.” The interplay of their actions and behaviors constitutes the performance, while the performance constitutes them as actors and spectators. This particular quality of performance is termed “performative.” Whatever happens before the start and after the end of the performance is fundamentally different from the performance itself (R. Leach 20). Seen in this light, be an accomplishment or a two-way interactional process, every performance involves an irretrievable transition bringing forth a cumulative experience for the people involved. Presumably, the ‘performance’ occupies a vantage point reaching out to almost every aspect of human endeavor and delineating contesting behaviors.

Richard Schechner is a distinguished name in the discipline of performance studies who has apportioned decisive theoretical and paradigmatic contributions from its incipient stage. According to Schechner, performance studies resists fixed definition and invalidates the notion of ‘purity.’ Performance may not invariably occur in fixed spaces or situations or in performing arts alone. It can be found in the most unlikely situations as “dress-up and drag to certain kinds of writing and speaking” (Schechner, *Performance Studies* 24). Performance is construed as a ‘broad spectrum’ or ‘continuum’ of human actions. Along the continuum of the discipline, new genres are added, others are eventually dropped. Evidently, the underlying notion can be summarized as any action

that is framed, presented, highlighted, or displayed equates to a performance (Schechner, *Performance 2*). Hence, performance is a protean, dodging notion constantly changing contours subject to individual particularizations and social stigmas.

Performance is “any action that is restored or twice behaved” (Schechner, *Between 36*). Thus, performance means never for the first time. “It means: for the second to the nth time” (37). Peggy Phelan in her essay “The Ontology of Performance” comments on Schechner’s approach that he is interested in almost anything in the world that is done more than once (115). Schechner sufficiently categorizes most performances in two transparent terms, “is” and “as” (*Performance Theory 1*). Philip Auslander affirms that the theatre, performance art, and other forms of aesthetic performance and entertainment (including circus) fit very comfortably in Schechner’s “is” category. The American anthropologist Milton Singer extended that category and put forward the term “cultural performance” in which all the aesthetic, ritual and ceremonial events that provide a sense of the values and priorities of a given culture is included (Auslander, *Performance 5*). Hence, performance is never tired of recurrence, instead, it derives meaning from the repetitive quality of life, and the is/as categorization of Schechner expands its peripheries unconditionally embracing all behaviors directly or indirectly linked into the umbrella of performance studies.

In an article entitled, “Performers and Spectators Transported and Transformed,” Schechner notes that the performer goes from the “ordinary world” to the “performative world” from one time space reference to another, from one personality reference to one or more others. Therefore, in a performance, one can accomplish things that cannot be done in ordinary existence (267). He names performances where performers are changed

“transformations” and those where performers are returned to their starting places “transportations” (“Performers” 269) and affirms that a “series of transportation performances can achieve a transformation” (“Performers” 267). It can be assumed that performance accords superhuman competency and freedom to its performers suspending them in a state of euphoria and tranquility distanced from quotidian concerns and dilemmas.

To begin with, the major contribution of linguistics to the performance studies has been the concept of ‘performatives’ or ‘speech acts’ developed by British philosopher J. L. Austin. In his seminal book, *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), Austin proposes that the uttering of a sentence is, or is a part of the doing of an action, which again would not normally be described as or as “just,” saying something (93). According to this assumption, to utter a sentence, in effect is to ‘do’ it. Here, words drift from a syntagmatic to pragmatic plane as it acquire the clout and effect of actions. Austin labels such constructions as “a performative utterance, or a performative” (93). Further, Bert O. States in his article titled “Performance as Metaphor” elucidates that performance falls into the category of “keywords” proposed by Raymond Williams that evolve into a new word “spreading on the winds of metaphor” (108). The utterance of such words can also be an initiation to the series of events that follow and the circumstances must be also appropriate and be followed by certain actions.

A discursive look into the definitions of performance provides us with an idea of the reach, divergent allegiances, and the dispositions of this discipline. Tellingly, in “A Paradigm for Performance Studies,” Ronald J. Pelias and James VanOosting observe that the term performance studies as used in place of the more familiar label ‘Oral

Interpretation' and insists that such double naming calls into question the nature and scope of a discipline in transition (215). Also, Robert P. Crease in "The Play of Nature: Experimentation as Performance" defines performance as "an execution of an action in the world which is a *presentation* of a phenomenon; that action is related to a *representation* (for example, a text, script, scenario, or book) using a semiotic system (such as a language, a scheme of notation, a mathematical system)" (States 127).

Furthermore, performance studies also gives due value to the presence of spectator/audience relationships as it constitutes the other side of the coin. In "Approaches to Performance: An Analysis of Terms," Grahame F. Thompson defines performance as the mode of assessment of the textual/character/actor interaction. It is interestingly placed at the intersection of the text, the actor/character, and the audience (138). Goffman's typical performer is the "single person moving in a world infested with do's and don'ts," Turner's performers are usually "disturbed social groups caught in the agon of competing political claims" (States 114). Performance, thus, is a semiotic representation of multiple and rhizomatic experiences, whereupon meaning is tacitly aligned upon the interstices of the performer, the performed, and the observer.

To put it simply, in postmodern imaginings the whole world is perceived through the focal point of a performative schema and every activity or existence, from every day to exclusive, nondescript to influential or tangible to ethereal can be tagged as performance. Other key aspects of performance studies are 'body,' the space or canvas onto which the images are reflected and 'representation.' The rhetoric of 'body' is a tangled one, involving sexual and corporeal dimensions and in the context of performance studies, it can range from body of the work to the material bodies in action. Actor's body is an

interesting field of study as it is wholly variant from the character's body (E. Bell 37). Feminist theorists like Jill Dolan "sees representation as necessarily masculinist" (Auslander, *Theory* 7) and takes a lesbian feminist perspective. It is this prevailing focus on 'body,' that categorically draws feminist theoreticians into performance studies, and they constantly endeavor to dismantle the conventional orders of representation that upholds the dominant, patriarchal values in performances, thus, creating a niche for themselves in this discipline.

Another thrust of performance studies is the 'mediated performances' as now is the era of mass media culture. Mediatization has brought considerable variations to performance as a whole as most performances are nowadays processed and produced. By implication, these developments have created a new genre of performance alongside the traditional ideological practices and these frictions have consequently given way to the distinction of performance art against 'live art.' Apparently, ranging from individualistic performance to a social drama involving mass audience participation, performance studies has wider affiliations to the semiotic systems of knowledge, the visual sensibilities and the mediated experience, bodily politics, and representation that is subject to a nexus of power relations. Discarding its genealogies, performance studies categorically makes inroads into divergent disciplines reciprocating methodologies and viewpoints, addressing newer concerns. Hence, this discipline actively endeavors to reform lives, strikes a chord of social commitment and answerability, and apparently lay stress on the performer-performed nexus making it more live and interactive.

In addition to the principles of ritual as event and ritual framing, performance theorists are concerned with the peculiar efficacy of ritual activities, which distinguishes

them from literal communication, on the one hand, or pure entertainment, on the other. Catherine Bell observes that though not acknowledged equally, most performance theorists imply that an effective or successful ritual performance is one in which a type of transformation is achieved (*Ritual: Theory* 74). This brings us to the question of “the emergent quality of ritual,” implying what a ritual can “create, effect, or bring about.” Bell validates that the emphasis on the efficacy of performance attempts to illustrate a major goal of performance theory, that is “to show that ritual does what it does by virtue of its dynamic, diachronic, and physical characteristics, in contrast to those interpretations that cast ritual performances as the secondary realization or acting out of synchronic structures, tradition, or cognitive maps” (C. Bell, *Ritual: Theory* 60). From this perspective, what emerges from the ritual is, in one sense, the event of the performance itself.

Again, a performative dimension or self-conscious doing is common to theatre, performances, spectacles, and public events. The performative dimension of social action enables reflexivity by which the community can stand back and reflect upon their actions and identity. Thus, they are constantly shifted to and fro, from being the performer to a spectator, perpetually becoming an audience to themselves. Erving Goffman establishes human interactions as ‘interaction rituals’ or ‘ritual games’ that consists of “ordered sequences of symbolic communication” (*Interaction* 141). We act and perform as ‘self-regulating participants’ ordering our actions according to the norms set by society and culture at length. In most greetings and farewells that seem to be an apathetic set of activities, power relations are astutely ingrained, Goffman argues. In the more elaborate and formalized activities, which acquire the form of a ritual, the interests of dominant

sects supersede the concerns of the marginalized. Also, in traditionalizing rituals, which make them consistent with the archaic customs, the preponderance of certain social groups can be well discerned.

Victor Turner in *From Ritual to Theatre* (1982) proclaims that ritual, in its full performative flow, is not only many-leveled, 'laminated,' but also capable, under conditions of societal change. Since it is tacitly held to communicate the deepest values of the group regularly performing it, it has a 'paradigmatic' function (20). It can be argued that ritual arose from man's desire to be a part of a community, submitting his individual consciousnesses to a collective one, and thereby ultimately succumbing to the forces of the universe that he cannot comprehend but nonetheless experience. Thus, a ritual is a performance that bridges the schism between man's material existence and the esoteric natural world. Schechner in *The Future of Ritual* (1993) defines rituals as "concept, praxis, process, ideology, yearning, experience, function" (228). Further, Victor Turner affirms in *The Forest of Symbols* (1967), that "Ritual is transformative, ceremony confirmatory" (95). Thus, rituals fall in the terrain of epistemological and ontological praxis and as men evolve, the rituals also undergo a transition; this metastasis noticeably reflects human disposition from time to time.

Richard Schechner in *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (1985) indicates that people are accustomed to calling transportation performances "theatre" and transformation performances "ritual" (130). Philip Auslander in *Performance: Critical Concepts* advances the view that Milton Singer's incorporation of religious ritual into the category of cultural performance and Schechner's considerations of ritual alongside theatre both reflect the centrality of concepts of ritual to the discourse on performance

(9). It is at this point that performance studies and ritual studies unequivocally converge promulgating new equations and doctrines. Further, any ordinary behavior transformed through sequencing, repetition, and rhythm into a structured event can be termed ritual (Turner, *Ritual* 16). Seemingly, rule or tradition, or a set of patterns is always associated with ritual-like actions. In that case, everyday activity as brushing one's teeth becomes ritual-like as it is repetitive, occurs at a certain point of time, and follows certain definitive patterns of behavior. Thinking along this line, one attribute that enables us to identify the intrinsic ritualistic behavior is the presence of an indomitable structure and order.

Ritual as noted earlier possesses a transformative or expressive quality. Victor Turner hails this particular quality as 'liminality.' In ritual, the body is central as it becomes a "medium to locate rituals in space" (Tiwari 18). In liminality, there is a conspicuous change in the state or status of the body/mind. The liminal body can thus be called a 'ritualized' or 'performing' body. In a performance as in a ritual, the relationship between the performer and the spectator is at close quarters and largely intimate. Moreover, Schechner in *Performance Theory* (1988) attests that ritual is an event upon which its participants depend; theatre is an event that depends on its participants (137). In theatre, the performers professedly go through the vent of liminality. If the theatre could actualize this liminality in its spectators, then the theatre reasonably attains the quality of being a ritual and the spectators too ascent to the empirical sphere of performers. Another key element to consider is the gossamer layers of meaning enmeshed in every ritual. Rituals must be participated in, to understand the absolute meaning they possess. Sensibly, the adhered observation of ritual in a society begets a collective consciousness

among its participants and as a consequence, the outliers cease to be a part of that community.

Community rituals as a sacrifice and communal sharing of a totemic animal unconsciously work to cement social bonds between its members, but the group remains largely oblivious to this effect of the ritual. For them, rituals are certain actions that must be ceremoniously followed, as their ancestors have done, to placate their divinities. As mentioned above, ritual can involve banal, routine acts, and high-order activities as festivals, or rituals marking a crucial phase in a person's life. It can range from subjective to comprehensive collective terrains. Performative acts as dance, theatre, play, storytelling, religious sermons, and a vast number of events can be enumerated as a ritual. It is the schema of context and time that acts as the conclusive factor in fixing ritualistic behavior. Thus, a performance adequately enacted out, can acquire the halo of a ritual and makes an indelible impression on its audience and ultimately can be instrumental in the making of their dispositions.

In *Totem and Taboo* (1913), Sigmund Freud argued that undercurrent repressed, incestuous sexual desires formed the basis of both obsessional neurosis and religion. He contended that both are rooted in the same psychological mechanisms of repression and displacement, "the repression of sexual impulses in the case of neurosis and egotistical or antisocial impulses in the case of religion... The parallelism led him to the conclusion that one might describe neurosis as individual religiosity and religion as a universal neurosis" (qtd. in C. Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives* 60). Thereby, Freud categorically developed an inseverable link between an individual's mental dispositions with that of his racial past. Through his extensive studies on divergent ritual practices operational in a

society, Freud boldly avows that the taboo necessitates the ritual. This assertion ought to be read along with Catherine Bell's argument in her influential book *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (1997) that ritual is an obsessive mechanism that attempts to appease repressed and tabooed desires by trying to solve the internal psychic conflicts that these desires cause. Thus, the ritual has an intrinsic "therapeutic value" (40). Arguably, rather than policing the untoward desires of a community, which is the usual *modus operandi*, ritual and religion offer a cordial understanding and accommodation of such feelings latent in culture and civilization.

Apparently, for humans, rituals act as a conduit of communion with the occult inexplicable orders of nature. Freud alleges that desire channeled through the ritual of an original murder is ultimately enshrined in every social institution, including language (C. Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives* 78). The animal being sacrificed is identified with "the body of the primeval being . . . which gave life to the grain by being itself divided ritually" (qtd. in C. Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives* 48). The ritual sacrifice is how the community deflects or transfers its desire and violence on to another, someone who has been made into an outsider, an 'other.' For Rene Girard, this act of scapegoating lies not only at the beginning of human history but also at the beginning of a socio-cultural process that continually repeats and renews the violence and the repression that renders the violence deceptively invisible. He remarks in this regard, "Violence, in every cultural order, is always the true *subject* of every ritual or institutional structure" (qtd. in C. Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives* 79). Thus, systemic and institutional violence, implicit as well as explicit manifested through multifarious forms lies at the heart of all social activity.

Furthermore, Mircea Eliade insists that through the ritual enactment of primordial events, human beings come to consider themselves truly human, sanctify the world, and render meaningful the activities of their lives (47). He records the whole course cryptically, “Thus the gods did; thus men do” (Eliade 50). By transacting rituals befittingly, humans forsake the current temporality and enter into the sacral primordial times of the divinities. Eliade considers the agricultural rites connected to sexuality and fertility such as naked women sowing seeds at night and carnivalesque festivals, not a means for seasonally evoking the forces of nature, but these acts play out the original creation of the world itself.

Assuredly, the Belgian anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep’s celebrated book *The Rites of Passage* (1909) has laid the groundwork of the ritual theory. He identified rites as powerful means in effecting social transformation and identified rites of passage veritably integral to human lives. Gennep in generalizing the rites to a universal pattern divides it into three distinct phases; preliminal, liminal, and post-liminal. Both Richard Schechner and Victor Turner drew heavily from Gennep and Turner evidently designed his concepts of ‘liminality’ and ‘communitas’ based on it. In rites of passage, the person is first removed from the original group, he is then held in a “betwixt and between” state where he is “neither here nor there” (Turner, *Ritual* 95). After this stage, he is reincorporated into society with an altered status and identity. The first stage, separation, is often marked by rites of purification and symbolic allusions to the loss of the old identity (in effect, death to the old self): the person is bathed, hair is shaved, clothes are switched, and marks are made on the body, and so on. In the second or transition stage, the person is kept for a time in a place that is symbolically outside the conventional socio-cultural order (akin to

a gestation period): normal routines are suspended while rules distinctive to this state are carefully followed. In the third stage, symbolic acts of incorporation focus on welcoming the person into a new status (in effect, the birth of the new self): there is the conferral of a new name and symbolic insignia, usually some form of a communal meal, and so on. Gennep argued that the rites of passage minister to orchestrate disarrayed and chaotic social changes that could threaten to disturb the quintessential structure of human society. They inconspicuously facilitate an easy passage or transition from one stage to another. A new reality is being erected; a boy is now recognized as a man, a man attains a new status, subsequent power, and roles, new relationships are made, and some earlier relations are forgotten.

Victor Turner in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969) extends this notion further, and he decidedly focuses on the middle state of Gennep's three-part rites of passage namely 'liminal.' Turner in this book affirms that liminal entities or 'threshold people' are "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (95). Furthering the notion, he writes; their ambiguous state is expressed through a variety of symbols of death, being in womb, invisibility, darkness, bisexuality, eclipse, menstruating women, etc. They have no status, property, role, or power (*Ritual* 95). Apparently, in liminality, there is a period of alternative "lowliness and sacredness," of "homogeneity and comradeship" and for a time, they are "in and out of time" and "in and out of secular social structure" (*Ritual* 96). In this pattern, two modes of society are discernible. In the first, society is a "structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of

‘more’ or ‘less.’ The second, which emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders.” Turner names this peculiar state as ‘*communitas*’ (*Ritual* 96). Thus, *communitas* is an intrinsic part of liminality; this middle stage is markedly chaotic against its structured beginnings and ends, but it is here that collective consciousness and camaraderie take birth.

Seemingly, the neophyte in liminality is a “*tabula rasa*” or a “blank slate” (Turner, *Ritual* 103), onto which the values of a society are inscribed. He has to pass through several agonizing and opprobrious ordeals to be strong enough to cope with new responsibilities and attain a maturation that would subsequently prevent him from abusing his newly attained privileges. Thus, they are more or less like clay or dust that is molded by society to its desired form and content. Thus, we can see liminal process as a social tool chiseling out the desired members of society. Concerning this, Genep’s concept of ‘territorial passage’ is flagrant and still feasible in the contemporary modernistic imaginings. The peripheries or the line between states or countries exists only in maps but though impalpable, they prevail as cogent marks of segregation and often are not violated. The yardsticks of this separation are more or less political legitimacies, economic parameters, or that of cultural or linguistic legacies as we discern in India. The communal demands for separation and autonomy unfailingly create tensions within the society, eventually conceding in the constitution of new states. These separations though not tangible, are internalized by its inhabitants and followed religiously throughout their life. For example, most Hindu temples in India do not allow

the entry of non-Hindus, and these customs are sacrosanct. This “magico-religious aspect of crossing frontiers” (Gennep, “Territorial” 27) is most noticeable and potential in disrupting the order of society.

Making the life of a central African tribe as his model of study, Turner in “Social Dramas and Stories about Them” considers rituals or to be more specific ‘social drama’ as “generative and regenerative processes.” He continues to state that narrative can be discerned either as one of the “cultural grandchildren or great-grandchildren of ‘tribal’ ritual mechanisms or a universal cultural activity, embedded in the very center of the social drama” (167). For Victor Turner, the social drama is a universal pattern of conflict and resolution that operates at all social levels from intimate, interpersonal relations to conflict within and between societies. He views society as a ‘process,’ in which humans alternate between “fixed” and “floating worlds” (*Ritual* vii). Turner’s division of the social drama into four phases (breach, schism, redress, and denouement) constitutes both an elaboration of Van Gennep’s schema for ritual into a broader pattern of social action. Turner’s claims for the universality of the social drama as a pattern of human behavior have been subjected to criticisms similar to those directed at the efforts of Schechner and others to translate the structure/process embedded in one cultural tradition into another pattern (Bharucha 32). Clifford Geertz criticizes Turner for homogenizing disparate social realities by assimilating them all to a single template of action (“Blurred” 9). What does each performance try to transmit to its spectators? What role does it play in creating or chiseling the collective identities of the people involved? Apparently, Victor Turner genuinely makes an effort to arrive at an answer through his concept of social dramas as he has realized that these events have concealed layers of meanings and repercussions in

society. While playing out, these performances cleverly mask its political and ideological dispositions and appear to be innocuous dramatic performances.

Significantly, the British anthropologist Max Gluckman brought major insights into the study of ritual. “Every social system,” he wrote, “is a field of tension, full of ambivalence, of co-operation and contrasting struggle” (*Rituals* 127). This was a digressive approach from the earlier views on ritual as Gluckman viewed rituals as “the expression of complex social tensions rather than the affirmation of social unity; they exaggerate very real conflicts that exist in the organization of social relations and then affirm unity despite these structural conflicts” (*Rituals* 136). The ritualization of conflict situations and aggression through contests and duels is generally understood as a social control mechanism. Max Gluckman, in the context of his ethnographic work in Africa, referred to such practices as ‘rites of rebellion,’ enactments that allow conflict to be staged and acted out (Stephenson 15). Such rituals provide a framework wherein the participants openly state their resentment of authority and generally act in a fashion contrary to the norms and attitudes of their social system.

Ritualized violence is intentional bodily harm that has been enmeshed with meanings and used as a tool to communicate values, narratives, and beliefs. The pain experienced by victims of torture is all too real, yet also a kind of performance staged for communicative effect (Stephenson 17). They “proceed within an established and sacred traditional system, in which there is a dispute about particular distributions of power and not about the structure of the system itself” (Gluckman, *Order* 3). He claims that this categorically allows for a kind of instituted protest, and in intricate ways rejuvenates the unity of the system. Gluckman cites the example of Zulu women’s agricultural rites, in

which women boldly parade about in men's clothes, doing things normally forbidden to them. The traditional patriarchal values of the community are temporarily inverted, which they believe is beneficial to the whole society. Gluckman suggests that these are 'ritualized rebellions' that channel out the internal conflicts and despair that women have garnered forever living in a subjugated state. These rites have the "cathartic effect of releasing social tensions, thereby limiting discontent and diffusing the real threat contained in such discontent" (*Order* 38). Evidently, these rituals act as compensation and mitigation and avert the group from a bigger catastrophic outburst. Plus, by allowing temporary inversions or suspensions they "dramatically acknowledges that order as normative" (Gluckman, *Order* 38). Hence, for Gluckman, ritual inflates the social conflicts and abysmal chagrin inherent in a system to its pinnacle and rather than leaving them behind, invigorates their expurgation ultimately creating a stable robust society. But it can be assumed that this process is not always in the best favor of the stigmatized groups, and they are at large unaware of this Machiavellian tactic laid out by the dominant groups of the society. Arguably, Bharani can be hailed as a ritual of rebellion as it is an instituted violence cleverly crafted by the dominant groups so that the participants without questioning accept their part in the hierarchical structure. They are seen as intruders who have come to disrupt the normal order of the civilized society. Yet, anticipating a potential rebellion this temporary protest is sanctified and conducted in a ritualized ceremony.

A performance involves visual representations, sounds, and even tactile, olfactory, and gustatory sensations thereby simultaneously appealing to multiple senses. By participating in these activities, even the passive audience is galvanized into a rarefied

state qualifying them to experience motley of sensory experience. At carnival time, the unique sense of time and space causes the individual to feel he is a part of the collectivity and he ceases to be himself. It is at this point through costume and mask, an individual exchanges bodies and is renewed (Smith 82). Michael Holquist in the Prologue to Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* (1965) suggests that Bakhtin's carnival is not only an impediment to revolutionary change but a revolution in itself. Carnival is not a mere holiday or festival sanctioned or fostered by governments or secular institutions. It proceeds from a force that pre-exists priests and kings (xviii). He further contends that Bakhtin's conception of folk is colorful and contradictory to the civilized folk. His folk is blasphemous, they are coarse, dirty, and rampantly physical, reveling in oceans of strong drink, poods of sausage, and endless coupling of bodies (xix). Thus, carnivals, more than being a nonsensical festival of color and pomp, eventually effects an explosion of subjective identities to acquire a heterogeneous disposition and in addition, the dichotomy of appropriate/wrong is dismantled for a certain time. The inherent features of a carnival that he underscores are its emphatic and purposeful 'heteroglossia' and multiplicity of styles (Bakhtin x). In carnivals, humor is attained through ritual spectacles (carnival pageants and comic shows), comic verbal compositions (oral and written), and various genres of billingsgate (curses, oaths, and popular blazons). He validates that in the folklore of primitive people, serious cults were coupled with comic cults that laughed and scoffed at the deity, evoking 'ritual laughter,' and abusive cults (Bakhtin 6). Both of these variations were equally sacred to them. As hinted above, serious and comic were two facets of man's bearing, but in the definitely consolidated state and class structure, such equality of the two aspects was implausible. All the comic forms were transformed

to a non-official level, acquired a new meaning, were deepened and rendered complex until they became the expression of folk consciousness (Bakhtin 6). Hence, Bakhtin argues that in the evolutionary process of man, he lost touch with the comic aspect of life as the world around him became more stringent, comic and serious were categorized into impervious structures.

Carnival is an occasion for maximum social chaos and licentious play, and though it seems to be the pure opposite of ritual, it follows a ritual pattern. They are considered ritualistic as divergent social groups come together and social differences are kept apart or reversed in the duration of the activity. The mad rites of the carnival serve as a reminder to the elite groups of the power of the poor and their contempt against political and religious authorities (C. Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives* 126). Though the elitists have tried to curtail it, by recognizing the relative utility of the act they have granted its continuation aiding the masses to vent out their repressed emotions. Arguably, carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. People were reborn for new pure human relations. These relations were not only imagined but experienced. Arguably, the utopian ideal and the realistic merged in the carnival experience (Bakhtin 10). He traces the origin of abuse in human culture and records that abuse is not homogenous in origin and has the character of magic and incantations. The language that insults and mocks the deity as part of ancient comic cults were ambivalent, while humiliating and mortifying, simultaneously revived and renewed them (Bakhtin 16). He presses that the same ambivalent abuse is made use in the carnival but it underwent an essential transformation; it lost its magic and specific practical direction

and acquired an intrinsic universal character and depth. The new form contributed to the creation of the free carnival atmosphere and a droll aspect of the world (16). To Bakhtin, carnival is the people's second life, organized on the basis of laughter (8). It is not an individual reaction but festive laughter; laughter of all the people. It is directed at everyone including its participants. In the most general sense, the carnival celebrates the body, the senses, and the unofficial, uncanonized relations among human beings. But in man's development cycle, these festivals, whether ecclesiastical or state-sponsored, failed to create a second life; rather than aiding men to come out of the existing world order, it only reinforced the pattern (Bakhtin 9). This led to the ineludible genesis of carnivals, plays, or performances where the natural drab order of life was reversed. Evidently, such acts that involve a profuse display of power configurations and audacious breach of impervious norms can trigger human minds into action. As we have seen, these two disciplines often situated on the fringes of entertainment and efficacy, frivolity and seriousness are not always disparate or contrasting. They reciprocate and supplement each other at times, sharing their analytical tools and *modus operandi* and are indisputably fixated on decoding nuanced facets of human behavior. This original purpose and character of 'abuse' are seemingly preserved in Bharani, and more than creating a festive mood, the 'abuse' aimed at Goddess, in particular, is believed to placate her, supplementing her lack.

It is clear that from being an innocuous activity to a social drama or further to being a form of rebellion, all these dominant approaches identify the therapeutic value of the ritual and its construal capabilities. In concluding this section, we realize that the spurring list of play, performance, ritual, carnival, festival, and spectacle, etc. converge at

some point, all of them are unequivocally devised to satisfy one or other human needs, from alleviating boredom, appeasing human's desire to experience this esoteric world, forging a community, to providing them with a sense of identity and belonging. Regrettably, they can be a means of despotism in the hands of those wielding power. At the same time, they can be instrumental in flaring rebellion or resistance against totalitarian agendas. Hence, they are ambivalent but the dominant moods may vary between laughter, seriousness, pain, and anger. Through this study, it is apparent that it is impossible to insulate the myriad idiosyncrasies of human temperament; they most often converge and reciprocate in their enterprise.

Evidently, no aspect of human rhetoric-religious, artistic, political, physical, or sexual is rooted and perpetual. Instead, they constitute a continuum. They are shaped and re-shaped in accordance with particular social and historical prospects. Thus, in a dramaturgical trope, every being is an actor and every activity is patently a series of performances or behaviors which are learned, rehearsed, and presented over time. This chapter began by asking certain questions: What is the relative relevance of performance to this revived world? How do they operate and negotiate in the new arena? What happened to the original signification of rituals, which has now been stratified with fresh imbuelements? The probe does not end here, rather the pursuit to trail the answers to these queries perseveres through a comprehensive study of the Kodungallur Bharani Festival.

Performative Elements in Kodungallur Bharani Festival

Now, moving on to the performances in Bharani, being a subaltern fest it is essentially quotidian. Nevertheless, it follows an impervious and stringent pattern as

every event occurs within a fixed temporal frame and is contained within the religious confinements of *muhurtham* (“auspicious time”). Though wild and ravenous comportment is largely exhibited by its participants, this promptness about time and ritual severity has to be noted in particular. From day one to last, each group’s participation and performance occurs within a scrupulous schema, lending theatricality to this festival. In analyzing each rite of the Bharani festival, the presence of imperious forces is evident, and being a subaltern festival it undergoes strict monitoring of magisterial powers, and any step against the conventions is contained using force and weight. In addition to the natural order, the event also falls under a symbolic-time as Bharani decisively epitomizes the archetypal combat that occurred between Darika and Bhadrakali, and hence the actual time of this battle is typified with respect to day and time. Further, regarding the sacrality of the objects concerned, Bharani devotees, especially the chief oracles come adorned with the jewelry of the Goddess, which comprise of innumerable gold ornaments embellishing the idol of their respective temples. They wear this jewelry manifesting the form of Goddess herself. Also of much importance in the ritual is the saber, the anklet, and the waist belt used by oracles that are hallowed by the devotees, and various rites are performed in relation to them.

In Sarah Caldwell’s research paper, “The Blood-Thirsty Tongue and the Self-Feeding Breast: Homosexual Fellatio Fantasy in a South Indian Ritual Tradition,” she asserts:

The essential rituals of the Bhagavati cult all point to the aggressive and fatal erotic drinking of the male by the female, the infamous orgy of blood sacrifice of male ‘cocks’ at the Kodungallur Bhagavati temple; the male *veliccappatu*’s

cutting of his head in a symbolic act of self-castration ... [Kali] is herself, first of all, a phallic being, the mother with a penis... she is the bloodied image of the castrating and menstruating (thus castrating) female.... (76)

The essay “The Hindu Goddess Reinterpreted as a Symbol of Sex and Violence” offers a harsh criticism against Sarah Caldwell for applying far-fetched Freudian theories upon the Kali Cult of Kerala. The Indian scholars identify this study by Caldwell to be partial and she uses the English word ‘cock’ instead of the rooster, thus hinting at the connotation of the phallus. Keralites, or in particular, the ritual participants are unaware of the connotative value of the English word ‘cock.’ In other words, this is a “projection of the scholar” (Rampersad 43). Further, in the review of *Oh Terrifying Mother: Sexuality, Violence and Worship of the Mother Kali* (1999) by Sarah Caldwell, Cynthia Humes affirms, “The implications she sees, while tantalizing and truly fascinating, are based on extended digging into and assembling a dispersed array of sensationalist and homoerotic mythological themes, combined with rumored sexual activity” (Rampersad 44). Thus, Caldwell sees Kali as a ‘phallic being,’ this addition of meanings from outside the contexts of Indian culture can be disturbing to the moral and spiritual edifices of a sect.

One plausible reason behind why Kodungallur cannot negate and restrict Bharani is the massive support it lends to the socio-economic sphere of Kodungallur. It is a highly productive festival in terms of its material outcomes and utility as the devotees come with huge amounts of *kaanikka* (“offerings”) for the Goddess. Thus, every year, a substantial sum inadvertently flows into the economy reviving the commercial domain of Kodungallur and the temple as well. Also, the relationships Bharani has spawned over

generations is much wider than the financial conjunctions. It is intrinsically connected to the life nod of Kodungallur forging a lasting kinship. There are homes in Kodungallur which provide space and shelter to these devotees to stay and cook, and this tradition has been carried over for ages. For the Bharani devotees, *deviyude thattakam* (“The jurisdiction of the Goddess”) i.e, Kodungallur becomes a borrowed space that they make their own for a few days and worship their mother goddess who resides far away from them.

Furthermore, while considering the performative elements, the entertainment quality of Bharani deserves mentioning. The *theripattu* sung in devotion to the Goddess is a primary source of entertainment of the fest and draws scores of spectators. Additionally, Bharani is an arena where many traditional performing art forms as *Kalampattu*, *Kettukazhcha* (see fig. 2. 1), *Teyyam* (see fig. 2. 2), *Mudiyettu*, *Mudiyattam*, *Velavaravu*, and *Thira* are played out.



Fig. 2. 1. Jayan, Nimisha K. *Velavaravu* or the effigy of bullocks in the temple premises during Bharani. 20 Mar. 2018. *Private collection*.

These performances are played out in the open air involving complex face paintings, attractive headgears, exotic costumes, natural accessories, and rhythmic dance movements and articulate various aspects of Kali worship.



Fig. 2. 2. Jayan, Nimisha K. *Teyyam* performed in the temple premises before *Kaavutheendal*. 20 Mar. 2018. *Private collection*.

These art forms are exclusively and elaborately played in the Kali groves of the native place of devotees. Apparently, Bharani offers a performing space for the divergent social dramas to come together. And visibly, both efficacy and entertainment qualities are ‘braided together’ in Bharani as Schechner pointed out regarding gatherings in general. As a matter of fact, the quintessential *tantric* nature called *Shaktheya* or *Kaula marga* of this ritual conveniently allows for a certain kind of celebration or polyphony. The *Panchamakara* tradition is a form of worship using the five elements like sex, alcohol, grain, fish, and meat. A *tantric* tradition is a paganistic form of the ritual and in stark contrast to the Brahmanical tradition, *Shaktheya* or *Kaula marga* do not advocate pain and suppression. Partaking in the joys of life, one attains the peak of existence that is *moksha*, the ultimate joy. In its inception, explicit female vagina and phallus were

worshipped but later due to the civilizing influence of Brahmins, the shape was smoothed out and is now implicitly worshipped. Also, in small groups, the devotees cook food, especially meat in the temple premises, and consume alcohol (which is sacrilegious and not allowed otherwise) and they dance and sing ribald songs. Oracles who are believed to be the representation of Goddess in the battlefield, smites the forehead and other members of the group sing around to arouse them. The oracles make several cadenced steps according to the rhythm of the music and *kottuvadi* (“small sticks”). Here, many cultures overlap in a single space, and a new experience is created. For the devotees, it offers a cathartic moment whereas the spectators/audience, most of whom belonging to the natives are also transformed to certain degrees. Indeed, this interaction between various caste groups and cultures creates a *mélange* of experience.

Further, space has a deeper, more varied significance for traditional societies than for current urban ones (Kellerman 45). Space is very crucial in Bharani and the paths along which the devotees move are well designated and fixed. The devotees move along their hitched paths and the pilgrimage as a whole is well-organized and executed. A detailed analysis of spatial relations of the Bharani festival and its space-body relationship is being carried out in chapter five of this dissertation. Three kinds of participants are seen in Bharani: the performers, the accompanying or assisting devotees, and the spectators. Bharani like many rituals do not call for the presence of spectators; they are engaged in communion with the divine directly. Several natives, including the royal doyen and the clans, have the privilege to perform several rites; they perform alongside the immigrant groups. Also, they have their *avakashathara* which signifies

each group's prowess and power (see fig. 2. 3). These rights are hereditary and are passed on to future generations.



Fig. 2. 3. Jayan, Nimisha K. Pilgrim group from Palakkad along with chief oracle singing songs in their *avakashathara* at Kodungallur. 29 Mar. 2017. *Private collection*.

Bharani as explicated earlier, consists of a series of events and one categorically leads to another in sequence. It demands several days of preparations which eventually culminate in the ceremony of *Kaavutheendal*. Unlike theatre, the devotees harm themselves in reality striking their forehead with the sword and they dance in mirth which leads to a trance state strewn with blood. They apply turmeric to the wounds at once which is the only medication they seem to take. Thus, a conflict is presented before the audience and as this festival is believed to be the re-enactment or re-presentation of the battle fought between Devi and Darika, the space sooner or later gets metamorphosed into a battlefield. Ghastly torrents of blood, the burgeoning crowd, and the flagrant color of the spices and assorted flags, the masking dust, etc. produce the illusive impression of a battlefield. Devotees undergo a trance-like state and even spectators are transported into

an empyreal existence. Apparently, Bharani is both ‘actual’ and ‘symbolic’ in the tradition of many of the rituals all over the world.



Fig. 2. 4. Jayan, Nimisha K. Oracles dancing near *kozhikkallu*. 20 Mar. 2018. *Private collection*.

The whole of the atmosphere, their costumes, jewelry, and the accessories as swords and anklets heighten the elements of ‘play’ and they are made into believing that they are Goddess incarnate. Devotees in their delirium do serious injury to their bodies, but through self-inflicted torture, their visage is that of pleasure and not of pain. Thus, pain for them is a path to otherworldly existence. The human body is the reminder of mortality and triviality and by trying to deny this protected body, they try to be in communion with the divine. To elaborate in Schechner’s version of performance, the devotees of Bharani are involved in a kind of ‘dark play’ that “subverts order, dissolves frames, breaks its own rules” (*Performance Studies* 36) where they are simultaneously their real selves and the Goddess herself (see fig. 2. 4).



Fig. 2. 5. Jayan, Nimisha K. Oracle in trance performing near *kozhikkallu*. 20 Mar. 2018.

Private collection.

This shifting to and fro between these two identities can be conscious or unconscious. The play may start from a conscious level and enters the threshold of unconscious dark play in the zenith of religious fervor and ecstasy (see fig. 2. 5). This transportation to another existence is possible through the spiritual devotion of the performer involved. Thus, the devotee becomes something ‘other’ in the heightened state of emotional intensity, each devotee seemingly experiences different levels of ‘play’ and after they reach the culmination point of ecstasy, they either lose consciousness or come back to their serene state (see fig. 2. 6).

Thus, Bhagavathi, the predominant deity of Kerala, is a form of the pan-Indian goddess Kali. As Bhagavati she is a benevolent protectress, but in her more common angry and violent form, she is referred to as Bhadrakali. She is referred to as *agnigolam* or ‘ball of fire’ that can cause much havoc and destruction. She is the goddess of earth, “deity of the soil, the matron goddess of Kerala” (Caldwell, “Bhagavati” 216). Earth is

her fertile womb and Bhagavathi is also the patron of agriculture. David Kinsley states that Kali is almost always “associated with blood and death,” and he goes on to state that “within the civilized order of Hinduism blood, death, and Kali herself are the supreme anomalies” (Caldwell, “Margins” 250). She is hot, full of rage, sexually dangerous, but she is also a loving mother whose blessing ensures prosperity and fertility. The whole atmosphere is that of heat, the performance itself falls on the peak of summer, the scorching sun, the heat of the chicken and the liquor the performers consume, and ultimately the inner heat of the devotion, anger, and revenge that they experience while merging with the higher energy of the Goddess. But this connection to religion and daily activities such as agriculture is long lost to Keralites due to social and economic reasons.



Fig. 2. 6. Jayan, Nimisha K. Oracles at play in Kodungallur temple during the Bharani festival. 29 Mar. 2017. *Private collection*.

Further, probing the international interfaces, M. J Gentes observes parallelism between the mystery cults of the Greco-Roman near east and the rituals of the Bharani festival. “The links with Syria and the Hellenist world may have been the conduit for the

transmission of the worship of the mystery cult goddess into Kerala.” Similar in nature to the Cult of Dea Syria is the Mystery Cult of the Phrygian goddess Cybele. Both men and women became priests in the Cult of Cybele and her consort Attis. In this cult, the male priests were called *galli* and their emblem was the cock (*gallus*) (313). He presses the view that Kannaki is painted as a wronged, sorrowful, and vengeful figure that is deified and worshipped. But he contends that story- neither of Kannaki nor Kali appears to be overtly tied to fertility exactly as it is expressed in the Syrian example. Considering the esoteric virtues of the festival and its unquestionable celebration of sexuality similar to occult mystery cults and fertility cults, and the ancient relations Kodungallur had with classic civilizations like the Greek, the Romans, and the Chinese, such an infiltration of cultures is quite plausible.

This study would not be complete without probing the influence of Buddhism in the making of the Bharani festival in the light of humungous Buddhist ligations in the archaic past of Kodungallur. According to researchers, historians and thinkers, Buddhism was introduced in Kerala in the third century BC by the missionaries of Emperor Asoka on their way down to Sri Lanka which still retains Buddhist links. “The history of Hinduism abounds both in periods of creative assimilation and interaction and in outbursts of violent intolerance” (Doniger 25). Ajay Sekhar in his article proclaims that Jainism and Ajivaka philosophy also co-existed with Buddhism creating the great Sramana civilization of the South that has given birth to cultural classics like *Thirukural*, *Silapatikaram*, *Manimekhala* and the whole canon of *Sangham* writing. In places like Mathilakam and Kiliroor in Kerala, there were even Buddhist and Jain Universities and Research Centers in the early centuries of the first millennium that

attracted intellectuals and scholars from all over the world (Chandran 42). Later with the invasion of Aryanism, their culture along with their canons and sacred texts were burnt and destroyed.

Influence of Buddhism and Jainism, the presence of *Saktha Tantra* tradition which is still the form of worship in the temple, points to the fact that a huge level of assimilation has taken place in Kodungallur temple. Buddhism is of no doubt has been a great influence in Kali worship. In Buddhism, Vajratara is a goddess similar to Kali in appearance and character and follows *tantric* tradition (Kumar 200). Many historians agree to the notion that the Kodungallur Kali temple was a Buddhist shrine in ancient times. The lotus petal engravings evident in the circular *balikallu* reveal it to be the remnant of a Buddhist stupa. This *balikallu* points to the popular myth that practices like cock sacrifices and lewd songs were commenced to expel Buddhists from Kodungallur temple (Gopalakrishnan 35). Thus, it is highly likely that when Buddhists took over the temple and the *kavu* from the lower castes, they had to make only a few changes in the practices as the goddesses were very much similar. Probably, they could continue the adoration without disturbing the local traditions and inciting their anger. Historians point to the presence of Buddhism in Kodungallur and their usurpation in the hands of lower caste people guided by high caste groups. Furthermore, the Goddess Sitala of West Bengal and Mariyamman of Tamilnadu embody many aspects of Bhadrakali primarily being the goddesses of smallpox.

From *Manimegalai* we can fathom that Kerala was a decisive center of Buddhism. Four important Buddhist centers in Kerala were 1) The stupa installed by Mahendra, son of Ashoka near Kodungallur temple, 2) Avalokiteswara-Bodhisatwa in Churulimala, a

cave temple north-east to Sabarimala, 3) Indra Vihar in Kodungallur, 4) Sreemoolavasam between Azhikode and Kottapuram in Kodungallur (Chandran 96). The travelogues of Huan Tsang stand as testimony to this. T. K Krishna Menon in *Kerala Samskaram (Culture of Kerala)* suggests that when Thomasleeha visited Kerala, the prominent religion of Kodungallur was Buddhism. During the reign of Chera Chenguttuva, the prosperity of the kingdom and the spread of Buddhism reached its peak (3). Buddhism triggered considerable modifications in the cultural dossier of Southern India. Brahmins tried hard to resist these new advancements. Ilango Adigal, Chithala Chathanar, and people from administrative domains adopted Buddhist philosophy and Kodungallur thus became a strong playground of Buddhism. And in the niche created by the conflicts between Buddhism and Hinduism, Christianity grew in Kerala (K. Menon 23). Veda religion did not know of temple worship till then. It was Buddhists who built viharas and installed Buddha as their deity in it. Hinduism imitated and followed this practice from them. Strikingly, the ruling class as well as the common people practiced Buddhism. Buddhist monks traveled throughout the state preaching this religion. At those times, Brahmins were reasonably a minority group and Buddhism and Brahminism were always in tension and conflict. Thus, the arrival of a third religion was welcomed by both of them (K. Menon 29). They both might have dreamt of defeating the other using this new religion.

Elamkulam Kunjan Pilla in *Chera Samrajyam, Onpathum Pathum Noottandukalil (Chera Dynasty in Ninth and Tenth Centuries)* asserts that it was from Kodungallur itself, the capital of Kerala that the annihilation of Buddhism commenced. By eighth-century Buddhism declined in Kerala. Buddha was against any sort of idol worship. But in its

evolutionary trajectory, he began to be worshipped as god contrasting its basic axioms and ideologies. Aggrandized by other superstitions and demoralizing practices, Buddhism displayed signs of decline. Jaina Mahavira began to be worshipped as Karumadikuttan and Buddha as Vishnu (Kunjan Pilla 54). In Kerala, Brahmins were gaining power in the eighth century. By the twelfth century, they became all-powerful. However, Jainism managed to endure until the sixteenth century. When the reformist movements heralded by Kumarila Bhatta and followers progressed with royal support, the Buddhist monks and nuns were forced to leave the land. Also, abusive songs against Buddha's preachings began to be performed. In the songs sung in Kodungallur Bharani and Cherthalapooram, these slogans against Buddhism can be heard (Kunjan Pilla 53). Further, one set of historians believe that Kodungallur temple was once a shrine of Jain goddess. The Chera emperor, whose capital was at Vanji, protected the Jain and Buddhist communities. With Aryan immigration, these two sects had a setback and showed signs of decline. The Savarna had diplomatically persuaded the lower castes into attacking the Buddhists and "throwing animals and filth into the sanctuary" (Induchudan 39) thus expelling them from Kodungallur forever. Thus, Bharani is believed to have played an important role in the disappearance of Buddhism from Kodungallur. The trouble with this version is that the natives could have easily used force to expel them since Buddhism is a doctrine founded on peace and tolerance. It is highly contestable that the upper caste had to strategically expel them taking into consideration they were more powerful, seeking the help of lower castes provided Nair community were the commander-in-chief of the state army and exercised power.

In the cultural progression of Kerala, temples played a major part. They were not merely places of worship. They were educational centers, places of protection, and defense. Sekhar states that “All the Buddha idols in Kerala were recovered from current Savarna temple ponds or paddy fields in their vicinity. They were violently attacked, uprooted and thrown or buried in ponds and marshes.” It shows the repressive power of the mainstream Savarna Hindu ideology and common sense that becomes hegemonic and annihilating. This historic and epistemic violence are legitimized in the name of an omnipotent god and timeless religion. Thus, we see that most Hindu Savarna temples of Kerala had a Buddhist/Jain connection and they were either Buddhist shrines or Jain temples or monasteries. If this is a phenomenon common to most temples of Kerala, festivals similar to Kodungallur Bharani should have been celebrated in other such temples of Kerala which is not quite the case. We do not happen to see any such festival in Kerala that uses extreme ‘abuse’ and violence as in Kodungallur temple; one plausible reason can be the centralization of Buddhism in Kodungallur. As in many other parts of Kerala, Buddhist centers were converted into Hindu temples and in Kodungallur it was dedicated to Bhagavathi. Later the spirit of Kannaki was also absorbed into Bhagavathi. Thinking along this line, Buddhism played a decisive role in the inception of the festival, and the history of Buddhism in Kerala unfolds a different picture, where Hinduism was a marginal presence and subsequently throws light on the power diffusions and the cultural and epistemological alignments converging in contemporaneous attitudes. The placing of Kali at the center of life is justifiable when we envisage the contingent import attached to Kali festivals even in the revamped climate of human existence. In Kerala, life has remarkably transgressed from a thoroughly agricultural tradition. We have been exposed

to a globalized way of living; nevertheless, we are constantly assimilating and adapting new trends to compensate for the lost traditions and beliefs which were once the life-nod of our earlier civilization.

Conflict and Rebellion in Bharani

Bharani follows an abrasive religious tradition, but no system can be disparaged as the subjective experience of its practitioners ultimately contours their life. Why such allowance was granted to the lower class at a time when untouchability and caste discrimination was rigorously practiced? Even when the natural rights of living and walking in freedom were denied, they were granted an unimaginable allowance of contaminating the Goddess and the temple creating a conscious loophole in the existing systems. That if anyone mentioned on that particular day that this fest is pollution, they will have to pay for the entire process of purging the whole of the temple which amounts to a considerable sum, thus strategically sealing off people's mouths forever. Prior to the passing of *The Temple Entry Act* in 1936, the idea of pollution was more intense as lower caste groups were not allowed worship in the Temple. Now, that 'pollution' is no longer valid, 'pollution' arises from the 'opprobrious' acts of the performers. Furthermore, why this tradition is still practiced in the face of strong opposition from various groups? This leaves us wondering why orthodox upper class society took such pain to acquiesce this subaltern festival. Firstly, in the light of the origin of sacred groves in Kerala, we can ascertain that Kodungallur temple too was in its primitive state nothing but a grove which was later transformed into a temple. Thus, Kali is a goddess who belonged to the indigenous natives and was not part of Aryanized nomadic invaders. This philosophical compromise is very evident in the Kodungallur Bhagavathi Temple. Most probably,

religious practices originated there in strata, each layer took shape adding to or subtracting from the existing practices. No much logical evidence is available to validate that the temple belonged to lower caste people in the earlier times but considering the general trend in Kali worship, this must have been the case even in Kodungallur temple as the circumstances were almost identical.

A more psychological reason can be identified, footed on the notion of conflict. Partha Chatterjee suggests that subaltern movements against feudal or semi-feudal exploitation are “enmeshed in a host of relationships of mutual obligation, institutionalized in a wide variety of customary practices” and involves acts of “conscious violation of the symbols of authority-loot and destruction of property and desecration of objects of ritual significance” (35). Ranajit Guha feels that though the ideology among the subaltern groups is diverse, “one of its invariant features was a notion of resistance to elite domination” (5). *Bharani* is a social drama that involves certain conflict and its resolution; it exhibits a breach-crisis- redress pattern but resolution occurs not in the strict sense as Turner proposed. In one sense, it is a re-enactment of conflicts that occurred in the ancient past; be it the conflict of Kali and Darika, or the conflict that is believed to have occurred between upper class sects and Buddhist or Jain groups or the conflicts that have surged out of the shifts in the ruling structure, a transition from a *kavu* of lower castes to that of upper class jurisdiction. The trace of the latter conflict is still present, at least to an extent that primarily gets reflected in the *Bharani* songs and the ‘opprobrious’ behavior of the performers by challenging the civilized order of the state. The performers pass through a liminal state and *communitas* evidently emerges from the ritual, a group with similar interests and values (for a detailed discussion, see chapter five). Hence, a

solution or reintegration does not emerge, if at all there is a solution it is temporary. Thus, it would be more appropriate to categorize Bharani as a 'ritual of rebellion' to use a term from Max Gluckman.

Gluckman identified a 'conflict' or 'social tension' in most ceremonies or rituals and based on the anthropological studies by Hilda Kuper in South-eastern Bantu of Zululand, Swaziland, and Mozambique regions, he proposes the concept of 'ritual of rebellion' to denote the conflict inherent in these structures. Gluckman uses the term 'rebellion' as well as 'licence' and 'protest' in his book *Custom and Conflict in Africa* (27). In such rebellions, the participants seem to attain a "catharsis through a general confession of anger" (*Order 57*). Gluckman views rebellion as an "ever-present, persistent, repetitive process influencing day-to-day political reactions" (*Order 71*). The starting point of Gluckman's theory, as he acknowledges is James Frazer's narrative in *The Golden Bough* (1890) of a ritual of the priest-king of the Italian grove of Nemi. In that tradition, a candidate for the priesthood could only succeed to the office by slaying the existing priest, and the new priest continues to hold the office until he gets slain someday. Gluckman asserted that this priest-king is involved in a 'ritual rebellion' (*Order 178*). Gluckman identified rebellion in both social and political rituals that are explicated in his study of women's rituals of the Zulu and *Incwala* ceremony respectively. This occurs in sacred and traditional established systems where there is a dispute about particular distributions of power, and not about the structure of the system itself. This allows for the instituted protest and in complex ways renews the unity of the system (*Order 179*). Gluckman records the unique rites of women folk of the Zulu community practiced in honor of Goddess Nomkubulwana. The most important of the rites of the

goddess required 'obscene' behavior by the women and girls. The girls donned men's garments and herded and milked the cattle which were normally taboo to them. Their mothers planted a garden for the goddess far out in the veld and poured a libation of beer to her. At various stages of the ceremonies, women and girls went naked and sang lewd songs. Men and boys hid and did not go near (181). Nomkubulwana is the only developed deity in the religion of Zulu. Gluckman notes that this ritual is obsolete, women no longer perform the ritual to honor the goddess. Furthermore, among the Tsonga tribe of Mozambique, a ceremony to drive crop pests is practiced exclusively by women. If any man walked through the paths, "he is pitilessly attacked by these viragoes," who push him or maltreat him. Nobody goes to help him from the "savage crowd of women" (*Order* 182). Further, the Swazi *Incwala* ceremony is a typical first-fruit ceremony and no one should eat the crops before it has been performed. In the ceremony, a pitch-black bull is stolen from the subjects and sacrificed. Then the priests start a journey to fetch water and plants from forests and on their way, "the priests practice licensed robbery on people" (190). In the ceremony, they chant, "You hate the child king, / You hate the child king" and "You have wronged, // Bend great neck, / Those and those who hate him, / They hate the king" (191). At various stages of the ceremony, this hatred song is sung as a national anthem. Certain medications are applied to the King who is secluded from the rest, and at the end of the ceremony, he spits medicines over people so that his strength goes through and awakens them. Then, marking the end of the ritual, he bites the new crops and next day various groups of the nation have the crop in the order of precedence.

Gluckman saw these rituals as a means of “re-establishment of social cohesion.” Through the controlled allowance of protest, a potential rebellion or violence of massive repercussions is adequately checked. These rituals identify conflicts as an essential feature of social life, which is amplified in customs. But through the very same means of customs, the conflict is restrained thus maintaining the social order (2). Tellingly, a custom or tradition is simultaneously the catalyst and the controlling agent of conflicts. An evident resemblance is perceived in Turner’s discussion of *Kumukindyila* rites, an Ndembu ritual of installation of its chief, known as Kanongesha. In *Kumukindyila* rites, the fellow men shower a series of harangues on the chief, “You are a mean and selfish fool, one who is bad-tempered” (Turner, *Ritual* 201). After this, any person who considers that he has been wronged by the chief-elect in the past is entitled to revile him and most fully express his resentment. The chief-elect during all this sit silently with a bowed head. However, Turner does not stress the element of conflict in such rituals and cites it as an example of a phase of liminality, explicating how the rites mold its citizens to conform to its customs; the chief is erased out of all his past allegiances and ego, making him a better leader.

These rituals “openly express social tension: women have to assert license and dominance as against their formal subordination to men, princes have to behave to the king as if they covet the throne, and subjects openly state their resentment of an authority” (Gluckman, *Order* 179). Gluckman notes that the men wished the ritual to be performed and their positive role in the ceremony was to hide (*Order* 182). This dropping of normal constraints and adopting an “inverted and transvestite behaviour” by which men became inferior to women was believed to result in an abundant harvest thereby

ensuring the prosperity of the community. An “open and privileged assertion of obscenity” is yet another marked feature of these rituals that bring out the “fundamental conflicts both in the social structure and in individual psyches” (*Order* 187). Gluckman pays tribute to Frazer who stressed a ‘political process’ inherent in natural, agricultural ceremonies that seemed to be harmless (199).

Rituals of rebellion are an intrinsic feature of an “established and unchallenged social order” (Gluckman, *Order* 200). One important feature of the participants involved in these rituals is their unequivocal belief in the system of institutions. They may have displeasure with certain authorities or individuals; they may hate the king but never hate the kingship. Certainly, these rituals are not aimed at “altering the existing social and political order.” And it is this acceptance of the established order as the right and sacred, that allows the “unbridled excess,” as it is the system itself that sustains rituals of rebellion (Gluckman, *Order* 201). The words of the *Incwala* songs may be shocking, in contrast to the general patriotic songs sung in praise of king, its theme is the “hatred of the king and his rejection by the people” (Gluckman, *Order* 203). The rebellion is headed by a prince; thereby paradoxically the rebellion supports the kingship. In Bharani as well, *Kaavutheendal* occurs after getting permission from the royal head, in the symbolic form of opening a red silk umbrella. But the royal chief does not go through the ordeals as the Kings of Swazi rituals.

Similarly in Bharani, the ceremonies are agricultural rituals, thanksgiving to the goddess for the harvest she has given and for the future prosperity. The women’s ceremony and the King’s ceremonies at sowing and having the first-fruits occur within the ritual pattern of worship of Goddess Nomkubulwana, the nature spirit who is their

patron as is the Bhagavathi. As a part of the rituals, 'temporary kings' are also installed who were sacrificed or mocked or discharged after a few days of role (199). The conflicts can be acted out directly as in the case of temporary kings or by inversion of roles. In Bharani the participants mimic those in power, becoming a representative or a shadow king, a concession of certain days is given, which ultimately asserts the superiority of the royal head. There exists another temple called Pulappadam, about half kilometers east of the Kodungallur Temple at Kaavilkadavu. In relation to Kodungallur Temple, it is called *keezhkavu* (lower grove) and Bhagavathi Temple is known as *melkkavu* (upper grove). Here, we see a small raised platform without roofs and walls, and Bhagavathi is worshipped. This temple belongs to the Pulaya community. The main priest of the temple is known as Vallon and this title is supplied by Kodungallur Thamburan. There is a popular myth that explains its origin and relevance. One day Vallon and his wife Chakki returned from their work to see a dark woman sitting in their hut. Upon inquiring, she reveals that she is Kurumbakkali and is returning after slaying demon king Darika. She expresses her wish to remain in Pulappadam. Pulaya community worshipped her for thirteen days with alcohol, meat, fish, and grain powder and on the fourteenth day, she blessed them and said she will be present thereafter and will be happy if they worship her using these very things. Then, Devi proceeded to the Pilappilly (Nair House) and asked them to inform this matter to Thamburan. And upon her wish, Thamburan built this temple and installed Pulayas as the priests (Chandran 60). Even this story evidently exemplifies Dalit appropriation. Seemingly, in the past, when there occurred a need for accepting this temple, Savarna groups used divine elements to aid this appropriation. When the lower caste groups were uniting and becoming a power, those yielding power

endlessly tried to bring them under Savarna rules. For this purpose, they made stories that explained and justified their actions as a divine wish. Even today, the Savarna sects find it difficult to digest the importance assigned to this temple. In the past, this allowance might have emerged from a social crisis that could have affected Savarna domination. Today, they question the implausibility of such a story and feels if the Goddess can reach Pulappadam, there is no need for her to rest there as Kodungallur temple was just a few distances away from Pulappadam. When *keezhkavu* began to be famous and made more income, a donation box from *melkkavu* was placed in *keezhkavu*. Then, as per an agreement made between the then Vallon and Devaswom, this custom was changed, and instead *keezhkavu* submitted fifty-one rupees every year to the *melkkavu*. This is still practiced and again points to the Savarna attempts to have control over any enterprise of the lower caste groups.

On the day of *Kaavutheendal*, Vallon bows before Thamburan, offers him presents, and adorns him with the sword, shield, bangle, chain, silk, and stick. He wears a cap similar to that of royal head and with all adornments circumambulates the temple three times and pays homage to Goddess. After this ceremony, he seats himself in a raised platform about ten centimeters from the ground. This custom is known as *Vallon Thattukayari*. All the pilgrims who reach *keezhkavu* ascend this platform and receive his blessings and offer *dakshina*. When *Kaavutheendal* concludes, he descends from the seat. On this day, Vallon becomes a shadow image of the royal head. Tangibly, he is only an instrument in this play of Savarna patronage. He enjoys power and fame just for one day and this, in turn, asserts their superiority. The gradual loss of importance faced by *keezhkavu* and the associated practitioners point to a significant period in the history of

Kerala: the rise of Brahminical hegemony in the eighth century and the subsequent marginalization of local groups. Contrastingly, other rituals display an inversion, the inappropriate becomes the appropriate, chaos becomes the norm, and all licentious behavior is tolerated or rather promoted as a potential means of maintaining the balance of the society.

A 'bacchantic' state where women dominate over men as in the case of Zulu does not occur, nevertheless, in Bharani women ascend to share equal space with men. However, men notably do not represent masculinity but manifest feminine force of Bhadrakali, dressed up as women and in a way creates a bacchantic state. It is not an occasion for men to 'hide' (Gluckman, *Order* 182); they play an important role in the ceremony. Women in Kerala, seemingly, are expected to display modesty especially in sexual matters. But in Bharani, sharing equal space with men, they sing ribald songs not in exclusive private space as in the women's ceremonies of Zulu but publicly accompanied by sexual gestures which are otherwise not accepted. Arguably, men in Bharani inverse their role not by leaving the scenario for women to act, but by celebrating the feminine energy. In Zulu, the practice of women donning the men's attire ultimately normalizes the patriarchal system and its superiority. Evidently, the importance attached to feminine nature is not restricted to the period of ritual but is much more lasting in Bharani, producing a healthier gender atmosphere. The presence of transgender groups is a testimony of this broader sentiment and tolerance. Further, menstruation is not seen as a taboo, women are allowed to enter the temple, even during their periods. But by categorizing this entry as one of the elements of pollution, the society is in turn normalizing the taboo against menstruation.

When we come to the concomitant question of the consciousness of the subaltern, the notion of what the work *cannot* say becomes important. And within this realm, “the track of sexual difference is doubly affected” and “subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow...” (Spivak 28). Ranajit Guha proposes to fight against elitist historiography by developing an alternative discourse based on the rejection of the spurious and un-historical monism characteristic of its view of Indian nationalism and the recognition of the co-existence and interaction of the elite and subaltern domain of politics (7). This powerful speaking back is explicit in Bharani songs; ‘abuse’ against royal power including king can be heard and also against administrative powers as in the *Incwala* ritual of Swazi. They perform gestures of hatred towards the head; ‘abuse’ through Bharani songs but ultimately view him as the protector and their savior. This is visible in the performers’ immediate behavior after *Kaavutheendal*, of falling at the feet of the Thamburan.



Fig. 2. 7. Jayan, Nimisha K. After *Kozhikkallu Moodal* Bharani pilgrims contesting to get blessings from royal chief seated in *Nilapaaduthara*. 07 Apr. 2019. *Private collection*.

In the final stages of *Kaavutheendal* when the royal head sits in the *Nilapaduthara* (Platform of the royal chief in the western portico) to permit *Kaavutheendal*, scores of devotees hustle up to bow before him and touch his feet to have blessings. Police and other authorities stand around him to control the crowd and the devotees are pushed and shoved out by these authorities. Still, people swarm around him heedless of the ‘humiliating’ experience (see fig. 2. 7). In the past, the royal head was the king and he ruled over the country. Even today, in the changed scenario, the mindset of these people remains unchanged. For them, their pilgrimage is incomplete without the blessings of the royal head. Here, the royal head holds power almost equal to the Goddess herself and it underlines the general belief that kings are the representatives of gods on earth. After the conflict is enacted out, they return to the normal cycle of the power structure and accept their status as inferior.



Fig. 2. 8. Jayan, Nimisha K. Chief police officials positioned in *Nilapaduthara* during *Kaavutheendal*. 07 Apr. 2019. *Private collection*.

During *Kaavutheendal*, the priests come out of the inner sanctum. Thamburan hands over long sticks known as *mudravadikal* to these priests and Nair chieftains. It

commemorates the ancient incident of Thamburan giving away weapons to the soldiers of the battle as a representative of the Goddess (Chandran 54). Then, accompanied by the young heirs of the royal family and the chiefs of *Onnu Kure Ayiram Yogam* (literally meaning nine hundred and ninety-nine), the association of Nair society of Kodungallur, who were the administrators of Kodungallur temple, Thamburan seats himself in the chair specially ornated with silk on the *Nilapaduthara* of the eastern side of the temple. Then, he opens the silk umbrella signaling the permission to start the *Kaavutheendal*. Police Chiefs, Member of Legislative Assembly, District Collector, and other eminent personalities accompany the royal head (see fig. 2. 8). Ostensibly, political power, administrative power, and royal power are combined in this festival that dictates the norms.

After *Kozhikkallu Moodal* ceremony, the presence of Kodungallur Valiya Thamburan accompanied by his family is mandatory by the custom in the *balikkalpura* in the eastern portico to measure the rice grain for *uchapooja*. After *uchapooja*, he goes back. In the evening, till the *deeparadhana* is over, Thamburan has to be present in *balikkalpura* (Chandran 57). Arguably, these festivals serve to assert upper class superiority and indispensability. Upon close examination, we realize that the customs and rules of these festivals are carefully designed in such a way as to ensure the Brahminical hegemony. In Bharani, different caste groups from upper castes to lower castes share the ritual space and together solidify the established notions of caste and race fields. But, in the initial understanding of the festival, we do not see any resistance. If there is any moral anger even this has been masked by religious fervor and ecstasy. For them, Bharani serves as a harvest festival and their offering to their much-feared Goddess brings them

fortune and health. Thus confirming to the traditions, they seem to accept their social role as marginalized.

Thus, Bharani as a ritual of rebellion is a 'psycho-drama' involving intricate psychological processes above the 'social drama' of class conflict. Bharani is a Freudian 'projection' of upper caste sects, wherein their sexual desires and antagonisms are attributed to the subaltern groups and subsequently disowned. As Jacques Lacan identifies, the unconscious of the performer is the 'kernel of being' and reigns supreme in Bharani. The self of the performer is formed from this unconscious as Lacan observed, "I am where I think not" (103). Bharani is like a psychoanalytic procedure wherein the repressed anxieties, traumas, and desires are voiced thereby taking it from the unconscious to the conscious realm of mind and are openly dealt with. The repressed materials are later sublimated, 'promoted' into something grander or nobler. The devotees are separated from their mother goddess in the course of history pushed to the current 'symbolic order' marked by socialization and the painful knowledge of taboos and restraints. Through Bharani, there is an urge to go back to the 'imaginary' order where there is a relative merging and 'idealized identification' of the devotee with their Goddess. This anxiety and lack and intense longing for the Goddess is best expressed in the Bharani songs. Bharani songs are characterized by a language enriched with metaphor and metonymy, the ingenious play of signifiers all aimed at attaining or reaching a transcendental signified, the Goddess herself.

Bharani is supposedly against the accepted norms of social roles. Though we see an inversion of conventional rules in Bharani, in contrast to carnivalesque behavior, all the participants are not deemed to be equal. A sense of hierarchy exists within the

participants, though the regime of power which is dynamic and implies upper caste domination. Though occasional joviality is created through abusive songs that mock at everything including the upper castes, Bharani is ultimately a religious observance with ritual severity. It occurs within a rigid ritual framework, it is first and foremost an occasion of pain and not laughter. Also, even though in the festival, the participants as Vallon and Palaykal Velan act as a shadow of a king, they do not parody the kingship, but view it with veneration and exercise the office with dedication. By entering the temple premises without adhering to prevalent modes of temple worship, devotees break the sacrosanct convention giving rise to religious tension. The sovereign powers grant the ritual though there is great discontent among them and thus the Bharani devotees 'pollute' the Goddess and the temple premises in the face of fierce moral anger of the natives of Kodungallur. Some resist these 'invaders' and see them as 'pollutants' who have come to denigrate their Goddess. Adding to the friction is the contesting practice of *theripattu*. For a few days, these religious extravagances are tolerated upon. For the time being, this infringement is condoned and the gap between upper class authority and these subaltern groups, otherwise unbridgeable is forgotten. Their excessive anger, frustrations, and energies are spent in the activity and they return as a new being and this is markedly a major event in the spiritual growth of the devotee.

In brief, for the devotees, Bharani serves primarily as a harvest festival, and their offerings and steadfast devotion to their much-feared Goddess brings them well-being and euphoria. As hinted before, they are seen as intruders who have come to disrupt the normal order of civilized society. They serve as a cultural shock to the pseudo-moralistic society and a grim reminder of man's crudeness, vulgarity, and bawdiness. The upper

class continues to view them with skepticism and disgust and is not ready to accept them or even their festival. Even the opposition they face is unequal as they are absent for a year and appear in the arena only for a few days of a month. The totalitarian forces work against them for the rest of the year trying to contain their rituals, ban their songs, and 'clean' their activities. But till now, though much has been gained in writing, the upper class sects have not been able to contain these mass which is wild, divergent, and streaming in from different parts of the state. They stand paralyzed against the latter unrefined, uncontrollable energies and though repressive measures such as policing are used, unmistakably it has not succeeded yet.

Chapter Three

Bodies in Performance: Gender and Power

Women's studies has entered into the new domain of gender studies where men's studies and transgender studies receive equal attention. It is footed on the notion that every 'body' is gendered and is a result of multiple agencies. In the post-structuralist analysis, 'women' and 'men' are regarded as constructions or representations achieved through discourse, performance, and repetition rather than being 'real' entities. However, some scholars feel that women's studies has lost its confidence and sense of direction and that gender studies is a dilution—a sign that feminist knowledge has been tamed and reconstituted by the academy (Pilcher and Whelehan xii). Nevertheless, the study of gender remains diverse and inter-disciplinary re-emerging and re-finding its position and power. Gender categories of 'masculine' or 'feminine' have been devised by the society to affirm the inferiority of female sex and create a consciousness among women that they are naturally better suited to 'domestic' roles. Simon de Beauvoir's statement in *The Second Sex* that "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (295) stresses how the pressure of society necessitates this transformation. Tellingly, the concept of gender as performance brought forward by Judith Butler allows for 'gender trouble,' a conscious attempt to subvert the automatized gender equations thereby questioning the normalized meanings and institutions.

Today, 'body' is a seminal category not only for physical sciences but for Philosophy, Humanities, and Social Sciences as well. Within feminism and gender studies, the body has occupied a key position in a wide range of debates, including men's

control of women's bodies as a key means of subordination; critiques of dichotomous thinking; and in debates about essentialism and the theorizing of difference and diversity. This concept has been strongly critiqued or questioned. Women have been objectified and alienated as social subjects partly through the denigration and containment of the female body (Grosz xiv). The body has remained a 'conceptual blind spot' in western philosophical deliberations and contemporary feminist theory. In gender studies, the body is dealt in three ways: the body as nature, the body as socially constructed, and embodiment (Pilcher and Whelehan 6). The first approach that deals with the body as nature is a traditional approach to the body, in which it is seen as a biological entity that determines the difference between genders. Shulamith Firestone, a radical feminist, regards the reproductive functions within the body as the defining element and proposes that in order to eliminate the differences, the reproductive functions have to take place outside of a woman's body. However, other activists as Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray consider reproductive activities as a source of power and superiority over men.

In the seventeenth century, philosopher René Descartes formulated a dualistic conception of the body as separate from the mind often known as 'cartesian duality.' The body, according to Descartes, was simply a machine, much like a car. It was driven intellectually and spiritually by the mind, hence Descartes's well-known dictum *Cogito ergo sum* meaning 'I think therefore I am' (46). This division between mind and body is patently gendered. Not all historical conceptions view the body as equally 'inescapable.' Susan Bordo attests that the Greeks viewed the soul and body as inseparable except through death. Descartes believed that with the right philosophical method we can transcend the epistemological limitations of the body (4). The mind has been associated

with positive terms such as reason, rationality, and masculinity whereas the body has been associated with negative terms such as irrationality, nature, and femininity. Men are thought to be able to transcend their bodies, or at least have their bodily needs met by others, whereas women are thought to be tied to their bodies because of their emotions, menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth (Johnston and Longhurst 97). Feminists have argued that dualism is frequently gendered, with women cast in the role of the body, in Beauvoir's words "weighed down by everything peculiar to it." In contrast, a man casts himself as the "inevitable, like a pure idea, like the One, the All, the Absolute Spirit." In dualism, the body is the negative term, and if a woman is a body, then women form that negativity, "distraction from knowledge, seduction away from God, capitulation to sexual desire, violence or aggression, failure of will, even death" (Bordo 5). Linda Alcoff attests that mind-body dualism is a central feature of the male reason. She quotes Plato, "the god-like rational soul should rule over the slave-like mortal body" (14). "The body is mind, and the body, the personal and social, and more: in Freud's term, it *is body- ego*" (Pile 185). Thus, the body has multiple layers of meaning; the body is not only an individual project but has social and political connotations attached to it.

Furthermore, the body has an uncertain place in Deleuze's work. "It is its kind of Erewhon: simultaneously 'now here' and 'nowhere'" (Guillaume and Hughes 1). Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari proposed a vision of the unconscious as a factory and the body as an assemblage of machines producing desire. The human body, they note:

is at work everywhere, functioning smoothly at times, at other times in fits and starts. It breathes, it heats, it eats. It shits and fucks. What a mistake to have ever said the *id*. Everywhere it is machines—real ones, not figurative ones: machines

driving other machines, machines being driven by other machines, with all the necessary couplings and connections (*Anti* 1).

They view ‘body’ simultaneously as perception and action. Body is seen as a unitary and dynamic entity deeply involved in the world. That is, any theory of body is at the very same time a theory of such a body into the world; there is nobody outside the world (Cimatti 3). Further, the body suffers from the imperialism of language (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand* 65). It is formed in signification and thus the body is always a spoken body, a signed body, a marked body. In particular, according to Deleuze and Guattari, a body is not the sum of its own somewhat ‘static’ properties, quite the contrary, a body is what it can do, it is what it actually does. They elaborate on a new concept to characterize the body, the concept of ‘virtuality.’ A classical body is such a body, which can do what it potentially can do. Every temporal body has a limited set of dispositions, attitudes, habits, and behavior. But every actual body also has a virtual dimension: plenitude of potential behaviors. They call the aggregate of such potentials as the “body without organs.” The full body without organs is “schizophrenia as a clinical entity” (*Anti* 310). That is, a body is somewhat trapped into the very Aristotelian couple of potency and act (Cimatti 6). Probably, what they “effectively do is to reconfigure the body as the sum of its capacities, which is not the same as reducing it to its functions...” (Buchanan 75). This idea of body views the human body to be in constant interaction with the larger abstract bodies, social and physical ever caught in the process of producing, produced, and becoming.

Seemingly, the contemporary Western view of the body views body and mind as braided together, affecting each other’s functioning. Further, the Indian approach of the

human energy system views the body as 'gross' and 'subtle.' This concept based on *chakras* ("wheels of energy"), subtle bodies and the aura views human beings as made up of layers of vibrating energy each of which has their specific vibration and purpose. The gross physical body is visible to us, whereas the subtle, energy-laden body is invisible. The Hindu yoga epistemology believes in seven *chakras*, Jaina scriptures mention nine *chakras* and Buddhist scriptures find dozens of *chakras* (Osho 1). Presumably, this notion views the body as a network of energy systems. At another level, the body has two dimensions: the phenomenal or subjective and the objective. The subjective side belongs to the individual realm whereas the objective body is located in society. The subjective body is visible and cognizable by the senses. The abstract states of mind as feelings, anxieties, and emotions belong to the objective body. The social world frames and constructs the objective body (Leder 131). Both these sides are linked, yet distinct. Mary Douglas explored the social body as "a highly restricted medium of expression" and a key to the relationship of self, society, and cosmos (173). Victor Turner pushed the primacy of the body further by arguing that it is the human organism itself, and not society, that is the *fons et origo* ("source and origin") of all classification ("Body" 123). Erving Goffman, in turn, examined the molding of the body into a nearly mnemonic encapsulation of the cultural principles that organize society. The body serves as a link between the interactions between individuals and society. The body also places itself as "the foremost of all metaphors" around which a society is organized (C. Bell, *Ritual: Theory* 118). Thus, if the physical body is the begetter of a larger social apparatus, then the complexities of society can be better understood by inspecting bodily configurations.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the distinction between sex and gender began to be questioned by feminist theorists such as Diana Fuss, Moira Gatens, and Elizabeth Grosz. They persuasively argued that the distinction between sex and gender (between biology and social inscription) does not hold. It is not possible to say where sex stops and gender starts or vice versa. The body can never be extracted from the social mesh; sex and gender are always inextricably linked. Gender writes itself not on but through bodies. Within the 'embodiment' theory, the body is seen "simultaneously both as a natural, physical and as produced through cultural, discursive practices" (Pilcher and Whelehan 9). R. W Connel identifies a set of cultural practices which, in combination, act to 'negate' (or minimize) the similarities between the bodies of women and men, by exaggerating their differences. Clothing and accessories are a means of achieving such a negation of the body. She vindicates the view that the "body, without ceasing to be the body, is taken in hand and is transformed in social practice" (Pilcher and Whelehan 9). This concept of equality takes us to the concept of difference that lies at the heart of feminism. Whether men or women are treated as same, irrespective of their differences or their differences be recognized and accepted is a central question posed before gender studies. Arguably, feminism is against essentialism which assumes "all manifestations of gender difference as innate and transcultural and historical" (Pilcher and Whelehan 41). Gayatri Spivak advocated a kind of 'strategic essentialism' as she posits that the essence of a thing can be 'positioned' and 'necessary to' understand the position of women in this world (43). Also, Judith Butler's model of gender as performative and perpetually in transition was unmistakably against the essentialist notion of identity.

The body is located in its socio-cultural context. Body and space are inextricably related and the bodies in action are an important key in understanding the space in which it is located. Drew Leder writes in *The Absent Body*:

It is through the bodily surface that I first engage the world. Only because my eyes and ears lie on the surface of my body are they capable of disclosing the events taking place around me. My hands, in order to explore and work upon the world, must extend outward from my corporeal “extremities.” My expressive face can form a medium of communication only because it is available to the Other’s gaze...The surface is where self meets what is other than self. (11)

She argues that each of our senses works in different ways and open to a world around us. She contends that “my being-in-the-world depends upon my body’s self-effacing transitivity.” Feelings as hunger, thirst, and sexual cravings are not only limited to internal forces, they have several manifestations in the external body as well. Thus, the body has the “power of transcending its confines” (Leder 15). She calls this phenomenon of projection of lived body ‘ecstatic’ meaning to ‘stand out.’ The lived body is not a definitive entity but a medium to sense the world. To incorporate a tool is to redesign one’s extended body until its extremities expressly mesh with the world (Leder 72). We reshape our bodily abilities according to the environment around us. This is true as people belonging to different physical environments have varied bodily activities. Thus, the interactions with the world make certain changes in the appearance and capabilities of our body. Drew Leder argues that even man and technologies and tools are designed to suit this interaction. One end of a tool is designed to suit human anatomy and movements and the other end is suited to fit the physical world. Elaine Scarry’s comparison of a

human dwelling to a body is poignant in this context. She points out, “the very house in which one dwells is both a reconstruction of the surrounding world to fit the body and enlargement of our physical structure” (qtd. in Leder 73). For most of our lives, our body goes unnoticed as it is always in a process of self-effacement.

Another question in this regard is how the body is perceived in this world. Feministic studies always link gaze to desire, as the body is felt like an accessory or rather a commodity. Rebecca Schneider affirms, “Desire must appear as unmarked, as human nature. But, like commodities themselves, it is nature designed, packaged, and sold—marketed, outfitted... as if by some great accident of God: desire is masculinized; the desired, feminized” (5). Since this desire is always placed as ‘insatiable,’ the female body is placed as ‘impossibility.’ Contemporary feminist thinkers insist that “women are the done to, not the doers; that men and their desires bear the responsibility; and female obedience to the dictates of fashion is better conceptualized as bondage than choice” (Bordo 22). Rebecca Schneider studies the explicit performances by female artists who use their bodies, both as a prop and a stage, through which they re-enact social dramas and traumas which have “arbitrated cultural differentiations between truth and illusion, reality and dream, fact and fantasy, natural and unnatural, essential and constructed” (5). They make a deliberate attempt to disrupt the conventional notions of viewing the body and aims at a re-scripting of the body. She alleges that it is not the content, but the frame within which it is set that decides the nature of a work of art.

For Michel Foucault “bodies, and the social organization of bodies, are immediately implicated in any scene or site of knowledge” (*Power* 22). The body was conceived as either an unsophisticated machine that took in data without interpreting it,

or it was considered an obstacle to knowledge in throwing up emotions, feelings, needs, desires, all of which interfered with the attainment of truth (*Power* 15). Foucault's theory speaks of the body as space where various discourses conflict as well as a site of power. Foucault holds that "bodies are constituted within the specific nexus of culture or discourse/power regimes" (*Power* 226). Foucault posits a history of the modern regime of social control, in other words, how the body is controlled by power. In the west, there occurred a shift in the patterns of punishment by the nineteenth century, it transformed into a 'gentler' punishment, more or less aimed at the refinement of the soul, which nevertheless included elaborate procedures to regulate the body making it docile. Foucault termed this new system 'discipline,' and argued that the move away from torture was "not to punish less, but to punish better; to punish with an attenuated severity perhaps, but in order to punish with more universality and necessity; to insert the power to punish more deeply into the social body" (*Discipline* 81). Professedly, three technologies enable the production of docile bodies: hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and examination. The first is inherent in the model of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon; the second method of normalizing judgment is a compulsive and extensive ranking and rating. "The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it normalizes" (*Discipline* 182). The final means, examination, combines the first two into a "normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish...in it are combined the ceremony of power and the form of the experiment, the deployment of force and the establishment of truth" (*Discipline* 184). He terms these regulatory practices of modern states through

“an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations” as biopower (*History* 184). Thus, discipline does not merely evaluate individuals according to norms; it also breaks individual bodies down into basic elements to better evaluate and train them to obey this norm (Punday 512). It seems that for Foucault, the formation of knowledge and the exercise of power are intrinsically linked.

Third-wave feminism realized the need to study men in a new way, so that gender roles and sexual relations would be seen in a new light and questions the naturalness of gender itself as a binary opposition and how one gender became dominant over other. It imagined the human body as itself a “politically inscribed entity, its physiology, and morphology shaped by histories and practices of containment and control—from foot-binding and corseting to rape and battering to compulsory heterosexuality, forced sterilization, unwanted pregnancy...” (Bordo 21). Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the body as “the vehicle of being in the world” (82). Making any body explicit as socially marked, and foregrounding the historical, political, cultural, and economic issues involved in its marking is the agenda set by such feminist explicit body works. In other words, they aim at a “binary terrorism-or strategic implosion of binaried distinctions” (18). Furthermore, once the primary objective of feminist studies was the deconstruction of phallogentric narratives of male-dominated disciplines, but new feminist criticism “turned to its narratives, finding them reductionist, totalizing, inadequately nuanced, valorizing of gender difference, unconsciously racist, and elitist” (Bordo 216). To suit this purpose, they are seeking new tools and penetrating fresher domains making the discipline retain its appeal and import even in the changed scenario.

Judith Butler, a sterling presence in the field of gender studies, is lauded for her avante-garde theories that dismantle the wonted ideas of sexuality and gender. She posits that a unified, whole and universal woman's experience is unfeasible as women do not compose a group with common interests and attitudes. Hence, feminism must aim at an open-endedness to embrace the multi-faceted nature of a woman's experience. Butler argues that feminist approaches have failed to an extent as they reinforced a strictly binary view of gender, dividing them into male and female, allowing no space for variant categories. Though they denounced the popular dictum 'Biology is destiny,' they inadvertently replaced culture as inevitable. Butler is clearly influenced by J. L Austin's theories when she defines performative acts in *Bodies That Matter* as forms of authoritative speech where most performatives are statements that, in the uttering, also perform a certain action and exercise a binding power (95). She suggests that performance is "not a singular 'act' or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production..." (*Bodies* 96). Thus, for Butler, the ritualistic 'repetition' of 'gender performances' have an ongoing outcome. They contribute to the 'naturalizing' of bodies, making the 'cultural fiction' of gender appear credible and real, rather than being a corporeal (or bodily) 'style' or 'enactment,' a constitution of meaning (Salih 8). Evidently, it is a threat or constraint that fuels and validates a performance, and it is through repeated actions one achieve identity. This idea reinforces gender as an 'achievement' rather than an unalterable truth, synchronously ascribing an agency to the performer in fixing their identity.

Butler expounds on the performative aspects of gender employing phenomenology. She cites Merleau-Ponty's reflections *In the Phenomenology of Perception*, that the body is a 'historical idea' rather than 'a natural species.' She states that Simone de Beauvoir extends the very same idea when she in *The Second Sex* claims that "women, and by extension, any gender, is a historical situation rather than a natural fact" (qtd. in *Bodies* 98). For Butler, gender is a fluid variable that is relative and expeditiously evolving. She attacks the general notion of sex as a fixed biological entity and assumes it to be socially constructed. Butler argues that sex (male, female) is seen to cause gender (masculine, feminine) which is seen to cause desire (towards the other gender). This is seen as a kind of continuum. She writes, "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender, identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" ("Performative" 25). If gender is "understood as constituted" it can be "constituted differently" (*Bodies* 98). Butler calls for a 'gender trouble,' a conscious subversion of gendered identities. Identity is not something connected to the essence, but that which develops gradually through one's actions and interactions, or performance; hence it is free-floating. In the notion of gender as performance, the performance creates the performer and has no existence before or outside the performance. And curiously, if gender is a performative it can be performed in different modes giving rise to diverse identities. This notion evidently unsettles the long array of discourses that presupposed an essential, authentic human temperament.

Judith Butler relies in *Gender Trouble* on Foucault's theory presented in *Discipline and Punish*, which challenges the relations of body and soul. Foucault argued that oppression imposed on prisoners is not internalized but is rather imprinted or marked

on their bodies. Methods of 'discipline' and 'punish' act on the body and form the image of the recalcitrant inner soul. This image regulates and justifies the actions of power upon the body. Foucault's argument, adopted by Judith Butler, is that the soul is the prison of the body, and not the other way around as was widely held in Western culture (Salih 50). By this Foucault means to argue that discourse formations that deal with the human soul and define it essentially operate through the body and on the body, shaping it and marking it with the traces of the alleged 'soul' which hides somewhere deep inside.

For Butler, gender has been a 'burning' issue at stake and attacks the general notion that women are always already punished, castrated, and is subject to penis envy. Gender is a verb rather than a noun, a 'doing' rather than a 'being' (*Gender* 25). It is the mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized, but gender might very well be the apparatus by which such terms are deconstructed and denaturalized (*Undoing* 111). She argues that sexual difference is not the primary difference and that it is no more primary than racial or ethnic differences. It is an acceptable idea that all humans must be born from a father and a mother, but feels that sperm donors, or one night-standers or even rapists put the category of "father" in crisis (10). Reasonably, for Butler, interpellation, action, and creation are cardinal steps in the gender constitution. And relying solely on sexuality to categorize humans would be primitive and illogical as we currently witness a proliferation of sexual identities and relationships. Further, if gender is the cultural meaning that the sexed body assumes, gender cannot originate in a linear progression from sex. If gender being constructed is independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body and vice versa (Butler,

Gender 9). She presumes that gender ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on pre-given sex, gender is also the very apparatus of production by which sexes themselves are established (11). Favorably, biological differences do not stand in the way of achieving gender; female, the male or transgender experience is no longer exclusive, but mutual drawing from a collective.

The body implies mortality, vulnerability, and agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others but also to touch and to violence. The body can be the agency and instrument of all these as well, or the site where ‘doing’ and ‘being done to’ become equivocal. She argues that the very bodies for which we struggle are not quite ever only our own. The body has its invariably public dimension; constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, “my body is and is not mine” (*Undoing* 21). Butler writes that Beauvoir feels that one ‘become’ a woman under a cultural compulsion, the body becomes either a passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed or as an active instrument through which cultural meanings are produced for itself (*Gender* 12). Butler also underlines Luce Irigaray’s argument that women constitute a paradox, if not a contradiction, within the discourse of identity itself. Women are the ‘sex’ which is not ‘one.’ Women represent the sex that cannot be thought, a linguistic absence, and opacity. Within a language that rests on univocal signification, the female sex constitutes the ‘uncontainable’ and ‘undesignatable.’ Thus, Butler feels that woman itself is a term in process, a becoming, and a construction that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end. As an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification.

In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler deals with the question of the materiality of the body. She feels that the notion of gender performativity is a confusing idea:

For if I were to argue that genders are performative, that could mean that I thought that one woke in the morning, perused the closet or some more open space for the gender of choice, donned that gender for the day, and then restored the garment to its place at night. Such a willful and instrumental subject, one who decides on its gender, is clearly not its gender from the start and fails to realize that its existence is already decided by gender. (1)

This calls into question the idea of choice in gender. “Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (Butler, *Gender* 43). The category of ‘sex’ is normative; it is what Foucault has called a ‘regulatory ideal.’ In this sense, then, ‘sex’ not only functions as a norm but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs. It has the power to produce—demarcate, circulate, differentiate—the bodies it controls. Thus, ‘sex’ is an ideal construct that is forcibly materialized through time (Butler, *Bodies* 1). Gender performativity is intrinsically related to this conception of materialization. In the first instance, performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate ‘act,’ but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names. In this sense, what constitutes the fixity of the body, its contours, its movements, will be fully material; materiality being the effect of power. As a locus of cultural interpretations, “the body is a material reality which has already been located and defined within a social context” (*Bodies* 28). Thus, for her, the material body can be apprehended only through discourse. The body, as Butler puts it in her introduction to *Bodies That Matter*, is “a process of materialization that stabilizes overtime to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and

surface we call matter” (5). Sarah Salih feels that Butler is not refuting the ‘existence’ of matter, but she insists that matter can have no status outside a discourse that is always constitutive, always interpellative, always performative (80). Thus, the body for Butler is a linguistic construction. It is for this reason that ‘sex’ is placed within inverted commas, in order to signal its status as signification and its vulnerability to resignification (Salih 80). Thus, there is no fixity to gender; it is open to change and re-change. The term ‘materialization’ encapsulates the idea that the body is a temporal process repeatedly taking place in a language that is itself material. “A boy/girl’s sex or gender is identified through a process of interpellation, mostly when it is born. ‘It’s a girl/boy!’” (Butler, *Bodies* 77). Biological organs as penis and vagina, that typically denote sex are present in the body while birth, but it is a performative interpellation that categorizes the gender. In the ‘mirror stage’ proposed by Lacan, an infant acquires the notion of its body as separate from the outer environment and its mother’s body. Till that point “the infant’s bodily self-perception has been chaotic, scrambled, in pieces, what Lacan calls a ‘homelette,’ but after seeing its reflection in the mirror it becomes aware of the margins of its body (Mirzoeff, *Visual* 90). Butler argues that it is the language that constitutes the body as the mirror stage coincides with the infant’s entry into language or the symbolic order. In other words, language does not simply name a body that pre-exists, but in the act of interpellation constitutes the body and its identity.

Further, Butler’s ideas have profusely inspired queer theorists; the major being ‘melancholic heterosexuality,’ which can act as the cause of ‘gender trouble.’ Butler posits that heterosexuality requires homosexuality in order to define itself and maintain its stability. She writes; “[H]omosexuality emerges as a desire which must be produced

in order to remain repressed, heterosexuality produces intelligible homosexuality and then renders it unintelligible by prohibiting it” (Butler, *Gender* 77). Sara Salih observes this idea that homosexuality is ‘produced’ in order to maintain the coherence of heterosexuality is attractive but problematic, since it risks pathologizing homosexuality and consigning it to a secondary position in relation to heterosexuality – a product of a heterosexualizing law (60). Again, sex is not the same as sexuality. Michel Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality*, has changed the way world perceived sexuality, and it established homosexuality as an identity rather than a perversion. Homosexuality has long been condemned as pathology and ‘deviance.’ Foucault contended that sexuality should not be regarded as a force of nature that our ancestors censored and distorted, and which needs to be liberated within us but sexuality, like all other human states, is produced in discourse (During 185). Foucault’s ideas on sexuality have been greatly welcomed by queer theorists and his notion that the “body is immersed in discourse and given meaning by it” (*History* 129) led to its development. In addition, Foucault’s notion of ‘heteronormativity’ points to the fact that in our society the concepts of the normal and heterosexual are almost impossible to separate. It also indicated how heterosexuality almost invisibly supports several other norms; it is the key to social acceptance and remains one of the mainstays of family values. That is, heteronormativity as a concept makes it clear that compulsory heterosexuality is socially invisible because it has embedded itself into the culture’s sense of the normal across so many registers and formations that alternatives look like pathologies rather than viable alternatives (186).

Pointedly, queer theory seeks to subvert the process of normalization in favor of heterosexuality, and rather than hoping a welcome into the mainstream gender, they call

for a celebration of their difference. Lesbians and gay men, transvestites, and persons of indeterminate sex challenge the absolute nature of the binary opposition. The Intersex Society of North America (ISNA) of 1996 defines intersex as “individuals born with anatomy or physiology which differs from cultural ideals of male and female” (Ekins and King 170). This formula regards a purely biological definition of sex as impossible. At the same time, it challenges ideas of culture as a received tradition that shapes identity. The cultural ideal of the perfect human body denies people of intersex the very right to exist. They are in essence, fighting to retain their own body, in the original way it had been created from its inception. They are fighting for acceptance of their bodies without alteration. INSA brings attention to the practices of body alterations as Intersex Genital Mutilation (IGM). In the name of tradition, to curb female sexuality, in some societies, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is performed during which women are subjected to the excision of the clitoris and labia and even a practice known as infibulation in which the vaginal opening is sewn shut apart from a small opening. Such cases are reported all around the world, not only in primitive tribal societies but alarmingly in communities that proclaim to be progressive and educated; Kerala being one. If culture is defined as inherited tradition, these traditions too must be accepted, which cannot be.

Judith Butler’s understanding of human sexuality is immense, her notions not dogmatic but broad enough to embrace the diversities. Rather than viewing humans as helpless or passive receptors of values and identities created by distant extraneous factors, Butler posited the body as the tool of cultural production, a site of perpetual performances that ultimately defined its destiny. The next section is a discussion of

pollution and taboo ideas of society, its connectedness to sexuality, particularly focusing on the menstruation taboos and its patterns.

Pollution and Taboo

Pollution and taboo ideas play a significant role in creating gender separations. Sacred and profane are two modes of being in the world. Mircea Eliade states that the man of the traditional societies is admittedly a *homo religious* (15). Mary Douglas in her book *Purity and Danger* asserts that pollution ideas work in the life of society at two levels; instrumental and expressive. At the first level, we find people trying to influence one another's behavior. Beliefs reinforce social pressures. Similarly, "the ideal order of society is guarded by dangers which threaten transgressors" (Douglas 1). The fear of falling into profanity checks man from indulging in such 'dangerous' activities. "The whole universe is harnessed to men's attempts to force one another into good citizenship" (Douglas 2). These pollution ideas are cleverly planted in human minds and any sort of lapse is unacceptable and criminal aiding in framing the absolute moral code of the society. Sacred things and places must be protected from defilement. Thus, profanity and divinity must be compartmentalized stringently, allowing no space for mutual contiguity.

Douglas famously notes: "The unclear is the unclean" (97). Patriarchal society still views female experiences with skepticism, for it, these experiences constitute the incomprehensible, hence unequivocally hailed as 'polluting.' In certain tribal societies, an unborn child and mother are seen as polluting. For example, a Lele woman while pregnant does not approach a sick person, as it may worsen his/her condition. Among the Nyakyusa tribe "A pregnant woman is thought to reduce the quantity of grain she

approaches because the fetus in her is voracious and snatches it” (Douglas 96). In the Enga tribe, another conspicuous pollution idea is seen. The young boys are advised to shun female company as women are inherently polluting. Only married men can enter into the sexual union as they only get special remedies to purify them and preserve their virility. Even so, they reduce the sexual contact to a minimum, limiting it only for procreation. Douglas notes that the two dominant beliefs in their culture are the superiority of the male principle and its vulnerability to female influence (148). Menstrual blood and miscarriage are equally polluting agents.

Female sexuality is feared by most societies. If a man marries a woman of the plains Arapesh, he observes elaborate precautions to “cool off her more dangerous sexuality.” The wife is allowed to remain in his house, and they enter into sexual contact only after several months. Then he watches the signs if everything is safe and secure, he continues the relationship, if not he “abstain from relationship with this dangerous, oversexed woman still many more moons, lest the part of his potency, his own physical strength, the ability to feed others, which he most cherishes, should be permanently injured” (Douglas 149). Also, in the Enga tribe of Papua New Guinea, not only women, the sexual activity itself is a means of corruption and danger. Anyone coming from sexual intercourse should not go near sick or newborn babies as they can harm or even kill them. The wife had the duty of cleaning her husband and herself after every sexual contact. For this purpose, every woman keeps a pot of water hidden in the grass outside the village. Making matters worse, if a man touched it accidentally, he is believed to lose his virility. If the wife cooked food without ablution, he would again lose his virility. Thus, we discern virility to be a vulnerable fragile quality and a much cherished one.

Further, a menstruating woman should not light the fire, but she can cook food, seeking the help of a friend. And she should not enter the forest as it can wreck any enterprise of men in the forest. They depend on the forest for their living and hence it must be protected at any cost. In such societies, all rituals had to be protected from female pollution, and hence, women were generally excluded from cult affairs. The male officiants abstained from sexual intercourse the night before the ritual. The same applied to warfare, hunting, and tapping palms for wine. Similarly, women should abstain from sexual intercourse before planting ground nuts or maize, fishing, making salt, or pottery. These applied for men and women as well. Also during certain junctures, sexual abstinence was prescribed for the whole village. Douglas states that in such a society women were treated as “simultaneously as persons and as the currency of male transactions. Males and females are set off as belonging to distinct mutually hostile spheres” (153). Ironically enough, though considered as an agent of ‘pollution,’ women were not discharged of their duties but instead supplemented with means and solutions to ‘protect’ others from their ‘contagious’ presence.

Another polluting agent is menstrual blood that can “sicken a man and cause persistent vomiting, ‘kill’ his blood so that it turns black, corrupt his vital juices so that his skin darkens and hangs in folds as his flesh wastes, permanently dull his wits, and eventually lead to a slow decline and death” (Douglas 148). Menstrual blood down the ages is seen both as polluted and polluting in most societies. The *Book of Leviticus* taught that menstruation made women ‘unclean’ and that their menstrual blood was a sign of moral as well as a physical impurity. This impurity was considered to be contagious, and anyone coming into contact with it was in need of ‘cleansing.’ The menstruating women

themselves were to be ‘put apart seven days,’ and whosoever touched them would “be unclean until the even.” This idea that menstruation was a sign of women’s sinfulness was reinforced by popular interpretations of the Biblical *Book of Genesis*, which held that “the pain of childbirth, and, by extension, the discomfort of the menses, was a reflection of the punishment of Eve for her *Original Sin*” (Newton 20). Tellingly, to what extent these religious testaments had a role in drilling misogynist ideas into the society is imaginable.

Furthermore, Aristotle contrasted women’s sexual difference to men. He saw men’s souls as more active than women’s and ‘concluded that they [men] add more active energy to their blood, transforming it into sperm. As sperm can leave the body with great energy, he further concluded that sperm has more force than menstrual blood (Newton 27). Frazer in his *The Golden Bough* (1890) explores menstrual taboos that describe menstruation as a negative and polluting force: “The general effect of these rules is to keep [menstruating women] suspended, so to say, between heaven and earth...being shut off from both the earth and from the sun, she can poison neither of these great sources of life by her deadly contagion” (Newton 34). India, being a traditional society is replete with such rituals of pollution. Though they vary between different caste and religious groups, several similar patterns can be noted among them. Curiously, the old testamental notion of seven days seclusion is not an exclusive one; we can trace several such rituals around the world. The Hindu notions of pollution are governed by epic text *Manava Dharmasastra* (*Manu’s Treatise on Dharma*) believed to have written around 200 BC. According to the text, the twelve bodily fluids that are deemed dirty are “oil, semen, blood, bone marrow, urine, excrement, snot, ear-wax, phlegm, tears, the discharge

from the eyes, and the sweat.” The treatise considers semen too as polluting in contrast to the western view but validates that “when a man has shed his semen he is cleaned by washing; a sexual connection involving semen afflicts a man with inauspiciousness for three days” (Doniger and Smith 150). Noticeably, this concept of male pollution is not so popularized as female pollution and most often conveniently ignored. In Nepal, a *chhaupadi* or menstruation hut is built near homes to keep the ‘polluting’ menstruating women. Similarly, a menstruating woman in Kerala, in the past was forced to spend seven whole days in seclusion, in a dark room; she would be given food on regular intervals in utensils kept exclusively for her. She must not have any access to religious ongoing; additionally, they were prohibited from touching sacred plants as tulsi or lemon tree, lest it would be dried up due to the catastrophic menstrual heat of the women’s body. Thus, she was kept away from indulging in any kind of social activity during these days. She was incorporated into normal life only after a ceremonial ablution. This aspect pressed them to be absent for a few days and the male-dominated society has devised this as a tool to make her absent from the mainstream forever. In modern times, this custom has died out as it has become a practical impossibility. Such notions of pollution are also connected to life phases as birth as well as death.

Judy Grahn in her book *Blood, Bread, and Roses: How Menstruation Created the World* (1993) develops the ‘metaformic theory’ that posits menstruation to be “at the base of our distinctly human cultural habits, including our religions, sciences, and household arts and crafts.” She presupposes that ancestral females possessed a ‘metaformic consciousness’ which is the knowledge that their menses is synchronized with the lunar cycle, “giving them a means of identifying with an exterior time pattern. This gradually

pulled their minds into a radically different consciousness than that of other primates. Recognition of the synchronized cycles, combined with the danger posed by blood flow on the open plains, led to timed seclusions producing rituals.” She asserts that the Sanskrit term *ritu* meaning menstruation is the root of the word ritual. This leads to her theory that all human knowledge derived from rituals is constructed and held in forms called ‘metaforms,’ meaning “embodied forms of knowledge with menstrual roots or components” (53). This bold argument precisely places menstruation at the key center of human epistemology and praxis centered on rituals.

Foucault argued that power does not flow down from individuals, but is held and exercised within networks. Within these networks, social control can be exercised through the observation and sequestration of problematic individuals and behavior. In Foucault’s terms, bodily functions, such as menstruation are ‘confined’ within appropriate boundaries, and kept there by discourses that compel us to carry out activities in their proper place and to do the accepted thing. Mary Douglas draws a parallelism between society and the body:

The body is a complex structure. The functions of its different parts and their relation afford a source of symbols for other complex structures. We cannot possibly interpret rituals concerning excreta, breast milk, saliva, and the rest unless we are prepared to see in the body a symbol of society and to see the powers and dangers to social structure reproduced in small on the human body.

(115)

Douglas argues that the body, as an organic bounded system, provides a powerful analogy of the social system. For Douglas, the body is traced with the values of culture: the contours of the body are the contours of society: each reproduces the 'nature' of both the powers and dangers credited to social structure. Even so, fears for the flesh commonly cluster around sexuality (157). It is sexuality and, in prevailing economies of meaning and power, women's bodies which tend to bear the burden of these fears. Thus, it is female purity which is carefully policed, and women's sexual transgressions are brutally punished (125). She also demonstrates that sex is given a special status in society and that institutions of power commonly rely on sexual differentiation, where men hold the power, regulate the law, and control meaning (138). Thus, substances that breach the natural bounds of the body, such as menstrual blood, are symbolically coded as 'pollutants' and perceived as possible threats to social order. Blood is a powerful ritual symbol with deep emotional resonance because it is associated both with the physical experience of the color red and inherently to the relational experiences such as maternity, war, hunting, kinship, etc. In an introduction to a special journal issue on blood and relationality, Janet Carsten expounds a 'theory of blood.' She states that blood has some special material qualities such as liquidity and fungibility that lend it an "unusual capacity for accruing layers of symbolic resonance." Though the values associated with blood may vary with culture, the special qualities of blood and its range of resonances with "a heightened propensity to evoke emotional responses" are the same (Carsten 18). Although blood is widely considered a fundamental part of the body, associated with the life itself, it is expected to be mostly contained within the body's frontiers. When it crosses these barriers it is a cause of concern. Daniela Tonelli Manica in her article,

“(In)visible Blood: Menstrual Performances and Body Art,” points to the general perception in the society that menstrual blood must be concealed, creating a demand for sanitary products that make menstrual blood ‘disappear’ as it is absorbed by devices made of cotton (20). Bodily fluids abound in the human body, but it is often the female body which is the most commonly associated with ‘pollution.’ A male-chauvinistic society circulating such bigoted notions through secular texts and a patriarchal society embracing them to the present day come as no surprise, but what is alarming is the fact that these notions are so internalized by women themselves that they too accept these taboos as the truth of nature. These taboo ideas have no place in Bharani; it revels in the breaking of these rules, which is discussed in detail in the following section.

Gender in Bharani Festival

Women in Kerala society have always been tied upon by the mores of right and wrong and they are denied the right to express themselves, especially in matters concerning their sexuality. Usually, even while performing for a goddess, women do not participate as men do, and their roles are limited to chores that do not break the accepted codes of propriety. Men, whereas, in female guises identify with the goddess, they experience a relative merging of their spirit into the greater spirit of the Bhagavathi, and they eventually become Bhagavathi herself. This aspect is explained by Sarah Caldwell by exploring the etymological meaning of the words *tullal* and *tullich*. She lists the meaning as, “jumping, leaping, hopping, skipping; prance, prancing; fretting and fuming with auger; tremor; involuntary motion as of demoniac possession; dance; a kind of stage-play with the accompaniment of rhythmic dance and music, usually performed in temples” and of *tullich* as “an unruly or ungovernable sort of woman; a

flirt; an arrogant woman [slang usage]” (“Kali” 209). While *tullal* is a neutral word meaning ‘jumping,’ ‘dancing’ etc., *tullich*, the feminine version of this word is loaded with a series of negative connotations. This is applied for a woman who behaves against the established norms of a society, who displays unacceptable behavioral patterns and follows loose moral standards. Another word similar to this is *koothich*, a Malayalam slang word which presumably originated from the term *koothu* meaning ‘play,’ ‘drama’ etc. It evidently belongs to the genre of curse words. It is amusing to note that this word is a feminine noun for which no masculine counterpart exists.

The unmitigated, unintervened presence of male lends them the ‘power’ and they dominated in the ritual practices of Bhagavathi. For it, they had to make necessary adjustments. Caldwell notes:

The performer enacting the role of Bhadrakali in the ritual dramas of Kerala dons an entirely female costume (with an emphasis on prominent breasts) and a stylized female demeanor, including voice modulation, posture, and movements. The goddess’s oracular representative, (the *velichapadu*, is also clearly if more subtly feminine in his dress and behavior. (“Kali” 210)

Thus, it is evident that dancing, jumping, and play by women in public were not appreciated in earlier days. This used to be the case when high caste women were not allowed to display themselves in front of a public. To what extent these codes of behavior infiltrated to the lower castes women is worth pondering. They toiled in the fields along with their male counterparts and shared equal space in daily life. Regarding the dress code, they were prohibited from covering their breasts, thus living in perpetual shame and

indignation. They seem to little regard these high caste mores and participated in rituals with equal vigor and enthusiasm. This is clear in the Kodungallur Bharani Festival where thousands of female oracles dance, ‘abuse,’ and sing to placate their Bhagavathi. A similar performance is seen in the *tullal* dance of mad women in the Chottanikkara Bhagavathi Temple. Caldwell notes, “All rules of female propriety were controverted by the wild screaming and shameless jumping of the women, their matted hair flying about loose, dirt clinging to their faces, obscenities pouring from their angry tongues” (“Kali” 208). As mad women, they were outside the circle of propriety prescribed for the normal women; their madness gave them the freedom to break the frameworks and hence did not have to suppress their instincts. The lack of control displayed by all these undesirable female models centers around the double taboos against anger and sexuality (Caldwell, “Kali” 211). They display behaviors that violate the stereotypical notion of a Malayali lady. Freedom, more or less the same is savored by female oracles participating in Bharani. It is another fact that the high class society does not welcome these ‘anti-social’ behaviors and they are looked down upon as ‘mad’ women. Sarah Caldwell notes that the oracles are ‘exclusively male.’ Nobody seems to have questioned the appropriateness of a feminine force entering the body of a male oracle; probably the division of body happened in a later stage. The body becomes a site where their past, present, and future interplay. They use their body as a tool, as an offering in itself; their blood being one among them. It might be the helplessness of the destitute, their gnawing awareness of lack that in an ultimate gesture of sacrifice propels them to offer their own body to the deity. In this social drama, the performer is real and his performance ‘live’ with flesh and blood.

Caldwell notes that the dramatic rituals that celebrate the Goddess Bhagavathi in Kerala temples clearly are modeled around images of female sexuality, with both its promises and its perceived dangers. She notes that in *Mudiyettu* women have no direct participation. She negates the existence of matriarchy and explains that the ritual roles were a means to channel Tamil concept of *ananku*. Ananku can be understood as the early forerunner of the concept of *Shakti* (power) which is associated with females in the Siva-Sakthi concept of Hinduism. The union of male-female powers resulted in the creation of the universe. Saktas who worship the supreme deity exclusively as a female principle conceive “the Mother Goddess as the personification of primordial energy and the source of all divine as well as cosmic evolution” (Bhattacharya 13). In primitive thought, menstruation was regarded, as a process of the same nature as childbirth. In *tantras* for the same reason, special importance is attached to menstrual blood (Thomson qtd. in Bhattacharya 17). He notes that vermilion stands for menstrual blood and mother goddesses from Mohenjodaro, Venus of Willendorf, Egyptian, Maltese, Cypriote, and Danubian are similarly painted red (Bhattacharya 17). Without Sakthi, Siva is incomplete. Holly Baker Reynolds defines it as “a malevolent, dangerous power” inhering in both the natural world and the bodies of humans and deities, particularly female. This power residing in the parts of female breasts, loins, and genitals constitute her sexual energy which if uncontrolled can cause much destruction (qtd. in Caldwell, *Encountering* 254). Probably, this power is manifested in the possession performances of Bhagavathi in which the oracles are in a frenzied state endowed with supernatural powers of prophecy and cursing. Bhagavathi is always associated with nature/earth and these powers are present in the natural cycles as well. Caldwell connects rituals like *Teyyam* in

Northern Kerala and fire-walking cults in Southern India and Srilanka to these practices. With Brahminical onslaught women were pushed to the peripheries and silencing them was a part of their agenda to have domination over all walks of life. The exact means by which they achieved it is still an enigma, but the current status of women in Kerala as well as in most parts of India reveals that they have been successful in making women accept their 'secondary roles' in life.



Fig. 3. 1. Jayan, Nimisha K. Female oracles dancing in accompaniment with *chenda melam*. 27 Mar. 2017. *Private collection*.

Caldwell notes that this prior prominence once enjoyed by women in Kerala is entirely forgotten by them and they have chosen a path of resignation and tolerance. Also, they “attempt to raise their status by distancing themselves from everything connected to Bhadrakali” (“Margins” 254). This reminds us of a time when Brahmins took over Kodungallur Temple, Nambudiri women were altogether prohibited from going to the temple. Thus, there has always been an attempt to keep them at a distance as Bhadrakali certainly was not an ideal model for chastity.

By trying to control and curtail the various rituals of Bharani naming it as amoral or unacceptable, authorities are trying to rip the festival of its very essential spirit. Sensuality and extremities are the innate nature of goddess worship in India. Much harm has been done to the original practices through mortifying religious and political movements and what is left over is its present abridged form. Devotees claim that their Goddess relishes these extremities and demands it. Favorably, the Bharani festival has been still able to retain the importance of female devotees and they share an equal ritual space with their male counterparts (see fig. 3. 1). Thus, they are not marginalized entities in this festival but central to the performance. In the everyday lives, they may be unequal; however, in the divine presence of their Bhagavathi, female devotees enjoy considerable equality and immunity (see fig. 3. 2).

Scholars concur in the opinion that Kali derives in part from the ancient Tamil deity Kottavai, a warrior goddess who delights in blood. Kottavai is described as “wearing a necklace of tiger teeth, riding a tiger, and shouting in victory (*kurava*)” (Caldwell, *Encountering* 255), the goddess comes to the battlefield to kill enemies, eat their flesh, and drink their blood. The similarities between Kali and Kottavai can be justified as Kerala and Tamilnadu were one in the earlier times and the religious influences are natural. Female dancers accompanied Kottavai to the war front and they played, danced, and drummed. The demonic spirits that attended the war goddess Kottavai were represented by women dedicated to the service of the king. These ‘sacred females’ were considered powerful as they had direct contact with the divine and these women later came to be known as *devadasis* of South Indian temples. But later, with Aryanization, these women who once enjoyed immense power were hailed as ‘whores’

by the society and thus pushed to margins. Caldwell notes that their ritual roles included actions similar to oracles. Caldwell is of the opinion that the male oracles of high caste temples modeled their behavior on these female shamans, whose role was superseded in the Aryanized lowlands (“Margins” 256). As Kali’s worship came more under the control of Brahmanized elites, the earlier multivalent potency of the goddess was reconfigured as a danger, chaos, and pollution.



Fig. 3. 2. Jayan, Nimisha K. Female oracles seated in *avakashathara* during Bharani. 07 Apr. 2019. *Private collection*.

In Bharani, the Goddess enters into a battle against a male opponent Darika who poses a threat to the chastity of women. One group of scholars believes that the Bharani festival is the representation of this legend where thousands of men and women in primitive form, clad in red war-dress with swords race around the temple recreating the impression of a battlefield. Thus, Bhadrakali stands as a symbol of motherly love, affection, and protection to their devotees and at the same time, fiery and malevolent to their enemies. In her, two conflicting facets of nature are contained, which must be rightly balanced as procreation and destruction are essential in ensuring the continuity of

life. Discerningly, Bharani celebrates the valor and energy of womanhood. Here the experience is close to being in primitive existence springboarded on instinct. They are free to move about and are not constrained by the norms of female propriety (see fig. 3. 3). This freedom to an extent is granted by the narrative that forms the backdrop of the Bharani festival. For the devotees, it is the celebration of the triumph of Goddess Kali. She is fierce, demonic, and uncontrollable. She is energy and vitality and a loving mother to her devotees. This duality is present in her devotees as well. The devotees as well as the oracles are easily provoked as they are in ongoing communion with some otherworldly energy.



Fig. 3. 3. Jayan, Nimisha K. A female oracle carrying ritual sword and stick in Bharani. 20 Mar. 2018. *Private collection*.

Thus, to state that Bharani is primarily a festival of women folk would not be a hyperbole. As noted earlier, female oracles are fast dwindling in number in Kerala. In such a scenario, we see hundreds of female oracles participating in Kodungallur Bharani. The fest provides them an opportunity to sustain their identity in this changing world.

Generally, we perceive two tendencies among the oracles. One group of oracles performs as oracles only during the Bharani festival. The rest of the year, they are engaged in other occupations. It must be noted that most of them are hailing from lower strata of society making a livelihood through daily wages. The other group, which is less in number, is full-time practitioners, maintaining a slave-protectress relationship with the Goddess. They have a small temple, attached to their homes, where Goddess Bhadrakali is the supreme deity. They perform daily worship for her and make a living through the meager amount of money they get as offerings. Some also perform healing rituals in those temples. Apparently, their life is wholly dedicated to the service of Bhagavathi. In contrast, there are oracles belonging to well off families, running temples that more or less receive considerable offerings from believers in the form of money and gold. Mostly they belong to the chiefs of the group. Obviously, no rigorous organizational pattern is followed by the community. Each group can either act independently or link themselves to a major group. But most groups attach themselves to a chief under which they operate. The chief is not elected as such; neither age forms a yardstick. It gets conferred to a person mostly out of family lineage and tradition. Distinctly, the chief has much power over the pilgrims; he is the head of the *avakashathara*. All Bharani devotees attach themselves to any of these groups as being a part of *avakashathara* is important in the festival. Mostly, the *thara* is assigned on a regional basis. The royal head still decides the distribution of these platforms and the formation of new *thara*. They are not altered on yearly basis, he orders for exchange of *thara* if any disciplinary issue is involved. Thus, the pilgrims derive power from the space of *thara* as much of their activities are centered on this space. In this *thara*, they have a deity, and swords are recharged in front of it.

During the festival days, groups of oracles come dancing and ascend the *thara* to pay homage to the deity. The chief receives the sword, places it in front of the deity as a part of the recharging ritual, and then hands it back to the oracle.

Pointedly, such a life is not without sacrifices. In Bharani norms, female oracles are not restrained from leading a marital life. But in society, there is a negative attitude towards them as devoting the whole of their life to the service of the Goddess comes in conflict with conjugal life. During the interactions with oracles from Palakkad, it was learned that they are not promoting young girls getting initiated to oracles; the reason being the severe demands such a life makes. In most cases, they end up in forsaking a family life and career. Though girls feel a calling from the Goddess herself, through the continuous counseling from the chief oracle they hold this inner call. They participate in the festival, coming with the groups, sing songs, and go back. This is not a problem that women alone face. Even male oracles are finding it difficult to find a partner in life. They have a different life and lead a more severe life than the priests of general temples. They are also the priests of their household temples, but being an oracle is an entirely different experience. The now chief oracle from Palakkad, Shibu Swamy, also the head of *All Kerala Velichapadu Sangam* (“All Kerala Oracle Community”), is a degree holder but dragged into this realm by an inner call he received in his childhood. He has made it a habit to wear red-colored dress in his life, red symbolizing the Goddess Bhadrakali. Thus, the Goddess is inseparable from their being. Their unwavering faith is not for a few days of the year, it is for every day, for the whole life. They carry Goddess in their heart, and Goddess, in turn, protects them as a mother. Women, as mentioned above are free in the space of Bharani. They sleep in the open ground of the temple at night along with others

including men. They may not belong to a group, but inside the temple, under the guarding eyes of their mother goddess, they become brethren and one community. The following section traces how the body operates in the rituals of Bharani, the interactions which result in whole performance that ultimately derive their identities.

The Interplay of Power, Ritual and Body in Bharani

Women have been excluded and marginalized down the ages and her 'body' served as a major factor in this discrimination. Luce Irigaray presupposes that this is actually a deliberate attempt from the part of the patriarchal society to ensure its order and logic. Her body and bodily functions like menstruation and pregnancy, to an extent, ensure her servility and exclusion. As we have seen, during pregnancy and menstruation women are considered as untouchable and impure in the Indian scenario, and this altering between purity and impurity, acceptability, and unacceptability exactly keep in with the cultural agenda to make women's identity shifting and thereby oust her from the agency. As Michel Foucault suggests, power works here not through force or coercion, but through individuals conditioning their bodies into compliance with social norms. Pierre Bourdieu similarly locates power in the boundaries of what can be said and thought, a people's sense of reality, by which every social order naturalizes its arbitrariness (149). These rites and rituals become a part of 'gendered performances' and get registered with repetition through generations. These practices act as 'regulative discourses' or 'disciplinary regimes' and continue to enjoy unequivocal acceptance. But in the Bharani festival, all these codes of taboos are violated, pollution is normalized. This aspect of the festival ensures the presence of women throughout and at all times, thereby equalizing the ground for every gender.

Different rites and rituals exclusively constituting a 'female experience' are invariably connected to the 'gender performativity' and 'metaformic consciousness.' Butler's 'performativity' is not the same as 'performance.' She draws a distinction between a performance that presupposes the existence of a subject and performativity that does not (*Gender* 45). Butler stresses that gender is a process that has neither origin nor end so that it is something that we 'do' rather than 'are' (*Gender* 46). For gender to appear as natural, it must be repeated itself, according to Butler, thereby revealing the patterns of their 'constructedness.' "Performativity is thus not a singular 'act', for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates to the convention of which it is a repetition" (Butler, *Bodies* 12). "This repetition is at once a re-enactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation" (Turner, "Body" 77). Butler argues that "gender ought not to be construed as stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather it is an identity tenuously constituted in time, an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts" (*Gender* 59). Thus, identity is temporal rising out of repeated performances and therefore subject to change. Linda Alcoff states, "Both race and sex are most definitely physical, marked on and through the body, lived as a material experience, visible as surface phenomena and determinant of economic and political status" (102). Human identity or 'self' is not something they are born with, but something born out of a complex process of recognitions, comparisons, exclusions, demarcations, divisions, alignments, and re-alignments. We identify ourselves within a shifting field of images defined by language and imbued with power relations. Thus, it is through the

performance of bodies in Bharani that the performer emerges, and through repetitive performances, the oracles assume a new identity in marked contrast to their everyday reality. This identity is derived from the context, without which the performer becomes an absence. Even male oracles adopt a feminine physique and are presented as a Goddess- incarnate (see fig. 3. 4).



Fig. 3. 4. Jayan, Nimisha K. A male oracle after *tullal*; incision marks seen in forehead. 28 Mar. 2017. *Private collection*.

Thus, there is a relative obliteration of gender differences, and the whole of their identity and being, interests, values, and beliefs come together in one single act. Apparently, it is only through their bodies in performance in Bharani, they attain gender and identity. It is, by no means, connected to the essence or an inner core of the performer, but their actions in the prescribed contextual framework.

In ritual theory, ‘body’ occupies a significant place as it proposes that through ritual, the animal becomes man and man becomes a new man. For Foucault, the ‘body’ emerged in the late seventeenth century as the arena in which more local social practices were linked to the larger-scale organization of power. Power is not a single entity and

represents a cluster of discourses. Distinctions between power as implicit social control and power as explicit acts of political coercion create symbolic power, associated with ritual and ideology, and secular power, associated with agencies and institutions of force (139). Thus, power is simultaneously the agent and catalyst of change; a change in favor of the dominant.

For Foucault, power is contingent, local, imprecise, relational, and organizational. In particular, he breaks with the longstanding premise that “power, whether localized or invested in a monarch, a community of citizens or a class dictatorship consists in some substantive instance or agency of sovereignty” (*History* 151). He sees power not operating from a single point, rather it is dispersed. Power is everywhere and comes from everywhere, so in this sense is neither an agency nor a structure (*History* 63). Foucault uses the term ‘power/knowledge’ to signify that power is constituted through accepted forms of knowledge, scientific understanding, and ‘truth.’ Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true” (*Power* 131). He also rejects the notion of a dominant ideology perpetrated by the ruling class to serve its real interests, a view supported by the sovereignty model. For Foucault, power does not exist as a substantive entity that can be possessed or wielded, nor is it some ‘thing’ that exists in historical forms and causal effects. As such, power relations are deeply embedded in the network of social relations and basic, therefore, to any society (*Power* 156). According to Foucault, power not always work from top to bottom. He adds that this exertion of power from the top cannot be initiated without a “conduit from below” (*Power* 159). For the kings or capitalists to establish and maintain power, it must be rooted in local networks which are projections

of central power. Foucault argues, power is exercised over “free subjects, and only insofar as they are free,” (*Power* 161) that is, with the option of acting differently. For Foucault freedom is the condition, as well as the precondition, for the exercise of power. Freedom is power’s “permanent support, since without the possibility of recalcitrance, power would be equivalent to a physical determination” (*Power* 161). Hence, the resistance is embedded in power itself that is manifested through bodies in action.

For Foucault, the body is a “political field: power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs” (*History* 63). The body is the most basic level of power relations, the ‘microphysics’ of the micropolitics of power. Ritualization, Foucault appears to imply, is a central way that power operates; it constitutes a political ‘technology’ of the body. In ritual, both body and ideology come to operate. The social body is the micro-network of power relations, but not in terms of a reflection of larger social institutions or as some sort of social *homunculus* that contains a blueprint for them. The social body is the active site of “dispositions, maneuvers, tactics, techniques, functionings,” it is a “network of relations, constantly in tension” for which the proper metaphor would be a “perpetual battle” rather than “the conquest of a territory” (C. Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives* 169-172). Physical bodies are subjugated and made to behave in certain ways, as a microcosm of social control of the wider population, through what he called ‘bio-power.’ Discipline and bio-power create a ‘discursive practice’ or a body of knowledge and behavior that defines what is normal, acceptable, deviant, etc. – but it is a discursive practice that is nonetheless in constant flux (Foucault, *Discipline* 63). The social body—as the shifting network of power relations “between a man and a woman,

between the members of a family, between a master and his pupil, between everyone who knows and everyone who does not”—is, simultaneously, the “concrete, changing soil” out of which the sovereign’s power is constituted and out of which the individual and his or her power strategies are constituted (C. Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives* 175). A ritualized body is a body invested with a sense of ritual. We always associate power with violence and thereby ignore the fact that ritual, “as artifice, is there simply to disguise crude instruments of power” (Foucault, *History* 194). Thus, the ritual is more or less a tactic to discipline the bodies according to the norms set by society. Catherine Bell identifies the significance of the body in ritual, which through its movement and senses, not only experiences and receives the values ordering the environment but simultaneously defines and imposes such values.



Fig. 3. 5. Jayan, Nimisha K. Ruddied face of an oracle performing in trance. 20 Mar. 2018. *Private collection*.

Bharani festival with its highly ritualized environment becomes an ample mechanism for the production of gendered bodies. Women participating in Bharani enjoy

relative freedom equal in terms of their male counterparts and in them primordial energies and consciousness dominate. Women's 'body,' in contrast to the established notions does not seem to serve as a demarcating tool in Bharani and most often we see a celebration and exaltation of female body. "To be female is a facticity which has no meaning, but to be a woman is to have become a woman, to compel the body to conform to a historical idea of woman, to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility..." (Butler, *Bodies* 100). Footed on this notion it can be argued that the bodies in Bharani are in constant flux, shifting to and fro between identities.

Again, Reena Tiwari through her analysis of the cremation rituals in Manikarnika, Varanasi brings forth a relationship between spaces, rituals, and bodies. The body involved in the ritual marks out the internal and the external spaces within the city. The body also makes the private spaces of dwellings separate from the public domain, emphasizing the threshold or transitional spaces between them (2). Bharani festival also gives rise to a separation of spaces within Kodungallur. A body has an identity as long as it journeys through fixed territories; when it moves out of this space, it ceases to be a performing body. Thus, not only space constructs the performing bodies, but interestingly, the bodies in action construct the space of the Bharani festival. Spatialized bodies undergo a process of transformation while engaged in the acts, both 'everyday' and 'extra-everyday' (Turner, *From* 230). For the bodies, this space is not only a festival space, but a primitive battlefield, and a space of salvation. It becomes a space for transcending from the physical world to the spiritual, divine world. Sacred time is reversible as it is a "primordial mythical time made present" and is indefinitely

recoverable and repeatable (Eliade 68). While participating in a festival, the performer steps out of his ordinary temporal duration and reintegrates with the mythical time. With each periodical festival, the participants find the same sacred time, the same they had experienced in previous years. Thus, a religious festival is precisely a “reactualization” (Eliade 70). In the festival the sacred dimension of life is recovered, the participants experience the sanctity of human existence as a divine creation and they are periodically becoming contemporary with the gods.

Thus, Bharani act as a ‘ritual of power,’ marking the bodies of its performers and by arraying them in fixed positions, underlines their inferiority. During *Kaavutheendal*, with the arrival of the royal head all groups which were otherwise scattered over the temple premises, retrieve to their respective *avakashathara*. The royal head is placed in the *Nilapaduthara* that is located at the center of the Bharani space and directly placed against the idol of Lord Siva inside the temple, only a door marking the separation. Here, the chief sits in a position facing the idol, thus creating a linear power circuit, primarily a male communion. Here, the royal chief can be assumed as a symbol of patriarchy, dominant and controlling the wild, feminine spirit manifested through the pilgrims. Also, the embodiment of chief with his white cloth, jewels, and crown is in clear contrast to the pagan crowd that surrounds him. A panopticon-like structure emerges, with *Nilapaduthara* as the supreme center, and the performers derive power to touch the Goddess from the consent of the royal chief. Arguably, the very presence of chief constraints and controls their movement; they unconsciously enter into the wider dossier of symbolic power.

The festival is primarily a festival of marginalized groups. People standing at the periphery of the society, come together, in small communities and become one bigger force. Transgenders are marginalized beings, struggling to find a voice in society. Seemingly, there is a kind of ‘gender culture’ in our society which recognizes only two genders, gendering can be divided into two processes, those of ‘maling’ and ‘femaling’ (Ekins and King 33). For Raewyn Connell gender is the outcome of recurrent interpretations of, and definitions placed upon the reproductive and sexual capacities of the human body. Femininities and masculinities are the multiple effects of these ongoing interpretations and definitions, impacting bodies, influencing personalities, and shaping culture and institutions. Any particular society will express its understanding of gender in a complex, and largely unwritten set of rules which tell us what to expect of other people’s behavior. A basic rule of our gender culture is that only biological males are expected to male, and only biological females are expected to female. Where this rule is broken – where males ‘female’ and females ‘male’ it is called transgending (Ekins and King 33). In this regard, Goffman states, when we interact with others, we take for granted that each of us has an “essential manly or womanly nature- one that derives from sex and one that can be detected from the ‘natural signs’ we give off (*Presentation* 75). To Butler, gender is an act that brings into being what it names. Nancy Duncan states, ‘woman’ and ‘man’ are unstable categories which are only loosely and contingently related to sexuality (5). “That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality” (Butler, *Gender* 136). She further records that those who do not ‘do’ their gender correctly are punished by the society (*Gender* 139).

The sexuality of the performers is not essential; rather they are created in the discursive practices of Bharani. The repressive regimes of power are muted, and the hidden truths of one's sexuality are allowed a free play. This accommodation of divergent groups categorically results in the creation of a 'safe space' for the performers within the ambit of Bharani. While transgenders are engaged in a mission to destabilize their essential identities, the heterosexual too joins in, with their deliberate carnival behavior, transgression, and parody. Overt cross-dressing and adoption of feminine demeanor are visible while retaining the contrastive masculine features as beard and mustache heightening the element of play (see fig. 3. 5). The structure of Bharani gives them ample space to be themselves; here no question of identity is raised against them. The male body is decorated and adorned projecting a female identity and this ambiguity or erasure of sex is a unique feature of the Bharani festival. Thus, the geographies of sexuality are fluid and converging ever working against the socio-cultural forces that demand a 'compulsory heterosexuality' and the resulting ghettoization of transgenders.

All gender is parodic, but Butler warns that "[p]arody by itself is not subversive." There are some forms of drag that are definitely not subversive, but serve only to reinforce existing heterosexual power structures (*Gender* 66). To claim that all gender is like a drag, or is a drag, is to suggest that 'imitation' is at the heart of the heterosexual project and its gender binaries, that drag is not a secondary imitation that presupposes a prior and original gender, but that hegemonic heterosexuality is itself a constant and repeated effort to imitate its own idealizations (*Gender* 125). She advances the view that drag is not precisely an example of subversion; "It would be a mistake to take it as the paradigm of subversive action or, indeed, as a model for political agency" (*Gender* xxii).

On seeing a man dressed as a woman, the secondary experience is often taken as “artifice, play, falsehood, and illusion” relying on the external factors as clothes or the manner in which it is worn. But this again is a ‘naturalized knowledge’ based on a series of cultural inferences that may be right or wrong. In a trans-sexual person cross-dressing, the secondary appearance forms one’s real identity that cannot be judged by mere seeing. Thus, “body may be pre-operative, transitional, or post-operative” (Butler, *Gender* xxii). Women, like men, roam around freely singing obscene songs. Men take the guise of the Goddess; clad themselves in silk *saree* and gold ornaments. Here, appearance does not derive from one’s sexual identity. These distinctions are blurred and the participants are reduced to mere bodies in performance divorced from their sexual orientations. By obliterating the sex and gender constitutions, the circuit of desire is categorically broken. Every deviant nature has space; the performer can choose his identity from the mesh of identities. By pushing the margins of the body, males experience femaleness; by using the language of ‘abuse,’ which is more or less masculine, females experience maleness. Hence, ‘drag’ in Bharani is not subversive in nature. No relative importance is attached to heterosexuality; therefore a need to oppress homosexuality does not emerge in its space. Both men and transgender groups dress up as women, in the former, they are trying to attach themselves to the power, here, power being the Bhadrakali herself. The latter group extends their own identity into the festival, for them, the merging is a relatively easy process.

In contrast to the popular imagining of Bharani as a carnival-like lawless situation, it is strictly monitored by the state law and order machinery; it is a ‘ritual of power’ or a ‘ritual of rebellion’ where the lower caste sects inadvertently vouch for the

monarchy thereby attesting the supremacy of the connected disciplinary discourse. The entire stratum of society and culture is coming to display in this celebration. Thamburan is still the head of the celebration supported by an upper caste organization known as *Onnu Kure Aayiram Yogam* (“Nine Hundred and Ninety-Nine Brotherhood”) looking after the administration of the temple and the State-run Devaswom Board.

In 1990, the protest of the rationalist groups against *theripattu* and *Kaavutheendal* was staged. A notice of the movement reads:

The expletive songs devotees sing every year as part of the Bharani song festival in Kodungallur Bhagavati temple has become so disgraceful as to degrade the cultural sense of the common man. In front of sanctorum of a deity and surrounding it in the whole countryside, songs about sexual flirtations, procession, and dances odd devotees in sheer nudity, inebriated exultations were all-sufficient to demean public decency of the state. (281)

In April 1989, *Sadachara Yathra* (“March for Ethics”) led by *Navodhan Prathishtan* President Swami Bhoomananda was held as a part of this movement. J. J Pallath notes the hostile environment that ensued as a consequence of these rationalist movements:

Numerous policemen deployed both in plain clothes and in uniform inside the temple were immediately censoring the songs. Consequently, there was a lurking fear of the police. Some singers stopped at the sight of the police. Other enterprising ones quarrelled with the police. Some singers were taken into custody for not stopping at the sight of the police. The police also beat up a few people for going into a trance.

Thus, the entire celebration and its emotional expressions were censured, supervised, and closely monitored by the police, causing grave emotional distress and discontentment to the devotees.



Fig. 3. 6. Jayan, Nimisha K. Policemen positioned in the temple before *Kaavutheendal*.
20 Mar. 2018. *Private collection*.

Bodies in Bharani lose their individuality, become subjective tools and their ecstatic body is the link between the human world and the cosmos. The bodies are designed by the performers to fit into the framework, there is a conscious effort to highlight the body and assert their presence and visibility. It is curious to note that even in Bharani that is widely considered to be a rebellion of the repressed, through careful tactics the bodies are turned ‘docile’ by rigorous monitoring, hierarchization, and examination. Hordes of policemen and temple officials are placed within the space of Bharani to carry out this carefully scripted scheme of ‘discipline and punish’ (see fig. 3. 6). By privileging certain caste groups over others, and assigning them titles and special rights, the upper caste sects have been able to create a divide between the marginalized,

preventing them from a potential revolt. Bharani as a festival is fragmented, composite of 'mini-narratives' and cuts through the psyche of the lower castes, aligning them in unsurpassable casteist order.

In all the rituals and narratives connected to Bharani, the performers are projected as the extreme: profane and vulgar humans, demons or ogres, or lustful perverts desiring the Goddess herself. They constitute a foil to the royal chief with his obnoxious superior, stylized body, a magnate not reprimanding them for their sins but negotiating and patronizing their 'lowbrow' behavior. Bhadrakali becomes the embodiment of oversexed female who must be appeased; the body of the Goddess is targeted particularly in *Kaavutheendal* and erotic songs, and seemingly the upper caste groups have adapted this behavior to a ritual to discharge the Goddess of her sexual urges and bodily heat. Pollution is necessary to re-consecrate and rejuvenate her body, and rather than stopping this ritual altogether, this act is conveniently entitled to the lower castes, positing them as the targeted repository of undesirable values of a society, that must be eventually 'civilized' or 'cleansed.' The polluting touch of the subaltern is countered by the purifying touch of the Brahmin male priests; the Goddess is sanctified and alienated, her identity shifting between profane and sacred.

In brief, the idea of 'pollution' is very much alive in the festival. The word *theendal* in Malayalam discourse literally means 'to touch,' but by cultural assimilation, it has come to acquire the added meaning of 'to pollute.' Even before touching the temple, the 'pollution' takes place when they enter the temple. The barrier existing is rather a psychological one than being a physical boundary. The wall around the temple thus becomes a boundary for the pilgrims and in Bharani, this is surpassed

ceremoniously. A transformation of the whole place is evident; the factual world gets transformed into a spiritual realm and for the spectators, it is a pilgrimage. They travel far, spend sleepless nights, and neglecting the scorching heat of summer stays at the temple for worship. They have the anxiety of a borrowed space but the religious fervor and their blind devotion to the Goddess make them forget their pain and suffering.

Gennep observes: “a rite of spatial passage has become a rite of spiritual passage. The act of passing no longer accomplishes the passage; a personified power ensures it through spiritual means” (“Territorial” 31). Therefore, to cross the threshold is to unite with a new world. Through this act, the mattered body confronts the hegemonic powers but unequivocally capitulates. However, this invasion of space is significant as it inaugurates an important phase in the life and psyche of the individual. Precisely, Bharani is a matrix of free-floating identity where the material body through its repeated performance is perpetually pushing its contours to transcend the limits and have an experience of divinity.

Chapter Four

Visuality and Space: The Politics of Seeing and Being

Bharani is a haven of aesthetes as it is primarily a festival of color, drama, and extravagance. Accentuating this fact, we see hundreds of photographers and media persons; professionals, and amateurs, finding their way through the bustling crowd to transfer and record these exotic visions. People share the images and videos of *bharanikkar* (“pilgrims in Bharani”) singing ribald songs captured on their mobile phones and hence after each Bharani festival we get loads of images and videos uploaded by the spectators. Thus, Bharani always stays ‘live’ in popular media through visuals and videos shared in blogs, social platforms as *Facebook*, *YouTube*, and *WhatsApp*. Each of these genres does different kinds of performance with their audience as the framework shifts in each case.

Visuality

Martin Jay hails vision as “the master sense of the modern era” (15) as human experience is becoming increasingly visualized. Visual technology may mean any method adopted to enhance natural vision. With the emergence of visual culture, ‘picture theory’ was developed by W. J. T Mitchell that adopts a pictorial, rather than textual, view of the world (10). In Mitchell’s view, picture theory stems from “the realization that spectatorship (the look, the gaze, the glance, the practices of observation, surveillance, and visual pleasure) may be as deep a problem as various forms of reading (decipherment, decoding, interpretation, etc.) and that ‘visual experience’ or ‘visual literacy’ might not be fully explicable in the model of textuality” (Mirzoeff, *How* 16).

This notion places vision on an equal pedestal of speech against the western notion of the superiority of spoken word and proclaims vision as a diverse discourse that must be studied using new tools of reference.

To begin with, military and police power has proven time and again to be necessary but not sufficient to create and maintain an empire. Rather, empires must employ a multitude of strategies to expand and survive, one of the most important of which is state-sanctioned public spectacles, ceremonies, and rituals (Coben 2). The primary feature of the spectacle is gatherings centered on the theatrical performance of a certain scale in clear spatial and temporal frames, in which participants witness and sense the presence of others and share a certain experience (MacAloon 246). According to MacAloon, the defining features of spectacle include the primacy of visual sensory; its certain size and grandeur; the institutionalization of distinct roles of actors and audience; its dynamic form, demanding movement and action; and participation by choice as opposed to duty as in the case of ritual (30). Thus, spectacles have deeper functions to play than circulating frivolities, and rather than being accidental outgrowths they are meticulously devised by the society to meet its ends.

Further, the hierarchy of the senses within the western culture over the past few centuries has placed the visual at the top (Rorty 198). Thus, vision emerged powerful, “reduced the relative power of the oral/aural sense and enhanced the written word, as well as pictures and maps” (Hibbitts 255) and led to the popular belief that to be real, a thing must be visible (McLuhan 238). Simmel considers ‘eye-contact’ as the most direct and ‘purest’ interaction as it “produces extraordinary moments of intimacy.” The look is returned, and this results from the expressive meaning of the face. What we see in the

person is the lasting part of them, “the history of their life and ... the timeless dowry of nature.” By contrast, the ear and the nose do not reciprocate – they only take but do not give. Second, Simmel notes that only the visual sense enables possession and property; while that which we hear is already past and provides no property to possess (Frisby and Featherstone 116). The visual sense enables people to take possession, not only of other people but also of diverse environments. It enables the world to be controlled at a distance, combining detachment and mastery. This power of possession is best seen in the development of photography. Photography is thus a particularly powerful signifying practice that reproduces a dominant set of images and, at the very same time, conceals its constructed character (Urry, “City” 390). Photographic practices reinforce the dominance of the visual gaze, including that of the male over the bodyscape of women within the city. Luce Irigaray argues that for women, “investment in the look is not as privileged as in men” (qtd. in Urry, “City” 390). John Urry assumes that the visual sense is increasingly getting mediatized, as it shifts from the printing press to electronic modes of representation. By the nineteenth century, there occurred a “separation of the senses” through which visual experience began to be quantified and homogenized. He notes that “the city is both fascinated with and hugely denigrates, the visual.” Our cities have become more a spectacle to be consumed, but mere sightseeing is ridiculed as being superficial (“City” 390). Presumably, in the posthuman condition, everything from the human body to its enterprises is ruthlessly commodified, reducing humans to the state of being an accessory.

Hal Foster makes a distinction between vision and visibility and posits that “Although vision suggests sight as a physical operation, and visibility sight as a social

fact, the two are not opposed as nature is to culture: vision is social and historical too, and visuality involves the body and the psyche” (ix). Thus, both vision and visuality can be approached as a biological as well as a sociological entity, or to be precise as a ‘culture’ in itself. Nicholas Mirzoeff proposes that visual culture will not sit comfortably in already existing university structures. It is part of an emerging body of post-disciplinary academic endeavors from cultural studies, gay and lesbian studies, to African-American studies, and so on. Thus, visual culture can be called as “a tactic, not an academic discipline.” Visual culture is not only about taking pictures, it deals with visualizing experience, Mirzoeff argues. It is a fluid interpretive structure, centered on understanding the response to visual media of both individuals and groups (*Visual* 4). Thus, it is not a dogmatic narrow linear progression, but extensive, duly centered on the experience of both visual and visualized.

Mirzoeff suggests that visual culture is not simply the total amount of what has been made to be seen, such as paintings or films. It also involves what is invisible or kept out of sight. Seeing is actually a system of sensory feedback from the whole body, not just the eyes. Our bodies are now extensions of data networks, clicking, linking, and taking selfies. “Seeing is not believing. It is something we do, a kind of performance. What this performance is to everyday life, visualizing is to war. Hence, our bodies are now in the network and the world at the same time” (Mirzoeff, *Right* 61). Today it is impossible to talk about the development of the audio-visual without also talking about the development of virtual imagery and its influence on human behavior, or without pointing to the new industrialization of vision, to the growth of a veritable market in synthetic perception and all the ethical questions this entails (Virilio 36). So the act of

seeing is an act that precedes action, a kind of pre-action. But vision is more than the ability to see and the bodily sense of sight. Vision's meaning incorporates imagination: the ability to create images in the mind's eye, which exceeds in various ways those registered on the retina of the physical eye by light from the external world. Vision has a creative capacity that can transcend both space and time: it can denote foreseeing as well as seeing (Mirzoeff, *Visual* 15). In short, seeing is a very complex and interactive process. It does not, in fact, happen at a single place in the brain but occur in a rapid series of back-and-forth exchanges. Further, this interactivity between the visual zones of the brain and their associated areas happens at a series of ten to fourteen hierarchical levels. That is to say, seeing is not a definitive judgment but a process of mental analysis that goes backward and forward between different areas of the brain. It takes a brain to see, not just a pair of eyes (Mirzoeff, *Visual* 61). Terms such as paranoia, narcissism, and exhibitionism suggest how powerfully visual experience, both directed and received, can be tied to our psychological processes (M. Jay 30). Thus, vision involves a complex series of physiological processes coupled with cognitive psychological responses drawing from the repository of memory, experience, and subjective emotions.

Jay denies the existence of a universal visual experience as vision is intrinsically linked to language. Different people talk different languages. Hence, there can be variations in visual experience as well (9). For Plato, vision seems to have meant only that of the inner eye of the mind. He considered reliance on two eyes as partial, we see through the eyes, he insisted, not with them. The celebrated myth of the cave, in which the fire is substituted for the sun as the source of light too blinding to be faced directly, suggests his suspicions of the illusions of sense perception. From this distrust followed

Plato's notorious hostility to the mimetic arts (M. Jay 27). Certainly, visuality can be a threatening phenomenon at times. We are always under surveillance, be it the CCTV cameras or mobile cameras, and they have emerged as the new mode of power in the present era. It is argued that we live in a "surveillance society," even when we are apparently roaming freely through a shopping center or the countryside (Lyon 94). Additionally, Mirzoeff feels that the visual is essentially 'pornographic' as it promotes mindless fascination. He argues that a drawing of a tree is accepted by its viewers as a tree not because of its being real, but they accept it as a representation of a tree. These representations or associations can change over time. Thus, in his words, "seeing is not believing but interpreting" (*Introduction* 15). Adopting a term from Longinus, he uses the word sublime to denote the pleasurable experience in the representation of that which would be painful or terrifying in reality, leading to a realization of the limits of the human and of the powers of nature.

Mirzoeff reflects that the two most important psychoanalytic theories of looking, namely fetishism and the gaze rely on the viewer's misrecognition of what he or she sees (especially he) (*Visual* 167). Sigmund Freud argued that numerous men could only achieve sexual gratification through a specific material object that he called the fetish object, such as fur or velvet which is always a "penis substitute." Another important concept put forward by Freud concerning sexual identity is gaze. The phrase 'gaze' is most often associated with the feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey who is keen on the 'politics of images' and claims that the gaze of classic narrative cinema is masculine and active, while the feminine becomes a passive object to be looked at. In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and

passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly (Mulvey 19). She posits that “women are displayed for men as figures in an amazing masquerade, which expresses a strange male underworld of fear and desire” (8). The gaze is not just a look or a glance. It is a means of constituting the identity of the gazer by distinguishing her or him from that which is gazed at. Lacan placed the gaze at the center of the formation of the ego in his famed Mirror Stage. In Lacan’s analysis, there is no existence that is not fetishistic (Mirzoeff *Visual* 103). Likewise, feminists have argued that the concentration upon the visual sense over-emphasizes appearance, image, and surface. Irigaray argues that in western cultures “the preponderance of the look over the smell, taste, touch, and hearing has brought about an impoverishment of bodily relations. The moment the look dominates, the body loses its materiality” (qtd. in Urry, “Sensing” 40). This emphasis upon the visual reduces the body to the surface, marginalizes the multiple sensuousnesses of the body, and impoverishes the relationship of the body to its environment. And at the same time, the visual over-emphasizes masculinist efforts to exert mastery over the female body, particularly through the voyeurism affected via the pornographic picture. Seemingly, feminists viewed vision as misogynistic and hence oppressing. These notions throw light on the sexual dimension of vision and its relative importance in constituting or rather determining one’s identity.

After the ‘visual turn,’ the claim about the naturalness of visual images is no more heard, the image began to be cataloged along with text, both of which are subject to decoding and interpreting to arrive at the original meaning. The human eye has its powers as well as its limitations. Human vision can see light waves that are only a fraction of the

total spectrum, in fact, less than one percent with such phenomena as ultraviolet light, visible to other species, excluded (M. Jay 22). In addition, the human eye has a blind spot where the optic nerve connects with the retina. Though the vision of the other eye compensates for it, the scholars feel the blind spot as a metaphoric 'hole' in vision. Thus, instead of trusting in the integrity of the visual, we now comfortably talk about 'the hermeneutics of seeing,' 'iconic utterances,' 'the rhetoric of images,' 'imagistic signifiers,' 'visual narratives,' 'the language of films' (Mitchell 19) implying that rather than taking the vision for granted, one has to interpret and deconstruct it to bring forth the underlying truth.

Now, moving to the 'liveness' of visuality, Nicholas Mirzoeff begins his book *Introduction to Visual Culture* by stating, "Modern life takes place on screen" (1). Again, Philip Auslander questions Herbert Blau's claim that "a performance combining live bodies and filmed images can produce a 'confusion of realms.' Such an approach presupposes that live and recorded images belong to different realms" (*Performance* 1). Peggy Phelan argued that "performance's only life is in the present," which was questioned by Amelia Jones who insisted that: "the body art event needs the photograph to confirm it's having happened." Later Philip Auslander weighed in claiming that: "the act of documenting an event as a performance is what constitutes it as such" (*Performance* 1). This quality of liveness is at the heart of performance studies as well. It tends to approach actions as behaviors and experiences and is thereby concerned with the notion of presence or absence.

In today's technical world the mediated experience is trying to give an intimate primary sensibility. We constantly shift between the roles of performers and spectators in

this mediatized environment. Esther J. Langdon states that performance studies is concerned with ‘experience’ and it brings experience to the fore- “an intensified, public, momentary, and spontaneous kind of experience” (qtd. in Newton 27). There is an unmistakable line of progression between spectacle, theatre, and performance. However, the total feel of the Bharani fest cannot be reproduced through any audio or video documentation of the event. The real essence of the life of this multitude is missing from any of the videos seen. The very structure of the event seems to be the underlying cause of its non-transferability. It is vibrant and ever-changing. Non-uniformity is seen in and out of this festival and what happens in one corner is markedly different from the other corner.



Fig. 4. 1. Advertisement given by a chief oracle in newspaper signaling *Bharani Purappadu*. *Mathrubhumi* [Thrissur], 06 Apr. 2019, pp. 04. epaper.mathrubhumi.com/. Accessed 08 Mar. 2019.

Each person or group has a subjective way of participating in the event though they follow the generally accepted form of the festival. Personal variations and attitudes

lend freshness and vitality to the whole of the performance occurring at the festival. Though much of the festival has been commercialized, it still struggles to maintain its rustic charm. Technological innovations have significantly changed the 'behavior' of the Bharani festival. Everyone competes to shoot the events going on there. Also, some groups have arranged for a personal videographer to exclusively shoot their movements. Recently, the oracles are seen advertising in leading newspapers about their *Bharani Purappadu* ("the ceremony of leaving their native place to Kodungallur during Bharani") along with their images (see fig. 4. 1). The economic security and the betterment of their living standards get reflected here.

This subaltern festival is rapidly evolving each year, changing its color and persona. Each space is different from others and the experience we gather from them can never be the same. New additions are incorporated into the visual narrative that is being told and performed in this fest. Each of the spectator and the participants inadvertently get involved in the making of this narrative which has been the practice for ages. Jacques Derrida cites in *Limited Inc*, "Each time we see a thing it is same but different" (45). Similarly, though the narrative that forms the basis of this festival is the same, its manifestations differ and each year something is added to or deleted from it, making it novel for the spectators. This flexibility and 'liveness' propels its continuity in this changing world. To its interested spectators, the Bharani festival has many stories in its store, stories that contain hushed up memories and histories. One can feel content by the fascinating narrative that it offers to the plain eye. It is the story of the evil King Darika and how Goddess Kali defeated him in a breath-taking war. This victory of goodness

over evil is celebrated through this festival; from day one to the last, this narrative is being told visually.

Notably, women's body is not objectified; rather it is not a festival in which the vision dominates, reducing the bodies to materiality. Every dimension of the human body is celebrated, and the songs accompanied by the careless rhythmic gait of the body conceive an air of sensuality.



Fig. 4. 2. Jayan, Nimisha K. Oracle after incision of forehead; turmeric applied on the wounds. 28 Mar. 2017. *Private collection*.

Bharani is a visual festival enticing eyes and minds. The very beginning of the festival is marked by the raising of flags. These flags are colorful, with intermittent patterns of bright colors, figures symbolizing demons, thus bringing the impression of a battlefield. Prayer flags are an important aspect of Tibetan culture. Prayer flags act as a reminder of Buddha's preachings-promoting peace, harmony, and joy. It originated before the advent of Buddhism in Tibet, evolving through the integration of Buddhist

practices from India with the pre-Buddhist Bon Shamanism. The most followed pattern of these flags is the *lung-ta* horizontal line of symbols, *mantras* printed on to five different colored clothes- blue, white, red, green, and yellow. These colors represent the five elements- sky, clouds, fire, water (wood), and earth. There are also vertical flags called *darchen*, made of colored or white cloth (Barker 15). Probably, the prayer flags hung in Kodungallur temple is remnant of Buddhist establishments in Kodungallur. Another ritual of color is *Kozhikallu Moodal*. The red color is the prominent color of the festival; red representing blood, violence, and sacrifice. Heaps of red-colored clothes are placed on the *kozhikallu*, creating an impression of a pool of blood. Red is the color of the attire of the participants, most of the faces are covered with blood enhancing the mood of the ambiance (see fig. 4. 2).



Fig. 4. 3. Jayan, Nimisha K. *Velavaravu* performance staged in temple premises during Bharani. 20 Mar. 2018. *Private collection*.

Also, *Teyyam* with exotic makeup and costumes is terrifying and compelling at the same time. It is a subaltern art form by the Velan community playing out the Kali-Darika battle. Adding to it is the presence of virtually appealing performances as

Velavaravu (see fig. 4. 3), *Mudiyettam*, figures of bulls and horses, and huge effigies of mythical characters (see fig. 4. 4).

Hinduism is replete with such a visual representation of gods and goddesses. Sthaneshwar Timalsina suggests that constructing and worshipping images in Hinduism rests on cultivating a cognitive faculty of skillful imagination or visualization. Without imagination, the idols become mere material objects. There is considerable evidence to argue that image worship is a practice that originated in Buddhism (50). With the emergence of *Smarta* and *Tantric* Hinduism, image worship became a central part of Hindu worship (Timalsina 51). He notes that in India, the most important terms used to denote image is *murti*, *bimba*, *vigraha*, *akriti*, and *pratima*. *Murti* not only describes an image but also identifies the process of providing immanence to the transcendent; in its imagination, image and their relation to the transcendent are interconnected. *Bimba* corresponds to the English term 'image' and refers to the reflection or the mirror image of the absolute (Timalsina 54). They are manifest in multifarious forms reflecting the identity of the worshipper. Thus, the image is variable according to the person worshipping the goddess. Notably, other major religions of India as Islam and Christianity employ minimalist usage of images in worship. In Islam, visible representation of the almighty or any breathing entity is inappropriate as this religion is against any kind of idol worship. Thus, we garner the power of images in representing the visualized. In Hinduism, gods and goddesses are represented either as anthropomorphic figures or an abstract matter symbolizing the presence of divine power. Diana L. Eck identifies two types of images in Hindu worship; iconic and aniconic. The iconic image is 'representational' whereas aniconic images are 'symbolic forms' (42).

The Vedic ritual tradition of Aryans was aniconic as there is no evidence of images or permanent temples or sanctuaries (Eck 43). Iconic images appeared only later. The tradition of sculptural representations of the gods served both “theological and narrative functions.” These images were ‘visual theologies,’ which are to be ‘read’ by the devotees. The combination and juxtaposition of gestures and emblems express the ambiguities, the tensions, and paradoxes of the deity worship. Goddess Kali simultaneously wears a gory garland of skulls and gestures her procreation. This image world of India can be aptly called “visible thought” (Eck 51). The disfigured body of the deity is believed to sever the devotees’ identification with the body culminating in the destruction of one’s ego. They are also visual scriptures or visual narratives as many myths are embedded in the image.



Fig. 4. 4. Jayan, Nimisha K. A performer donning the form of Bhadrakali. 29 Mar. 2017.

Private collection.

As we have noted earlier, the *tantric* mode of worship used explicit *yoni* and *linga* images, but later with Aryan cultural invasion and blight of British imperialism, and the

consequent ascending morale of the society, these figures were smoothed or carved out to fit into the acceptable realm. One pliable reason to frequent places of worship is that, while we gaze at these representations, we need to be gazed or be visible to the divine power. Thus, images are alive in the form of worship. In such worship, seeing a deity requires a recalling of memory associated with the myths of the respective deities. The active gaze (visualizing) bridges the binaries of subject and object, and this singular awareness is the ultimate meaning, encompassing both the act of visualization and its object, an image. Thus, in Hindu image-worship, external objects and human imagination collaborate in creating realities. Creating an image in the mental space, derived from external input becomes central to visualization (Timalsina 57). This image may be relative, nonetheless, it limit itself to the existing practices and concepts. In this practice, even *mantras* or hymns produce images in the minds of the listener. This is evident in Bharani songs, where the listeners attend to a detailed description of the goddess's body from head to toe, which absolutely culminates in the worshipper's mental construction of the image of the goddess. For the believer, the deity images are real, as they visualize them as such. The visible aspect of a god need not be a permanent idol but can be an image as represented in a transient form as *kalam* ("floral paintings with powder"). Gilles Tarabout notes that ritual articulates different registries of the god's visuality and iconic representation (10). The visual interaction of devotees with divine images in temples is the main component of Hindu worship. Thus, vision is an important act in worship, *darshan*, the auspicious vision warding off of *drishti*, the evil vision (5).

Cultures of viewing have a close relationship with cultures of reading and thinking. Art, spectacle, and performance are important aspects of viewing (Lovatt 10).

Foucault's panopticon offered a new perspective to vision, linking it to power. The gaze connotes an active subject versus a passive object. There is a 'male gaze' that reduces women to mere bodies to be consumed and an 'imperial gaze.' Foucault through his studies probes the questions as "How does the dominant look at the subaltern?" and "What happens when these looks are returned?" (Kaplan xviii). "Like everything in culture, looking relations are determined by history, tradition, power hierarchies, politics, economics... Looking is power as Foucault has shown" (Kaplan 4). In Kerala, where untouchability was practiced, the stigmatized groups were to flee away from the upper caste gaze; the mere seeing was pollution. However, in Bharani, obviously the look is returned. The 'polluting' bodies are moved into the center of the action, polluting the heretofore sacred spaces. The dominant view them with suspicion, disgust, and hatred and though the feeling is mutual, the festival offers the subaltern groups a space for the expression of these feelings. Feminist critics argue that the nature of representation is altered by the gender of performance and spectators, as well as by their sexual preference. Both gender and sexuality bring the dynamic of desire to play, informing the narrative's structure, the production's- 'look,' and the relationship between spectator and spectacle (Dolan 57). Bodies of participants corresponding to all sexes are adorned rendering them effeminate, negating the sexual gaze.

In Bharani, the gaze act as an instrument of power, the festival takes place under strict surveillance; the presence of policemen in large numbers in the festival ground validates this argument. Theatrical performances and spectacles in pre-modern societies have profound implications for the understanding of any society, particularly in terms of the integration of communities and the establishment and maintenance of asymmetrical

power relations, which are intricately intertwined with each other (Coben 22). Though not directly linked to Bharani, we see certain identifiable elements in Ramlila, a Ramayana based performance staged during the Dussehra festival in North India. The first obvious similarity between these festivals lies in the fact that these two fests in essence celebrate the triumph of good over evil. Ramlila is a celebration of the upper class sectors of the society whereas Bharani is a subaltern festival inadvertently celebrating and enforcing upper class values. In Ramlila performance, Maharaja is an indispensable factor as Lila cannot begin and end without the sacred presence of Maharaja. Maharaja is seen as the representative of Lord Siva and he acts as one of the characters of Ramlila. He interacts with Lord Rama as if he is the contemporary of Rama and thus enters into the performance. This situation is relatable to the power enjoyed by the royal head in Bharani. About Ramlila, Anuradha Kapur comments that “Here is a rare example of political power being buttressed by theatrical spectacle” (209). What appeals to the common man is the vivid spectacle and the entertainment it provides. The power relations and hierarchy it generates in the process are hidden by clever visual technicalities.

To conclude this section, since this social drama can have no tools available to aesthetic drama to reach out to its audience, it has to find its tools. In Bharani, each piece of this narrative is linked up in the minds of the spectator as a chain of events and thus it relies on the spectator’s memory for its effectiveness. Thus, to each of them, Bharani can offer varying experiences. What is represented on the day of *Kaavutheendal* is the ancient war. To the modern minds, war is a distant memory, a memory that exists only in its racial past. This memory gets represented and re-enacted on this day with all its horrible

and violent characteristics; it is unlike a war that we see in motion picture or theatre. In films, the spectators are comfortable as their consciousness identifies the representation to be a simulacrum. The fact that this war happened in real, long ago may shock them to some extent. In contrast, the war that is represented in the Bharani festival is not the actual war but this is the closest war experience we can have in a representation. The participants cut their foreheads with a saber symbolizing the bloodshed that occurred in the mythical war. But this intimate experience is missing in any of its re-created versions. Ostensibly, seeing such a performance and participating in performance is way two different sensations. The primary experience still reigns over mediatized experience as an event is not about visual and auditory experience alone. To have complete experience other senses as the smell and touch are equally important. This holds true of a festival performance where the carnivalesque features are prominent. The following section of this chapter traces the organic use of space in the Bharani festival and delves into the nexus of body-space-ritual.

Organic use of Space in Bharani Festival

Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift begin their book *Thinking Space* by positing that “Space is the everywhere of modern thought” (1). In the fifteenth century, space was related to only visual experience; the body had but little importance in its conception. Noticeably, the concept of space has influenced thinkers outside this discipline. Earlier, the word ‘space’ had a strictly geometrical meaning; it simply meant an empty area. Till the 1970’s the popular notion viewed space to be a neutral container, a blank canvas which is filled in by human activity (Hubbard 4). Space was denoted using the Euclidean geometry possessing X, Y, and Z dimensions. For a long time, space reigned in the

mathematical realm, but today it is more a ‘human thing’ or ‘psychological place.’ A proliferation of the concept of space has occurred, we often hear of literary space, ideological spaces, the space of the dream, etc. As the most basic dimensions of human life, time and space serve as obvious, almost trivial, contexts of human life. On the other hand, time and space are also compositional in their being resources and factors for human action (Kellerman 1). This view cataloged space as separate from human existence, only serving a backdrop against which human behavior is played out.

The contemporary theory of space, in turn, views space as a ‘lived experience.’ This shift has been propagated by theorists as Walter Benjamin, Henry Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, and Edward Soja. In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre views space as something that is ‘perceived,’ ‘conceived,’ and ‘lived’ (40). Lefebvre argues that each living body is ‘space’ and has ‘space,’ it produces itself in space and it also produces that space (170). He views space as a triad; the physical space, the mental space, and social space. The first space is real which can be sensed whereas the second is imaginary. Here, the physical space experienced through senses is the perceived space. Mental space or space imagined becomes the conceived space. These two “moments of space are reconciled by living space through the body and that is when the embedded social dimensions are rendered visible.” Lefebvre argues that “the whole of the (social) space proceeds from the body... The body while living the space can construct and understand the social layers that make it up. Lived experience enables the body to coherent the physical, mental, and social aspects of space” (405). Thus, space cannot be understood or grasped in isolation as a container of people and things. This placing of the body at the

center of social space and treatment of space as a social product was obviously a concept that went far to inspire spatial theorists.

A. Kellerman notes that until the 1970s, the major concern of human geography was space and the human impact on it. Humans were mainly a macro or meso-entity, such as rural or urban communities and nations. Space was similarly interpreted as respective geographical units, such as villages or cities. In the seventies, this scenario got widened and gained more attention and stressed the interrelationships between humans and space. Humans could now be individual beings as well as institutes or structures, while space consisted of micro-units, such as homes, as well as the more macro communities. He opines that even in those times, human's impact on space was more central than were spatial impacts on society. To understand the significance of space it is important to understand the workings of its companion 'time.' Certainly, it is difficult to define time. Experiential time, or lived time, refers to personalized images of time as being short or long, passing fast or slowly. Time is a major dimension along which all events occur and around which human life-cycles evolve. It is an ordering framework for events in terms of 'before' and 'after' and in terms of chains of events or developments (7). Theorists of space identify two forms of individual spaces. On the one hand, there is the more fixed territoriality, the attachment of people to spaces such as rooms and homes; on the other hand, there is a rather more dynamic personal space, which constantly surrounds every human being like a bubble (61). Kellerman feels that societal space has not received thorough treatment as the individuals' space. The socio-spatial dialectic was proposed by Edward Soja, to view society and space within a unified framework, in which the two entities constantly influence each other (14). Thus, there is individual time

and societal time and individual space and societal space. It seems that societal time is the most flexible of the four. It is infinite and this is its most important asset.

Soja emphasized the distinction between contextual space and created space. The latter term, originally proposed by Lefebvre and Harvey, is at the center of Soja's spatiality (Kellerman 34). As mentioned earlier, space as a created entity is thus seen as a social product. Soja defines space as "a social product which is created, shaped and transformed by the same structural forces, antagonistic social relations, and periodic crises and struggles which affect the production process and social life more generally" (30). Building on Lefebvre's works, Soja introduced the notion of 'thirdspace' in *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. This third space is 'an-Other' way of conceptualizing space that extends and recombines the physical, material space with the space imagined, by living the space (5). It is thus simultaneously a product and force.

Nigel Thrift argues that space is unmistakably linked to the embodiment. Similarly, Marcel Mauss suggests that acquired habits and somatic tactics, what he calls the "techniques of the body," incorporate all the 'cultural arts' of using and being the body and the world. The body is at the same time the original tool with which humans shape their world, and the substance out of which the world is shaped (50). Further, Pierre Bourdieu employs the term 'habitus' to characterize how the body, mind, and emotions are simultaneously trained and use this concept to understand how social status and class position become embodied in everyday life (Bourdieu 35). Bryan Turner points out that human beings "have bodies" and "are bodies." Human beings are embodied and everyday life dominated by the details of corporeal existence (Low and Zuniga 2). Thus,

the body is best conceived as a multiplicity: “the “two bodies” of the social body, and physical (Douglas 1970), the “three bodies” of the individual body, social body, the body politic (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987), or the “five bodies,” which adds the consumer body and the medical body to the other three” (Low and Zuniga 96). Thus, the body is not an end in itself; it is in a constant process adding new dimensions to it.

Today, alteration of the human body is not impossible. At the same time, while the (living) human body has finally lost its integrity, the artist’s body has become part of the artwork and thus part of public space (Hallensleben 9). Plessner has argued that “our body can be perceived as a ‘thing,’ an ‘object of desire’ and as a ‘living body.’” Lefebvre feels that we can use our bodies (or parts of them) as tools, and at the same time we can be the tool that allows living, acting, interacting, creating life and producing spaces, creating ideologies and rituals, producing ideas and material realms, figural topics and urban topographies (5). A. Kellerman notes that:

If we take Lefebvre’s concept to be valid that our bodies are and have the space they are creating, then we create and constantly re-create and change our bodies by creating and producing our cultural space; then we perform ourselves, we do our bodies, or in the terms of performativity studies, we choreograph our bodies, which then not only means that we control our movements in space, but also that we design and redesign our bodies in space. (45)

Apparently, this ambivalence of being and having a body allows for understanding the human body as performative space. Giorgio Agamben proposes that “If the image is text, then the body is space. If texts can create images, then spaces can change bodies and vice

versa. If images can change cultures, then the body can create text; it is and has the text that controls” (18). It is only through our consciousness, actions, and interactions that the physical landscape is brought into existence (Sen 8). Space is created out of the vast intricacies, the incredible complexities of the interlocking and the non-interlocking, and the networks of relations at every scale from the global to the local (Massey 80).

Michel de Certeau feels that our society is characterized by a cancerous growth of vision, measuring everything by its ability to show or be shown, and transmuting communication into a visual journey. It is a sort of epic of the eye and the impulse to read (xxi). He sees practices as spatializing places. In short, space is a practiced place. Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into space by walkers (De Certeau 117). Thus, he is skeptical of knowledge that ‘map’ cities from a ‘god’s-eye view,’ and is more concerned with ‘stories’ as epistemologies of actually getting by in cities; and, in spatial terms, he saw walking as a form of practical narration. This may derive from the personal or social memories. The city for De Certeau is as much about dreams as things, and about doings not just knowings. The planner’s approach while building a city does not always consider the everyday realities of living in a city. It is only through living in the ‘everyday spaces’ that one can comprehend the ‘real text.’ The text is real for the users of the space, as it is written by the users themselves, through their “narrative footsteps” (122). Thus, the bodies through their actions are creating their own stories.

Experience of a performer can never be the same as the observer, an ‘otherness’ is always present in it. Erving Goffman terms the insider’s and outsider’s views as ‘emic’ and ‘etic’ views respectively (*Presentation* 75). Bharani abounds in possession rituals and

the experience of trance felt by its performers is not to be fully understood by the observer. But one can certainly be what Lefebvre calls as a 'rhythmanalyst' and hear the echoes of memories, hopes, desires, and pangs while listening to the rhythms of the space of Kodungallur during Bharani festival. For this, the observers have to maintain a critical distance; they have to merge in its rhythm and come out of it at the right time to analyze it. Space is marked by the activities going on in it. It requires a 'quality' firstly through its physical elements, secondly through the ritualized actions being played in it, and thirdly, through the way the active body responds to space (Tiwari 313). Seemingly, bodies act under the guidelines provided by memory and tradition. Space too is layered with meanings, it becomes a system of significations, "a palimpsest" (Tiwari 16). To understand the real significance of space, one has to uncover the deeper layers of space, to plunge into its past. A practical way of achieving this is through deconstructing the rituals performed in these spaces. Rituals mirror the evolution of human beings, their culture, knowledge, and praxis. By probing into how rituals came into being, how they have changed, how they have transformed the participants and the onlookers we get to grasp the mankind's relationship to the spaces and reveal the elements behind the production of such spaces.

Global forces have diminished the importance of 'place' (Ellin 19). To counter this, there has been resurgence in a re-creation of spaces projecting past identities and memories. But Soja argues that these processes led to the 'city of signs' where the city was being read as a sign, devoid of its 'original' meaning and completely abstracted from the user's body. "The city became an image to be consumed by the users" (Tiwari 12). The city is read and re-read by different people from a series of perspectives, such that it

no longer appears to be the same city. It is both one city and a plurality of different cities (N. Leach 3). The place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other (Tuan 3). Everyday life is simply ordinary, real life. Lefebvre in *The Critique of Everyday Life* questioned why the concept of everyday-ness did not include the extraordinary, for he felt that these were 'moments' that revealed the ordinariness of life. For him, the surreal, the extraordinary, the surprising, and the magical were part of the real. There are two types of actions: routine actions and the more formal ones as dancing, singing, and festivities. The first type of action relates the individuals to their own bodies, creating a 'rhythm of the self.' The second one relates individuals to public spaces creating a 'rhythm of the other.' The concept of 'everyday' thus is a dialectic between ordinary and extraordinary, between the mundane and special, and their spatialization traverses from the private to public, from room, to home, to street, to square, to city (Tiwari 28). The body in its everyday practice becomes involved in the process of creation, a kind of poesis. Bharani festival constitutes an 'extra-everyday' ritual through which the lived space of Kodungallur is constructed and represented. In analyzing the space of Kodungallur we confront with its 'performative impulses.' Reena Tiwari assumes that the construction and representation of space are influenced by the way the body is constructed and represented socially; thus, a gendered body creates a gendered space, an empowered body creates a space of power. In contrast to the general notion, the place is not a fixed entity. It is "multiple, contested, fluid and uncertain" (Hubbard 7). Victor Turner argues that meaning sealed within the layers of socio-cultural life, which are rather inaccessible to everyday observation and reasoning, is understood through the performance process itself (Tiwari 28). Kodungallur during the Bharani

festival becomes a theatrical space. Bharani festival too becomes incomprehensible to the one who views it with eyes alone. For them, it becomes a mere spectacle. The performance going on unites the chaotic, fragmentary space into a unified whole. Kodungallur through years of evolution evolved from physical space to absolute, sacred space. In Kodungallur, even when the festival is being performed, two kinds of spaces are being produced. Two modes of being exist: a group of people living everyday life and foreign group living an 'extra- everyday' life. These two existences though share a physical space; never share a 'lived space.' To understand Kodungallur as a unified space amongst its heterogeneous nature, it is necessary to adopt different 'ways of seeing' proposed by Lefebvre in the construction of the modern, capitalist understandings of property, space, person, and use-value. As noted earlier, viewing the city as a *flaneur* projects a different space before us in contrast to the resident daily participating in its creation. In Bharani, a new space is created that cannot be comprehended even by the residents because the Bharani festival does not belong to their immediate personal experience. It is 'an-Other' space that is not 'lived.' For the participants in Bharani, Kodungallur is a foreign space but they make it their own, through the rituals they perform there.

As a matter of fact, these rituals define them and lend them identity. They reconstruct the absolute, 'lived' space from within the sacred and the abstract realm of Kodungallur. Particularly, the oracles mark their presence in space; they construct a strange halo around them firstly by their appearance itself. Their red clothes, blood-stained face, swords and demeanor, itself becomes a performance. A theatrical space emerges with an oracle as a performer and people moving around him as an audience.

Their bodies are inserted in space, shape, and re-construct it. The presence of oracles amidst the abstract space takes the audience to the realm of imaginary space; the body is the tool or agency to make their presence felt. The emotional response their body creates among the spectators is varied; they evoke the feelings of fear, reverence, power, and divinity. They are the representation of the Goddess on the earth, living amongst the profane space. They transform the profane space into sacred through their materiality and are also instrumental in making the spectators realize their presence in space.

Reena Tiwari in her study of *aghora* in Varanasi finds that *aghoris* in the meditative posture and state is able to locate his own center. This involves his meditative movement in the vertical direction along the central axis of his body. He identifies this axis with the central summit of the Meru Peak (Hindu's *axis mundi* of the universe). A space, conical in volume, is generated (Tiwari 62). Thus, the newly constructed absolute, lived space becomes an extension of the oracle's body. Bharani festival produces a subaltern space; though the temple actually belongs to the high-caste, for some days it becomes defiled for the society. Thus, the irony is that even while becoming a sacred space for the participants, it becomes a profane, inferior space to the inhabitants of Kodungallur. For the time being, Kodungallur temple and its premises become 'periphery' of the city. "The peripheral body finds its place in the periphery of the city that holds a peripheral ritual" (Tiwari 62).

Thus, in Kodungallur, occurs a translocation of the center, it is not viewed as a sacred space, but a profane space with other-worldly power circulating in it. In the case of a temple, the presence of deity is enough for the devotees to deem it sacred. But in the Bharani fest, the deity herself is 'defiled.' There is a cutting off of sacred space by

‘profane’ practices and performances. Thus, by disrupting the central source of sacrality, the whole of the city suffers. The original inhabitants of the space see themselves in an eclipse, devoid of their protecting deity. During this time, for a whole month, no constructive events as marriage or house warming, etc. are performed in Kodungallur among the Hindu community. One reason might be the ‘profanity’ of the space during this time. Another plausible reason can be the creation of an imaginary battle space that represents the mythical battlespace of the Kali-Darika battle. The whole of Kodungallur becomes a battlefield, its memory is recreated.

Oracles through the rhythmic movement in space, like *aghoris*, construct a space (see fig. 4. 5). Similarly, there is a gendered space created by the interactions of different genders. In Kodungallur, the town has developed around Kodungallur Bhagavathi Temple as in the case of Vadakkunnathan Temple of Thrissur.



Fig. 4. 5. Jayan, Nimisha K. Procession of oracles inside Kodungallur temple amidst spectators. 29 Mar. 2017. *Private collection*.

The temple and its premises become the nodal center of all the activity. The buzzing cityscape is contrasted with calm, serene temple environs, full of tall banyan trees and large pools. Thus, right in the center of the city, sits this grove which maintains a balance between progress and nature. Even the four entrance points of the temple serve as the marking points of Kodungallur town, namely; *Vadakke Nada* (“northern entrance”), *Thekke Nada* (“southern entrance”), *Kizhakke Nada* (“eastern entrance”) and *Padinjare Nada* (“western entrance”). The town plan is such that for any enterprise in the town, one has to go around the temple, doing a half circle or full circle. This relative position is not only physical but also psychological. A casual ride through the town reveals an interesting fact; most of the shops from small to big hotels, theatres, cars, auto-rickshaws, and lorries are named either Kodungalluramma or her synonyms namely Kannaki, Devi, Durga, Bhadra, Sreekaleeswari, Bhagavathi, Sree Kurumbha, Rudra, Ambika, etc. This reveals the extent to which this deity has been synthesized into the psyche and lives of the inhabitants of Kodungallur. The northern entrance, the main entrance of the temple has seen the most of the development, the major buildings in the area being a court, bus stand, two shopping malls among others.

Rituals play a significant role in re-creating memories. Similarly storytelling that may be a part of most rituals is one of the ways of transporting or translating memories and creating lived space. Aristotle believed that humans are born as a ‘tabula rasa’ - a blank slate and that we are the product of a life imprinted as a series of memories. But memory is not such a thing; it is not concrete, definitive and reproducible, but ephemeral, ever-shifting in shape and meaning. It is more like a house of cards perched precariously upon the shifting sands of time, at the mercy of interpretation and confabulation (Levine

1). Thus, memory is the recollection or reviving of past experiences and impressions. This can be about a place or a thing or an individual that can be created by a continued transmission of knowledge, through tradition. Collective memory is a part of a community's active life. It is a collection of multiple and dispersed memories that are relative to a specific community at certain space and time (Boyer 121). The grounds for this collective memory are social experiences, in a spatial and temporal framework (Douglas 198). Memory and imagination have always been thought of as critical in the perception of built form. The city is a site for both collective and individual memory as every space or building has a forgotten story to tell (Benjamin 79). Space and memory have a longstanding connection; certain spaces evoke certain kinds of memories in us. The layers of memories are embedded in each space, in the flow of time everything about the space changes, but the memories both conscious and unconscious, both acquired and experienced persists. It is constructed and re-constructed through culture and tradition.

Jean Baudrillard recognizes the “murderous power of images, murderers of the real, murderers of their own model” and his idea of ‘representation’ is evidently opposed to ‘simulation.’ Simulation is “the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal” (3). To simulate is to feign to have what one does not have and implies absence and it threatens the difference between true and false, real and imaginary. He claims that simulacrum is powerful enough to threaten the existence of god, a belief that can create the belief that only the simulacrum existed; even the god himself was never anything but his own simulacrum. In representing the gods through a ‘mirror of images’ the iconoclasts are “enacting his death and his disappearance” (4). “Representation stems from the principle of the equivalence of the sign and the real;

simulation, on the contrary stems from the Utopia of the principle of equivalence, from the radical negation of the sign as value, from the sign as the reversion and death sentence of every reference” (Baudrillard 6). There are both memories in and memories (projected) upon our built environment. They, like a bank, are repositories into which both deposits and withdrawals may be transacted. Thus, the built environment becomes a memory bank, both individual and communal (Treib 1). Human constructors preserve the past, enabling us to experience the continuum of culture and tradition. We do not exist in a spatial and material reality but inhabit cultural, mental, and temporal realities (Pallasmaa 17). Simulated environments constructed to evoke memories as museums or themed spaces, monuments, and heritage sites may fail in producing the desired effect. The environment is experienced as only a spectacle and there is only a one-way relationship between the body and space, where the body does not play a role in the construction of the space. The viewers lose track of time and place due to their journey through unrelated and juxtaposed sites. They are unable to locate themselves within the space due to the continuous bombardments of juxtaposed images; the human body is unable to position itself in relation to space. Here, only two spaces are re-created; the physical and mental. The mental space is projected onto the physical space. The past dominates the present and the viewer and viewed becomes separate. These places fail to create Lefebvre’s third space that is the ‘lived space.’ To create a lived space, the setting must not be based on visibility alone, but provide a space for the whole body to interact and perform. It must enable the performing body to attain a liminal state to “reconstruct a space based on memories” (Tiwari 69). Bharani festival does not possess a textual space as other performances. The whole of the ritual relies on the memory of its participants.

Everything is oral, passing on from generation to generation. The whole procedure of the ritual is internalized, occupying their mental space. Thus, the mental space becomes the textual space here. Coming to the physical space of the festival, it is restricted.

Bharani can be read as a text where the meaning or truth is located in the 'mini-narratives' rather than the grand narratives or discourses which form its backdrop. Such a blending, such a viral, endemic, chronic, alarming presence of the medium without the possibility of isolating the effects, we are doomed not to invasion, to pressure, to violence and blackmail by the media and the model, but to their induction, to their infiltration, to their illegible violence (Baudrillard 22). The media 'corrupts' the behavior of Bharani, they are aware of its omnipresence and hence design their movements to cater to its needs. The presence of media has relatively changed the behavior of Bharani performers, the camera as Baudrillard suggests has replaced the panopticon. Further, the popular media is focused on its superficial grossness, in its translation, the reality is lost, and the events are 'sublimed.' Vision is influenced by the subjective experiences of the spectator; in Bharani, the upper caste views are circulated through print and other popular media, which in turn have an impact on the performer's understanding of the fest.

Reena Tiwari identifies three processes that are vital in the interplay between textual and physical. They serve to activate the memories embedded in and create a lived space. They are markings on real/physical space, de-constructing imaginary or textual space through mimesis, and reconstructing lived space as a monument of memory through transgression (96). Precisely, the site of the Bharani festival in Kodungallur is marked. They may be visible or invisible markings. In Kodungallur no special alterations are made to the temple except the numerous flags that adorn trees inside the temple. The

raising of this multi-colored flags forms an important ritual in Bharani that officially announces the commencement of the festival. Most of the markings are invisible, contained in their oral tradition. The underlying text here is the Kali-Darika battle which is projected onto the space of Kodungallur. This, although an imitation is not an 'exact copy of the original,' there occurs a mimetic transformation of both setting and original performance. In the second process, the participants deconstruct the space being resurrected. In Bharani, no props or simulated environments exist. The mundane space attains the form of a battlefield. They attain this through their bodily interactions and "translate them onto the present environment" (Tiwari 88). Within the ordinary physical space, they through their mental associations build a different world. In performance, memory and space come together. "The past world is reconstructed by remembering, imitating, and reiterating. It is a mimetic art" (Tiwari 90). The bodies through their 'experience' can locate themselves with space. The need is to construct a space that appeals to the body (physically and mentally) through the imagination, within the existing spatial framework. The third process is constructing a lived space. The participants transgress the present space through their performance, as in a time machine and journey to the ancient time. Thus, in this space, specifically called the 'lived space,' the past and present merge creating an absolute experience. The Bharani festival though linked to a narrative, and a representation of the original event, it is not a mere 'copy' but an event in itself. It is not recreating the ancient past, but the ancient past is manifesting itself through the mimetic environment produced within the space of Kodungallur. Here, Lefebvre's third space, the 'lived space' unequivocally emerges. For a fact, this situation is similar to 'play.' In Huizinga's conception of play there is stepping out of reality into

another order of existence, a transgression of both body and space, though not a physical one (56). Reena Tiwari makes a comparative study between the spatiality of Schechner's Plimoth Plantations, a live history museum, and Ramlila performance at Nati-Imli. In her comparison, she finds that in Plimoth plantation, although there is a movement in time and space, the spectators know that it is make-believe. In the Nati-Imli, the physical movement in space is nil as the sixteenth century is reconstructed within the 21st century (Tiwari 95). As the past is re-created from within the present, people are able to link and perceive space and time in continuity.



Fig. 4. 6. Jayan, Nimisha K. Oracle chief performing *tullal* in *avakashathara*. 28 Mar. 2017. *Private collection*.

In Kodungallur there is considerable physical movement in space. People travel far and wide to attain this transformation. They stay at Kodungallur, make it their second home. In Bharani, no 'fake environment' as Schechner finds in Plimoth Plantations is created. They live in ancient times for the time being suspending their memory of the present and through this state, they attain liminality. But the experience of liminality

varies from one person to another. For the spectator, it is a mere spectacle. Among the group of participants itself, liminality differs. The oracles attain the highest level of liminality. The pilgrims accompanying them, singing songs experience a different state of transformation. The psychic energy flows out and includes the object of perception and there is a merging of self and the other (see fig. 4. 6). It is here that the lived space is constructed, and becomes a monument of memory. This monument defines the past and articulates its relationship to the present, transforming the memoirs into a memorial by way of performance.

Regarding the same spatial movement, we have to take into account the changed scenario. Technological innovations have undoubtedly changed human behavior and extended the threshold of our movement. In earlier times, the pilgrims came to Kodungallur on foot or using waterways and this journey too was part of their pilgrimage. In those times a human's spatial reach was limited. They traveled for occupational purposes and covered only a limited space. In such an instance, coming to Kodungallur journeying hundreds of kilometers was not an easy accomplishment. This state of affairs changed with the advent of public transport systems. But matters have undergone a dramatic change in today's scenario with most individuals owning private vehicles. But even in the transformed existence, they have been able to retain the community bonding, they still manage to come in groups. In an interview titled "Ready to Wait: *Athava Savarna Sthreekalude Aachara Sneham*" ("Ready to Wait or The Upper Caste Women's Love of Ritual") given in 2019, J. Devika hypothesizes a sort of 'contract' between Brahmanism and Sudra groups in the earlier historical periods of Kerala. This alliance suffered a setback at the beginning of the twentieth century when

the Sudras protested and withdrew from the rituals that they found oppressing. She notes that not all rituals were erased; only those that could potentially heighten the conflict between the upper caste and Sudras were forsaken.

The earlier community was necessarily ritualistic; rituals pervaded both the private and public spaces. The rituals of *theendal* and the like were ceremoniously practiced. She cites the instance when Madhava Rao, Divan of Tiruvithamcore passed a law to accept the pleas of the subalterns in the courts during the times of untouchability. The Pulaya could not walk through the streets to reach the courts situated near temples; hence he further ordered a repeal of the untouchability rites for the functioning of his first order. This brings us to the question of the movement of subaltern groups in Bharani during such periods of untouchability. In 1917, Ezhavas were not allowed to travel through the public road, to the east of Kodungallur temple. The article that appeared in *Mithavadi* titled “*Ezhavan Nadannal Thallu*” (“If Ezhava Walks, He Will Be Beaten Up”) records the incident of an Ezhava male being thrashed by a Nair for using this restricted public road. William Logan and L K. Anantha Krishna Iyer have recorded their personal experiences of Bharani pilgrims’ mass movement calling out “*nada nada*” to reach Kodungallur (193; Induchudan 238). Thus, it can be presumed that during Bharani, along with the gaining of rights to enter the sacral premises of the temple, a liquidation of upper caste norms was realized in public spaces as well, thereby these groups enjoying the freedom to walk the paths. Bharani apparently is a validation of the Brahmin-Sudra alliance, which is clearly explicated in the origin story of Bharani as an anti- Buddhist episode; Nair community being Sudra themselves abetted the movement. Later, as

Devika suggests the Nair community probably aligned themselves closer to the Brahmin community, giving rise to a neo-Savarna collective.

Next, let us probe into the nature of the liminal space constructed during such rituals and analyze how the plan of the space aid in this transformation. In month-long preparations before the festival, the oracles separate themselves from the ordinary world. They live in a ritualized world, performing rituals, and observing *vratas*. They become 'detached' from their normal course of life. During the festival, they are seen to be experiencing a liminal state. They are both humans and gods; or rather they become ambiguous in state, treading through the narrow path between divinity and temporality. At the height of the liminal state, they experience a cathartic moment, thus the liminal phase reaches a finale. In Bharani, such liminal moments are plenty; they enjoy intervals of moving to and fro between liminal states. But the climax of this liminal state occurs during the *Kaavutheendal* ceremony. In performing the ritual, they seem to accomplish their goal; they have known their deity thoroughly, touched her, and experiences a converging moment. This sensation is fleeting; they are immediately suspended back into their original state. Squarely, the passage is consummated. They return completing a full circle, but the starting point and ending point are not really the same. Their experiences have changed them, this movement is a linear transgression, and not circular. The aura created by their attire aids the liminal experience. These markings on the body help in a smooth transgression into the liminal phase. Another arena where liminality occurs is the initiation rites of oracles. Initiants are disconnected from the mass, given blessings and a sword, they are allowed to be in the group of oracles for some time to get the 'call.' In the emotional arena created by the frenzied oracle troops and the high pitched enervating

songs they attain a liminal state, a contact with divinity, which they consider as a calling from the Bhagavathi herself, they break into tremors, cuts their forehead deriving energy from this point of contact and thus enter into the third phase. After *Kaavutheendal* the songs cease to play, the swords are suspended; they pack their bags and quietly leave the place. Even after the performance is over, the traces remain. The performance may have disappeared, but it has created a change in the performer and the performed space. However, the potency of performance increases by the fact that it has occurred; it has disappeared but has left 'traces' to be deciphered. An oracle chief cited that he shed tears only once a year; that is when he leaves Kodungallur after the *Kaavutheendal* ceremony. The pilgrims leave back to their native space carrying these traces or cinders in their mind, keeping it warm all through the year to ignite it on the next Bharani festival.

Further, in mapping the space of Varanasi, Reena Tiwari adopts the technique developed by Rem Koolhaas and Bernard Tschumi in their mapping exercise for Parc de la Villette in Paris, known as 'layering' (111). Each layer revolves around a separate aspect of the program of the site, has a logic and structure of an organization. These layers when overlaid on each other reveal the relationships between the different aspects of the program and context. Reena Tiwari develops a mosaic of Varanasi that works as a representational and performative model and re-configures based on the performance of the map maker now and then. In such an approach, the choreographed bodies inscribe their presence through rituals and help in continually reconstructing the maps. These maps have become the 'lived maps.' They do not represent the original urban space, but the urban space constructed through rituals of Bharani. The liminality of the participant finds a space in these mappings. For them, this is not a usual temple experience; they are

themselves transgressing into divinity here. Their body inhabits space constructing a personal meaning from it.

In tracings, the city is approached as a tourist; it is a 'postcard view,' highlighting the picturesque aspects of the city. Reena Tiwari feels that it is a 'documentary approach' and focus on capturing some visually appealing cultural icons representing the city as a cultural product to entice the viewers and to generate interest in the city. Here, the body is aloof and distanced from the city. The way we perceive the city and inhabit it affects the way we conceive the city. The planners or architects of the city often ignore the actual experience of living in the city. Understanding a city through maps and living in this city are strictly two separate experiences sharing nothing in common. Sometimes, while living in the city we get lost in its spatiality, and in order to get a grasp of our exact location in space, we may have to rely on maps. But maps are devoid of 'life' representing only the dry technicalities. But recently, there have been efforts to make the map-making process more creative and constructive. Maps are scientific representations usually marking territories, property rights, etc. But that is not the way people experience their space. Thus, space is not a neutral entity; it is laden with power and ideologies. We make our own spaces in life; it depends on the way we experience this world.

Today, with the help of technology giants like *Google Maps*, every corner of the city, every pocket road in the country is marked and has an identity. For a long time, space has been mapped from a visual perspective alone. But, the whole of the body should be brought into the study of space to have a complete understanding of it. Michel de Certeau in the chapter "Walking in the City" assumes that for a ritualized body moving in space, the city appears to be a 'writing.' This reading of the city by the user of the city is very

different from that of a detached observer watching from the top of a skyscraper. The ordinary practitioners of the city live 'down below' the threshold at which visibility begins. They are mere walkers; they write this urban 'text' without being able to read it (De Certeau 93). He too is a participant in its production. But the bird's-eye view of the space is panopticon-like and involves authority, power, and knowledge. The participants involved in this text-making play a role in the production of space and they are not merely the consumers of a spectacle. Benjamin's walker called *flaneur* watched and interpreted the 'city' by moving amongst the crowds, but he could never be a part of the crowd being an elitist and he viewed the city with an abstraction.

Apparently, the way a tourist grasp a city is different from that of mere representation on maps. Citizens of the city are concerned with 'textures' and not with the 'text' of the city. Visualizing alone is insufficient to map the real experience of the city. A map has to include the experiences and even the imaginations of its occupants. The mythical, symbolic, and mysterious attributes, which are invisible, hidden to the eyes, must find a space in a map. Cosgrove states that maps are not necessarily scientific and mathematical, but can also be a means of representing political, social, and cultural ideologies of the landscape. The map has to do with performance, whereas the tracing always involves an "alleged competence" (Deleuze and Guattari 12). Deleuze and Guattari suggest that a representation can be termed as a map only when it gives a glimpse of reality. A ritualized map is different from a scientific map. It tells the story of the inhabitants, sheds light on their culture and tradition. These maps are not fixed and stable; each of the viewers creates their own mental map. Gender, age, caste, political disposition, spiritual orientation, etc. affect the process of this map-making. Mapping is

such a process, where the user gathers thematic fragments of the city by 'rhythmanalysis.' Mappings and tracings are not the same. Tracings rely on visual perception; they trace out patterns and do not reveal anything new. In contrast, mappings are experiential. They are not a mere copy but serve as a constructive device. Thus, maps not only represent the physical attributes, but also the intangible, hidden forces. These intangible aspects are the stories, legends, historical events, politics, and economics that give these maps the potential to reveal the reality more than the tracing (Tiwari 111). Thus, mappings through the traveler's experiential journey are able to produce a new space, a 'lived space.' The same techniques of tracings are used in mappings as well; use of texts, images, and two-dimensional drawings, but they ultimately communicate a 'live' space.

The path of the pilgrims becomes 'charged' space and they become a performative space through the movement of these 'choreographed bodies' (Kellerman 123). Space does not carry a fixed meaning; different pilgrims using the same space write different stories through their performance. Even constructing the space leads to a 'transformative experience' for the body. Being a distanced viewer does not reveal to us the layers of the festival. We get lost in the visual overload of the festival. Only by being a participant of the event, being one with them, knowing their dedication and journey, we experience the transformative power of this performance. Here, the body and space become one and whole. Thus, the process of mapping a space depends on the way the body has lived and constructed the space. Conclusively, in mapping one has to be a part of the space, to imbibe its rhythms and then distance oneself from it, to give a critical representation of it. In space-ritual-body nexus, ritual acts as the key and enables the

body to use the space and attains a liminal state. Thus, the ritualized body is important; ritual acts as a tool, creating a lived space. In the initial viewing, the festival appears to be a fragmentary spectacle projecting an abstract space. We gaze at material aspects like money, ideological issues as power, gender, and social hierarchy. But through positioning our own body into space, through 'rhythmanalysis' specifically, this fragmentary abstract space is replaced by an absolute lived space. It is the ritual and the ritualized bodies that enable this transgression.

Chapter Five

Language, Abuse and Ribald Bharani Songs

Performance studies ascribes an agency to words; it proposes that speech is akin to actions. Speech utterances are seen as kinds of certain performances; they ‘do’ certain things and can supplement the fervor of the major action. *Theripattu* literally translated as ‘ribald songs’ filled with innuendos and explicit sexual references act as a catalyst to the *thullal* of oracles in Bharani. There is a vivid and detailed description of the body and sexuality of the Goddess in *theripattu* and the reason behind such a tradition is still contestable. From appeasing the fury of the Goddess and calming her down to arousing her sexuality, these songs abet in effectuating a cathartic effect in the performers channeling out their concealed furies, anger, anxieties and frustrations. The sexuality of the Goddess is ostensibly celebrated and the devotees believe this praxis to be cherished by their Goddess. Here, ‘abuse’ is categorically transformed into an oblation without which they believe the Goddess would not be assuaged. Another view sees it as a commemoration of the event by which Buddhists were expelled from Kodungallur by subaltern groups singing lewd songs. It is a fact that Bharani songs confront the strong threat of censorship in the face of upper class morality and are thereby struggling to preserve its authenticity. These songs are chiefly oral in tradition and are fast-losing their original flavor. Besides, changes in the socio-economic realms have been reflected in the Bharani songs, thus proving its social congruity apart from its religious design.

Profanity is socially offensive language, also called curse words, cuss words, swear words, crude language, coarse language, oaths, blasphemy, vulgarity, lewd

language, or expletives. Kalpatta Narayanan notes in an article “*Chekuthante Vakkanu Theri*” (Expletive is a Devil’s Word) published in *Mathrubhumi Weekly Magazine*:

If there is a day exclusively for speaking expletives, it will be the day when the man sleeps most peacefully. That sleep will be under the contentious feeling of having spoken in the most powerful language, of having used the most potential tool, of having driven the point; of having utilized the unlimited freedom (Can the rest be called freedom?). Those who speak expletives derive the same pleasure as a mob moving forward breaking barricades. There is an ecstasy of breaking the limits in voicing lewdity. It has the addiction of a festival in which everything is permissible. (my trans.; 54)

Thus, this ‘verbal abuse’ cannot be tagged as a meaningless activity involving substandard language and non-literariness and precisely has a definite role in shaping human behavior and cognition. Society, everywhere, has a tradition of demonizing certain value systems and valorizing others. In contrast to the established and accepted human language, abuse uses an offbeat syntagmatic structure, and the performative impulse of abuse is positively higher. It can serve heterogeneous purposes and reflect sundry human emotions. Accordingly, a study of cursing or abuse with its neuro-psychological dimensions can be significant which is attempted in the ensuing section.

Neuro-Psychological-Social Aspect of Cursing

In the most fundamental level, cursing is understood as the use of language to wish harm on or blame someone/something. But the term cursing also envelopes its variants as swearing, obscenity, profanity, blasphemy, name-calling, insulting, verbal

aggression, taboo speech, ethnic-racial slurs, vulgarity, slang, and scatology (T. Jay 10). Swearing draws upon such powerful and incongruous resonators as religion, sex, madness, excretion, and nationality, encompassing an extraordinary variety of attitudes including the violent, the amusing, the shocking, the absurd, the casual and the impossible (Hughes xv). Undoubtedly, language and culture reciprocate each other and linguistics is an advanced academic discipline having longstanding purport as it is unequivocally trussed with human evolution and growth. Nevertheless, like sexuality, the study of cursing or abuse has been considered as a social taboo and hence has been literally distanced from the sanctified spaces of knowledge. However, by trying to analyze language minus curse words, we are in actuality ripping off the emotional and destructive aspects of speech.

To fill this lacuna, a new theory called the NPS (Neuro-Psycho-Social) Theory of language has been devised by Timothy Jay, who has extensively worked on cursing behavior that incorporates both the normal and unique properties of curse words dissolving the sacred-secular binary. Jay through her studies traces the answer to the perennial question ‘Why do we curse?’ She finds that humans swear for different purposes: neurological, psychological, and sociocultural. At a neurological level, cursing may be viewed as an automatic process, relying on the right hemisphere and subcortical areas. An example of automatic cursing is cursing in response to surprise or frustration. Alternatively, propositional cursing is not reflexive; it is creative and strategic. Propositional cursing is joke-telling and sexual talk (246). Thus, cursing serves a more visceral than a cerebral purpose, catering to the emotional needs of human beings at large.

Paul Broca, a late 19th century French physician, through his studies on brain damage, revealed that humans create language using the left cerebral hemisphere of the brain which is now known as 'Broca's area.' Aphasia (the inability to make fluent sentences) is a condition that damages the Broca's area. Jay proposes that Broca ignored the fact that these patients retained the ability to swear and express emotions even when they lost the ability to use fluent speech. The NPS Theory, predominantly, is meant to explain why people curse and why they choose the words they do. This theory is notable for its protean adaptability, decentralized structure, and the primacy it accords to the personal experience. We all curse, some use moderate words that are not repulsive to others and the mode and tonality of such words will be higher than on normal occasions. Formal swearing is a ritual of social compliance and obligation whereas informal swearing constitutes a transgression of social codes ranging from the merely impolite to the criminal (Hughes xv). Thus, the range and degree of cursing vary from person to person, nations, gender, race, class, genealogy, age, etc. Although swearing might seem frivolous, it teaches us a lot about how our brains, our minds, and even our societies work (Byrne 6). Seemingly, cursing is a necessity for human beings to let out their intense feelings.

In the NPS, two interlocking neural systems are important: (a) the cerebral cortex, which governs speech comprehension and production, and (b) the subcortical systems (limbic system, basal ganglia, and amygdala), which regulate emotional reactions such as approach-avoidance responses. These two brain systems play a central role in regulating a speaker's verbal expressions. Cursing may take the form of an automatic reflex (outside of awareness and difficult to control) or a more complex, strategic, controlled response

(consciously monitored) (T. Jay 20). Thus, cursing can be both deliberate and accidental. Further, an individual's knowledge and his language depend on one's subjective personal experience, psychological dispositions, and religious idiosyncrasies and on the culture in which one is brought up. As such, a person's style of cursing will be the product of both shared and intimate experiences.

Interestingly, it has been observed that we speak expletives using the part in the brain that controls human organs and not with the part that controls language. Emotional expressions draw words from a cursing lexicon, or cursing module, in the cortex. Curse words are embedded in the semantic neural network that develops and expands with experience (T. Jay 22). For the NPS Theory, cursing is never chaotic, meaningless, or random behavior — cursing is seen as purposeful and rule-governed. The goal of the NPS Theory is to generate likelihood 'rules' that underlie concepts of appropriateness, offensiveness, and humor. According to NPS theory, cursing may accompany any emotional state, though anger is mostly the primary dominant emotion. Additionally, it has several communicative functions. It is interesting to note that children acquire curse words as soon as they speak but they suppress it due to fear of punishment. This is an activity that "persists throughout life into old age" (T. Jay 25). Steven Pinker observes that words' denotations are concentrated in the neocortex, especially in the left hemisphere, whereas their connotations are stored in the neocortex and the limbic system, especially in the right hemisphere (*Language* 18). Also, in cursing, gender, identity, and power relations are tacitly embedded. When we hear a person cursing, we hear emotionality, hostility, aggression, anxiety, and religiosity. We hear a speaker's personality through his/her style of cursing (Pinker, *Language* 107). Simultaneously it

can be a source of humor and a means of sexual harassment, abuse, and criminal behavior. Also, just as slang within a particular community serves to produce a feeling of bonding and solidarity within its members, curse words also bond social groups.

Arguably, use of abusive language is an effective means of anger and stress management. Connie Eble noted how slang changes over time. Many negative and derogatory terms in the general informal vocabulary of English originated as blunt and coarse references to sexual acts, body parts, and bodily functions. With increased use in a variety of contexts, such terms lose their shock effect, sometimes even becoming euphemistic (58). If slang terms lose their taboo-ness, new terms must be invented to break the taboos again. Over the centuries the two spheres of the unsayable— the religious and the sexual/excremental, the Holy and the Shit, have given rise to all the other “four-letter words” with which we swear. A history of swearing is a history of their interaction and interplay (Mohr 3). Jay amassed the examples of curse words uttered in statements and noted the frequencies of different uses of each word. One set of words appeared to be used primarily connotatively: *asshole*, *bastard*, *bitch*, *bullshit*, *cocksucker*, *cunt*, *dick*, *douchebag*, *fuck*, *hell*, *motherfucker*, *pig*, *pussy*, and *shit*. This means that *asshole* and *bastard* are generally used to refer to a thoughtless male, not a body part and an illegitimate child, respectively. Some words were used primarily denotatively, not connotatively: *balls*, *blow job*, *cock*, *dyke*, *honkey*, and *tits*. Another group of words was used both connotatively and denotatively: *blows*, *crap*, and *piss* (140). Thus, curse words are packed with gradations of meaning used both denotatively and connotatively, changing contours as per the context. Jay observes that curse words have a long history of use as figurative speech in song lyrics (137). In abuse, words are strong and pungent as in

poetry. In ribald songs, we discern creativity and imagination, metaphor and metonymy, rhythm, and rhyme. Here we get to see that celebrated ‘spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions’ categorically placing it as an offshoot of poetry.

It is interesting to note that most abusive language from any language of the world derives its most powerful tools from sexuality. Since the 1960s, many progressive thinkers have felt that sex is a source of mutual pleasure and should be cleansed of stigma and shame. Prudery about sexual language could only be a superstition, an anachronism, perhaps a product of spite, as in H. L. Mencken’s definition of puritanism as “the haunting fear that someone, somewhere may be happy” (Pinker, *Stuff* 300). Society, everywhere, is afraid of sexuality; it is believed to be something hideous that must be done in secrecy and privacy. “Society creates and maintains the secrecy of sex. Eroticism is present only in humans” (my trans.; Narayanan 56). Sex has high stakes, including exploitation, disease, illegitimacy, incest, jealousy, spousal abuse, cuckoldry, desertion, feuding, child abuse, and rape. These hazards have been around for a long time and have left their mark on our customs and our emotions. To talk about sexual acts and sexual organs is unacceptable behavior. “A male-female difference in tolerance for sexual language calls to mind the stereotype of a Victorian woman who when heard a coarse remark would raise her wrist to her forehead and swoon onto the fainting couch” (Pinker, *Stuff* 301). Discerningly, sexual speech is taboo because sexuality is deemed to be taboo and if in society, sex is an accepted way of behaving, sexually connotative words may lose its inherent taboo-ness.

Taking this idea further, when did humans felt shame and the need to cover their bodies? The answer is not known. In the Bible, it is associated with the first sin by Adam

and Eve. Shame was, thus the effect of their sin. “Attire, beauty, manners, and culture might have arrived as a package” (my trans.; Narayanan 56). But humans always tend to say the unsayable and do the undoable. In doing so, they enjoy pleasure; the pleasure of being free; free from all bonds and chains. Thus, ‘abuse’ offers compensation for the loss of freedom, and it is in reality, a replacement for action.

Steven Pinker assumes that taboo language “enters into a startling array of human concerns, from capital crimes in the Bible to the future of electronic media” (*Stuff* 304). Furthermore, language is subject to strict bowdlerizing by the imperious institutions within a society that conclusively decides what is appropriate and what is not. They may be educational institutions, religious establishments, government, law, family, or business groups, etc. Pinker wonders, “But why would a democracy sanction the use of government force to deter the uttering of words for two activities—sex and excretion—that harm no one and are inescapable parts of the human condition?” (*Stuff* 304). Censorship is a contesting topic that is precisely connected to human being’s freedom of speech. History shows that societies tend to cycle through liberal and then conservative periods of speech censorship. In cartoons and comics, we often see these abusive words indicated by symbols for words termed ‘grawlfixes’ in the lexicon of cartoonist Mort Walker. Also, in music and film, expletive is often conveyed by a beep sound. In this regard, Jay asserts that though innumerable studies have been conducted to study the effect of pornography on viewers, they have contributed very little information about the detrimental effect of offensive speech on listeners. The recording industry and film industry are constantly called upon to censor music lyrics, computer and video games, rock video content, and motion picture speech without any supporting social science data

indicating a need for speech restrictions (250). In this regard, Pinker posits that to the “guardians of decency,” profanity is self-evidently corrupting, especially to the young. But he does not comprehend “how the mere hearing of a word could corrupt one’s morals” (*Stuff* 304). Agamben suggests that *sacrare* (“to consecrate”) indicated the removal of things from the sphere of human law, to profane meant, conversely, to return them to the free use of men (23). The passage from the sacred to profane can be affected through ‘play,’ “it frees and distracts humanity from the sphere of the sacred, without simply abolishing it” (25). He identifies profanation as a ‘political operation’ that deactivates the apparatuses of power and returns to common use the spaces that power had seized (26). Evidently, no scientific algorithms have been devised so far to count the gradations of taboo-ness of a word and it is generally those in power who define taboo words and takes necessary actions to restrict its use through policing and retribution.

Also, Ludwig Wittgenstein concludes that language is human’s boundary. In speech acts, we do not violate these boundaries, but we safeguard these boundaries, he argues. But profanity violates all impositions and the restrictions the society has created over years. Abuse at times can be very harmful phenomena as well as it belongs to ‘hate speech’ that can hurt more than the physical pain and may end up in serious fights including murder. The primary aim of abuse is sacrilege. We, humans, are bound by the walls created by the mores of society. Some are happy whereas others are unhappy with this position, he maintains (54). Restrictions only result in intensifying the effect of abuse, in a conventional family circle, it is strictly impermissible. In such a scenario the advent of an abusive word can shatter many habitual value systems. Similarly, the person to which it is directed is another key factor. Power relations create variations in the

connotations of abuse. When called at men exercising power, lewdity becomes punishable. On a higher plane, if it is directed at religion or god, then it is blasphemy. Narayanan presumes that when spoken between people of equal rank/status, it is just “abuse for abuse’s sake” (my trans.; 55). Hughes hypothesizes that swearing is governed by ‘sacral’ notions of word magic; its relative power to change the world. The ‘high’ varieties of swearing often violate the taboo of invoking the name of the deity, while the ‘low’ are often violations of sexual taboos, especially those concerning copulation and incest. “This dualistic juxtaposition of the binary opposites of the sacred and the profane, the high and the low symbolically represents the angelic and the diabolical potentialities of man” (Hughes xvi). Thus, context is a defining element in the use of expletives relying on which the words relatively lose or attain the disruptive effect.

Cursing needs not always rely on morphological words but can be communicated using gestures as well. Since verbal and non-verbal forms of communication are deemed to be accepted forms of language, Jay feels that curse too must be qualified as language. The single-word nature and the gesture-like quality of cursing are not sufficient to deny its language status. What makes curse words unique is their “deep emotional intensification.” Researchers have always been keen to exclude emotion, probably because language is easier to deal without emotion. The problem with cursing lies not in the phenomenon itself but scholars’ limited definition of “language” (T. Jay 254). Thus, the key to the ensuing problem is a lenient widening of the ambit of the definition of language and ascribing due place to this inexorable aspect of human behavior. Words are not permanent unless they serve a continuing purpose. What is unnecessary in language becomes obsolete. Then curse words, if it were not a necessary phenomenon would have

become obsolete in time. But, as we perceive, they have only grown both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Also, Steven Pinker considers language as nothing but an ‘instinct.’ A child picks up language without any formal teaching. Basic, elementary language is imbibed by the child through interaction with his natural surroundings as “people know how to talk in more or less the sense that spiders know how to spin webs” (*Language* 18). A child is not exposed to abusive language and mostly it is only after physical maturity that one gets a complete implication of the abusive words they have heard or spoken. Usually, until a child attains a certain age it does not recognize the distinction between a taboo word and an accepted word. Language acquisition is certainly social conditioning. When an individual receives punishment for using certain words, they become aware of its unacceptability, but they do not erase it out of memory totally. It will be suspended there, within the deeper layers of consciousness, always tantalizing the memory and whelming to jump out.

Furthermore, Judith Butler in her book *Excitable Speech* presumes that when we say we are injured by language, we are ascribing an “agency to language, a power to injure, and position ourselves as the objects of its injurious trajectory.” Butler ponders how this mechanism works if we were not ‘linguistic beings.’ She states that our vulnerability to language is a “consequence of our being constituted within its terms.” If we are formed in language, then that formative power precedes and conditions any decision we might make about it, insulting us from the start, as it were, by its prior power (*Excitable* 1). Elaborating this notion, she argues that to be called a name is one of the first forms of linguistic injury that one learns. Not all name-calling is injurious. One is

not simply fixed by the name that one is called. In being called an injurious name, one is derogated and demeaned. But the name holds out another possibility as well: by being called a name, “one is also paradoxically, given a certain possibility for social existence, initiated into a temporal life of language that exceeds the prior purposes that animate that call. In using an injurious speech against someone, a ‘force’ works upon that person being interpellated” (2). It can affect in creating an emotional experience of changed identity. Thus, for instance, when being called son of a bitch, a very popular and offensive abuse in the English language, the hearer goes through the trauma of having such an appended yet bogus identity. He naturally feels disgraced and mortified. Racist remarks also come under this category as it can hurt one’s feeling intensively. In calling names related to one’s caste/race, people often get offended whereas one should not be. This happens when that race/caste is ‘low’ in society and only such words are seen as derogatory. The language that is dignified or lofty contains a ‘negative reference’ to the ‘common,’ ‘every day,’ ‘crude,’ ‘coarse,’ ‘vulgar,’ ‘uncouth’ language (Bourdieu 60). He hypothesizes that the factors constituting ‘habitus’ are “transmitted without passing through language and consciousness, but through suggestions inscribed in the most apparently insignificant aspects of the things, situations and practices of everyday life” (51). The concept of ‘everyday violence,’ a term coined by Nancy Sheper-Hughes (1992) shows that certain hierarchies and inequalities are maintained less by physical force than by everyday practices of symbolic domination. Bourdieu defines symbolic violence as a “form of violence that functions through the “purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition...” (2). Symbolic violence is actuated through certain processes as misrecognition where power relations are rendered “legitimate in the eyes of

the beholder,” condescension by which the dominant proposes a “purely symbolic denegation of distance,” and consent or complicity where the effects of the power are “inscribed in the bodies of the dominated” making them sensitive to public manifestations. Through misrecognition, the practices that can be potentially violent or complicated attain wide social acceptance through practices and discourses. Regarding condescension Bourdieu assumes that those who subvert objective hierarchies are those who are confident of their position in these hierarchies and possess the legitimate competence and the necessary symbolic capital (21). Zizek identifies symbolic violence as “embodied in language and its forms,” it sustains relations of social domination (1). In language, instead of exerting direct violence on each other, we are meant to debate, to exchange words, and such an exchange, even when it is aggressive, presupposes a minimum recognition of the other party (Zizek 50). Invisibility constitutes an effective tool of silent domination and silencing the dominated. Silence is not overcome by simply allowing the subaltern to speak, but a systemic and structural change is needed to enable them agency (Bhabra and Shilliam 67). Through such ‘subordination’ processes certain groups of the society, usually subaltern, are made a means of abuse. Thus, lower caste groups, women, transgenders, etc. supplement its popular vocabulary.

Interestingly, as in poetry, abuse is almost always lost in translation. Abuse is not necessarily hate speech. The one who speaks hate speech is imagined to wield sovereign power, to do what he or she says when it is said. Taboo speech is part of a larger phenomenon known as word magic. Through incantations, spells, prayers, and curses people try to affect the world through words, and taboos and euphemisms are ways that people try not to affect it (Pinker, *Language* 16). Taking into account the mythological

phenomenon of cursing in the Indian context, those who have the power to curse are gods, saints, or virtuous men/women. They attain this power from years of penance or through a life never deviating from the path of *dharma*. Kannaki cursed the Pandya Kingdom and the whole town was put to fire. She gained this power from being a steadfast, virtuous *pativrata* (“a wife loyal to her husband in Indian tradition”). Commencing from potent sources, even the mighty gods cannot escape from the repercussions of a curse. Indian mythology abounds in tales involving curse, and in most narratives, this phenomenon alone becomes the decisive factor. In cursing, seemingly, humans have copied the actions of his gods. Though humans do not possess the power to execute the words of curse into action, psychologically they experience an alleviation and respite after cursing. They have done their part and whether it would be fruitful is another matter. Cursing in its most literal sense invokes a deity to make something bad happen to someone. But the bloggers who give advice about “how to stop cursing in front of your children” are not explaining “how to stop calling the wrath of God down on your neighbors while your kids watch” (Mohr 10). And Keralites widely believe in the potency of words to cause harm upon others. They term this phenomenon *praaku* or *praavuka* that means cursing. It is believed that heartfelt cursing, if it is bona fide, even by humans can affect others. Greeks too catered to this aspect of cursing and believed that if at some point or other somebody cursed the ancestor of a family line, thereafter a moral taint lay upon his descendants (Fox 464).

Butler uses ‘citation’ in a specifically Derridean sense to describe the ways in which ontological norms are deployed in the discourse, sometimes forcibly and sometimes not. Linguistic survival implies that a certain kind of surviving takes place in

language. Thus, they transcend the limits imposed by time. “Language has often been called a weapon, and people should be mindful about where to aim it and when to fire” (Pinker, *Stuff* 310). To claim that language injures or rather to mention that ‘words wound’ is to combine linguistic and physical vocabularies. The use of a term such as ‘wound’ suggests that language can act in ways that parallel the infliction of physical pain and injury (6). Narayanan asserts that “Expletive is the medium of indecency, of making indecent, and of being indecent. In speaking them, you feel the same blood rush as slapping someone” (my trans.; 55). The same notion is emphasized when Charles R. Lawrence refers to racist speech as a verbal assault underscoring that the effect of racial invective as “like receiving a slap in the face. The injury is instantaneous” (qtd. in Matsuda 68). Also, Timothy Jay hilariously remarks, “After all, one might view cursing as an indication of evolutionary progress, saying words to people has replaced hitting them over the head” (255). Human kind is a diversified race and as long as there are differences between people, they are bound to create tension and hate resulting in hateful racist or ethnic slurs. But, on a more positive note, as long as the human need for bonding and sexuality is alive, abuse becomes a means of bringing people together. Basically, humans are animals with language, and they ought to express their animal desires through speech.

Butler argues that “If language can sustain the body, it can also threaten its existence” (*Excitable* 6). Thus, language can be both life-giving and life-taking. Violence can destroy language and language too can create as well as subdue violence. For Elaine Scarry, the body is not only anterior to language, but she argues persuasively that the body’s pain is inexpressible in language, that pain shatters language, and that language

can counter pain even as it cannot capture it. She shows that the morally imperative endeavor to represent the body in pain is confounded (but not rendered impossible) by the unrepresentability of the pain that it seeks to represent (Butler, *Excitable* 5). Thus, one of the effects of torture is to efface its own witness as the victim loses the ability to document the torture that has occurred, they in a sense become paralyzed. We can also see language assisting violence, as in the case of interrogation. This urges Butler to raise the following question: If certain kinds of violence disable language, how do we account for the specific kind of injury that language itself performs? As a possible answer, Butler quotes Toni Morrison's reference to 'the violence of representation' that posits "Oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence" (*Excitable* 6). Hence, language is thought of "mostly as agency-an act with consequences." "We do things with language, produce effects with language, and we do things to language, but the language is also the thing that we do. Language is a name for our doing: both 'what' we do (the name for the action that we characteristically perform) and that which we effect, the act and its consequences" (Butler, *Excitable* 8). Thus, in effect, language is simultaneously the act and the effect.

Butler refers to MacKinnon's argument that "Pornography is a kind of hate speech and that the arguments in favor of restricting hate speech ought to be based on the argument in favor of restricting pornography." He has based his argument on the conception that "the visual image in pornography operates as an imperative and that this imperative has the power to realize that which it dictates" (qtd. in Butler, *Excitable* 65). Additionally, Butler in *Excitable Speech* puts forward the notion that "censorship produces speech." She argues that censorship usually appears to follow the utterance of

offensive speech (128). After certain speech forms have become offensive, some sort of regulatory agency comes forward to regulate it and make it 'appropriate.' Butler herself validates that this is a confusing statement that reverses the usual conventions.

Censorship is a productive form of power: it is not merely privative, but formative as well. Butler argues that all speech is in some sense beyond the speaker's control and hence 'excitable' (*Excitable* 15). If the law produces hate speech to legislate it, it also produces a culpable speaking subject in order to prosecute him or her. Thus, censorship, in effect seems to fuel the very fires it seeks to extinguish.

Steven Pinker notes:

More than any other form of language, it recruits our expressive faculties to the fullest...It engages the full expanse of the brain: left and right, high and low, ancient and modern. Shakespeare, no stranger to earthy imprecations himself, had Caliban speak for the entire human race when he said, "You taught me language, and my profit on't is, I know how to curse. (*Stuff* 16)

Apparently, the curse is an additional creative faculty that language has gifted humans with and the shared apprehension towards abuse is fear; the fear that it might disrupt the veneer of civilization that is thought to guard several fragile human borne notions of sacrality and profanity. But however hard we try to suppress this aspect, the curse is an impulse or instinct just as language is, and will continue to amuse, abuse, or shock us. The following section of this chapter attempts a rigorous and exhaustive analysis of Kodungallur Bharani songs ill-famed for its nefariousness.

An In-depth Analysis of Bharani Songs



Fig. 5. 1. Jayan, Nimisha K. Oracles from Vallachira singing Bharani songs in temple portico on the day of *Kozhikkallu Moodal*. 22 Mar. 2017. *Private collection*.

Ribald songs or lewd songs or bawdy songs can be traced from all corners of the world, it is undoubtedly an essential feature of folklife, “obscenity remains a legal as well as a literary and social variable” (Cray xviii). This phenomenon has a profound history, emphatically related to human psychology and cognizance yet they are mostly ignored by the mainstream academia for being substandard and shoddy. These songs are an indication of a time when humans lived in a less monopolized society when instincts governed human nature than cultural norms. Unfortunately, much harm has been done to this tradition through the attempts of expurgation and relative sanitization making it fit into the moral schemata. The practical impossibility of preserving them due to the protest from guardians of public morality, self-appointed or legally comprised, has resulted in the waning of this fecund aspect of human nature. Eroticism once celebrated has been suppressed and pushed to the margins. However, vulgarity is a slippery concept as the

parameters of defining its certainty is abstruse. Words gain and lose colorings subjective to the vicissitudes in the mores of the society; a word once acceptable may become unacceptable.

The book *Erotic Muse: American Bawdy Songs* (1969) and its second edition that appeared in 1999 by Ed Cray has been a revolutionary step in this field collecting and documenting two hundred prevailing oral bawdy songs in America. In the book, he relates an interesting incident that throws light on the struggles and difficulties one faces in this endeavor. The great folklorist Vance Randolph from 1919 to 1954 gathered folk songs of a folk group called Ozarks, but owing to the censorship issues, he reluctantly had to publish an expurgated version of these songs excluding about 207 unprintable songs (Cray xv). Whether such a collection of ribald songs exists in India is suspicious, however, the scholars who have probed on the Kodungallur Bharani Festival though acknowledging the presence of obscenity in the songs have not attempted to file it. Probably, in a journal article “Sanitising the Profane” that appeared in 2013 authored by Shweta Radhakrishnan, an effort to analyze the songs is attempted for the first time including an appendix of translation of a few lines.

The conspicuous Kodungallur Bharani songs are sung in connection to the Bharani festival and are primarily oral. It is predominantly the presence of Bharani songs that makes the fest objectionable to certain groups of society. What we get in the name of *bharanipattukal* in printed form is a refined/sanitized version of these songs. These lines cannot enter into the accepted recorded versions or printed formats; censorship being one reason. And, not all Bharani songs are lewd. Some devotees do not sing *theripattu* and they sing *devistotras* instead which is not similar to the Sanskrit *stotras*. The language,

they use in these songs has a rugged charm, is in folkstyle, and full of slang. Interestingly, *theripattu* is set in the poetic meter *manjari vritham* (Adarsh 176). A comparative analysis of Bharani songs to the popular Sanskrit *slokas* describing the Goddess throws light on its essential nature. For example, the Sanskrit *slokas* describe Goddess in *Lalita Sahasranama* as “*Kameswara prema rathna mani prathi panasthani*” (“She who gave her breasts which are like the / Pot made of precious stones and has obtained the affection of the God of Love”), “*Nabhyala vala Romali latha phala kucha dwayi*” (“She who has two breasts that are like fruits borne / On the creeper of tiny hairs raising from her belly”), “*Kamesha gnatha sowbhagya mardworu dwayanvitha*” (“She who has pretty and tender thighs known / Only to her consort, the God of Love”), “*Ramana lampata*” (“She who is interested in making love to her lord”), etc. (Radhakrishnan 224). Further, in the Bharani songs, the Goddess is described as wearing “a crown of gold, in a hair bedecked with flowers,” “a face red as lotus,” “lips as red as a plum,” “having beautiful teeth,” “sparkling gold pots like beautiful breasts,” “body hair with a bluish tint / legs and perfect middle part.” Apparently, the similarity in explicit body detailing is impossible to not notice, but the aura of Sanskrit language protects them from harsh criticism and contempt.

Adarsh feels that in the twentieth century, the divide between different castes and sects in relation to the temple became more evident. During this time, the debates about the ‘vulgar’ nature of Bharani songs also began. It was as a continuation of these, cock sacrifice was banned and Bharani songs were limited to the temple premise (9).

Mithavadi-Book of 1916 contains a column that features a notice by SNDP (*Sree*

Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam), an organization of the Ezhava community in Kerala against Bharani in its thirteenth yearly committee. It is stated that:

The *poorapattu* sung during Cherthala Pooram and Kodungallur Bharani is against the community's increasing moral uprightness and any religious notions and it is intolerable and satanic to any human with dignity; hence it must be requested to Thiruvithamcore and Cochin governments to actively take action against stopping them completely; also this committee has decided to initiate the respective Ezhava Samajam members and chiefs to take necessary actions to separate Ezhavas from taking part in such shameful rituals. (my trans.; Adarsh 287)

This passage acknowledges the dissent faced by Bharani pilgrims even from the lower caste groups revealing the fact that the trajectory of this festival has not been an easy one. Bharani songs vary with places, as the singers incorporate sectarian contours into the songs they sing. The scheme of the songs gives room for greater flexibility and is updated from time-to-time. Cray notes that this is a universal nature of folk and there is no single 'correct' version of a song or a story. "Many folk songs are sung with stanzas interposed, transposed, dropped, or borrowed from entirely different songs because the singer felt like it at the moment" (xxiv). He also adds that "ribald songs do change over time, but at a rate much slower than do non-bawdy songs" (xvii). Ribald songs have a configuration that evokes laughter and shock and in most cases, their order and continuity are preserved by later generations.

Contemporary matters get reflected in these songs and they also serve as a means for expressing revolt and antipathy of the devotees toward the established systems. Shweta Radhakrishnan notes that *bharanipattu* has “long outlived its utility” (220). It has developed into a powerful socio-political tool capable of subverting the existing systems and hierarchies. Sweta identifies a sort of ‘self-censorship’ in the songs due to the intrusion of technology to the arena of Bharani, as the performers knew that their performances have a wide reach. But, this self-censorship is not so widely seen in today’s Bharani. We see the devotees freely indulging in the singing of ribald songs even in the presence of women and children in their groups (see fig. 5. 1). We often come across female oracles singing ribald songs without hesitation of any kind. They are at home with these songs as for them, singing is a ritual offering; it is certainly not something to be ashamed of.

In the article, “The Ribald Rites” that appeared in *The Illustrated Weekly of India* (1991), Venu Menon notes:

In recent years, an *ashram* near Trichur around 10 kilometers from Kodungallur, has become the nerve-center of a concerted campaign to stop Therippattu, a practice integral to the Kodungallur Temple ethos. Swami Bhoomananda Teertha and his band of faithful of the Hind Navotthana Pratishthan have held road marches and public meetings to focus attention on their mission of refining temple practices which are retrograde or which violate the laws of the land. (32)

Reasonably, this passage notes the efforts undertaken by Savarna groups to stop Bharani songs in the year of 1991. Though the attempts of Swami created havoc, it had not been

successful in the occlusion of Bharani songs. After this day, several episodes of this incident were judiciously added to the Bharani songs, thereby making use of the very same means to oppose their oppressors.

Another question to ponder is: Whom these songs are sung for? Some believed that they sing it for Bhadrakali; to calm her down, returning from the battle with Darika. Arousing her sexuality was a means to propitiate her and most devotees cater to this popular belief. Some devotees sing their songs as a dedication to the Goddess herself, as they believe her to be a virgin and these songs act as a compensation for her longing for physical intimacy. Some believe that these songs were sung for Nalachan—a friend of Kannaki and Kovalan. When he revealed his desire for her, she asked him to come to Kodungallur. Later, at Kodungallur, Nalachan was turned into a stone. To keep her word, she calls upon her devotees to satisfy his desire by singing ribald songs. This version underlines V. G Nair's claims that these songs are sung to defile the image of Kannaki, the Jain goddess. Another group believed that these songs were sung for the retinue of ghosts of Bhadrakali. Clearly, these myths are as varied as the people participating in it.

As a matter of fact, Bharani songs are so infused into the cultural imagination of the populace that the name Kodungallur has become synonymous with *theripattu*. In popular art, as films, we perceive this tendency of stereotyping which underlines this popular sentiment. For instance, in the Malayalam movie *Chocolate* (2007), when the character played by Prithviraj Sukumaran telephones the heroine and abuses her by calling her names, to his surprise, she retorts with unexpected hurling of expletives that are unforeseen and unexpected from a refined and educated woman of her stature. This shock probes him to ask his friend if by any chance she hails from Kodungallur. Also, in

the Mammooty starrer movie *The Great Father* (2017), when a journalist inquires a policeman about the character of their chief police inspector, played by Arya, he replies, “*Vaa kondu Kodungallur, kai kondu Kannur*” (“Kodungallur by mouth and Kannur by hand”). It implies that the chief, is aggressive and licentious in speech, and in action, he is violent and haughty. Regrettably, this view in and out prejudiced hesitates to appreciate the comprehensive spirit of Bharani. Firstly, Bharani involves a whole network of rituals and performances, and songs are essentially one of the many facets of the festival. Thus, equating Bharani to Bharani songs is not doing justice to this labyrinthine religious system. Secondly, though songs are lascivious in many aspects, they cannot be extraneously tagged as infantile debauchery. It is indeed an austere occasion for the participants, assiduously clouded in a ritual clime. The very fact that singing of songs as a matter of course commences and stops at a fixed time adverts to this fact. Also, most steadfast devotees do not sing these songs out of the ritual context of Bharani. They perceive it as a consecration to the Goddess, which is kept as sacred as any other spiritual offering.

Observing the gender variations within the practice of speaking expletives, in Kerala, abuse generally exists in the realm of the male world and within these boundaries, it is acceptable to an extent. But formal spaces do not encourage the use of such words and are shunned as bad manners. However informal occasions give room for a libertine usage of language rather than the restricted vocabulary. A person has multiple personalities within one’s self that they consciously contain and project according to contexts. Seemingly, abuse belongs to the subconscious realm of the human mind. It is natural and direct in contrast to the formal language that is artificial and ornamental.

Culture tames the human mind and brain and manufactures normal civilized beings. But apparently, the inner consciousness of humans is at a perpetual tension with these restrictions. In stark contrast to the normalized beings, the subaltern existence is more or less free and lackadaisical. They do not pay heed to the intellectual demands of the society as such and the prevalence of abuse in everyday language is not seen as a crime as in elitist groups. Hence, when they offer something to the Goddess in the form of songs they speak in their tongues without any liquidation. In the initial contact, it may appear as outrageous and irrational to our sensibilities. After the first shock, we wake up to the ring of sincerity in their primitive thoughts, earnestness in their earthiness, the tinge of pain and anger in their smiling lips and beauty in their imagination.

In Bharani songs, innumerable songs are *devistuthis* glorifying Goddess as the Kannaki- Kovalan story, the story of the Darikavadham, story of Nanu Nair, and debate between Urakathamma (Goddess of Urakam Bhagavathi temple, Thrissur) and mother goddess of Kodungallur. Some other songs are based on topics as the story of Shakuntala, Usha-Aniruddha story, story of Mandodari and Ravana, etc. After *Kozhikkallu Moodal*, a group from Vallachira region of Thrissur, sing songs in the northern portico of the temple. Adarsh C. notes that there is a debate between the Goddess of Urakam temple and the Goddess of Kodungallur in the first song sung by this group. In it, the Goddess of Kodungallur is described as the daughter of the Goddess of Urakam, the father being Lord Siva. But these songs are generally not popular among the public, Bharani songs are almost often understood as synonymous with *theripattu*. Devotees use the term *pachapattu* to denote *theripattu*. They sing, “You want *pacha* songs...? / I can give you Ramayana songs as well.” By *pacha* they mean rawness, explicitness, and lack of

ornamentation, etc. Adarsh C. views that among the traditional singing groups the songs are not considered vulgar (164). Ed Cray posits that the folk songs with obscenity have survived compared to the ordinary folk songs. “Reason for this staying power is easily found: bawdy songs are funny. They have an elemental appeal; they entertain.” He adds that entertainment can be the only function of these songs as “titillation is incompatible with humor: the person doubled over in belly-aching laughter is not one capable of copulation” (xviii). Bharani songs are unapologetically licentious. Sexuality, in all its manifestations, forms the main theme of these songs. Evidently, the singers purposely choose mythological stories that allow for free and extended use of lewdity. For example; stories narrating the birth of mythical characters as Vavar, Vedavyasan, etc. Apart from this, there is another category of Bharani songs that do not follow a storyline. They are loose, flexible, can be varied according to the contexts. They generally use archaic Malayalam as medium, at times English words also crop up in these songs. In analyzing the songs, slang words most often used are *kunna*, *kanthu*, *pooru*, *pannu*, *oompi*, *mairu*, *pari*, *thayoli*, *ooki* etc. all of which are explicitly related to sexual organs and sexual activity. These are slang words, not accepted vocabularies in Malayalam language. The literal translation of *pooru* is ‘cunt’; *panni*, *ooki*, or *oompi* meaning ‘to have sex’ can be said to have similar connotations of the word ‘fuck.’ Literally, *kunna* means penis and *kanthu* is clitoris but translatable as ‘cock/dick’ and ‘clit’ respectively. A quick view of the popular Bharani song depicting the birth of Vavar can provide the reader with an insight into the narrative structure and developmental pattern of Bharani songs based on stories in general. It starts with an invocation to Goddess Saraswati in the tradition of epic poetry. The singer pleads her to “Shed your shyness and reside in my tongue.” But unlike

the familiar poetry, he salutes the “clit who is the mighty lion” residing in the temple and “Lord Ganapati’s cock and Goddess Saraswati’s cunt.” This shocking initial salutation to the deity of the temple provides a taste of the ensuing episodes. He then asks forgiveness to the scholars for the mistakes he might commit in the rendition followed by reminiscing the teacher who taught him the song. The song is interactive and he asks, “Friends, do you know who Vavar is?” Vavar is then described as the son of Lord Siva. When Siva took the *avatar* of Yaksha to kill Tripurar, the heroine of the story; Pathumma was born in Mecca Madeena into a middle class Muslim family. Meanwhile, Siva went to Mecca for hunting “with an erect dick.” He was enchanted by the beauty of Pathumma and he took the form of a tree to seduce her, “The dick as big as an elephant trunk / Took the form of small twigs.” When the tree flowered, it attracted people from everywhere and Pathu too went to get some flowers. Pathu ascended the tree, “the small twig touched the clit” and Pathu became aroused. Then Lord Siva took his own form. This is followed by a drawn-out description of the penis of Siva: His dick was “as big as an elephant trunk,” “as fritters stringed on a stick,” “like a butterfly perching in the headless coconut tree / struck by lightning in the month of *Idava*” and consequently Pathu “wavered in the tip of his dick as a large areca palm tree in wind.” Ed Cray notes that bawdy songs are emphatically heterosexual. Their viewpoint is masculine, even when sung by women. “Sexual intercourse, often in heroic bouts; penises of equally heroic proportion; cunts worthy of such cocks; seduction of the innocent but agreeable maiden-this is the stuff of bawdry” (xxviii). Then, the sexual union between them is explicitly described as “When the dick penetrated the slit, three-fourth / Her slit flowered as a fishing net” and “After the fuck, when the slit is full / The cream overflowed into the earth.” And thus Vavar

took birth. The story ends with a bio of the singer and prayer to the Goddess. Thus, the songs are profusely peppered with slang words denoting sexual organs and sexual activity. Understandably, large sexual organs including long penis and enormous vagina are frequent motifs of ribald songs in general and Bharani songs in particular. And, assuredly, the story of Vavar is a convoluted one, having no mythical background and also unheard in the popular version of Lord Ayyappa-Vavar story.

Translating ribald songs is an arduous task as while transferring the connotative values of lyrics into another language, its original flavors are mostly lost in the process. In this regard, Kalpatta Narayanan notes, just think of the original form of the line that can be translated as “to have sex with Kodungallur amma, a flagstaff like a penis is needed” (my trans.; 57). A sexual act in most explicit or rather perverted manner informs these songs and the rhythm and feet of the songs are mostly the same. Its tonality is not similar to other popular folk songs of Kerala as *Koythupattu*, *Naadanpattu*, *Vallapattu*, etc. No strict rhyme scheme is followed. Notably, they even do not hesitate to ‘abuse’ the Goddess in extreme metaphors. They sing, “Mother goddess is a sheer bitch / She shows her slit to all.” Even addressing her as a mother, they perpetually shower invectives on her and it is these kinds of ‘abuses’ that the ordinary devotees find obnoxious. Another such line runs: “Mother goddess of Kodungallur is not so innocent / She secretly fucked Lord of Guruvayur.” In the contemporary spiritual atmos of India, mere contemplation of the sexuality of divinities is considered a sin. Sexuality and spirituality are understood as two distinct paths, potentially detrimental to each other and hence always kept apart. On these grounds, Bharani performers take the liberty to ‘abuse’ the Goddess in the most unimaginable language.

Homosexuality, child abuse, sexual perversions, illicit relations, inter-caste sexual relationships, and any relationship banned or shunned by the cultured society are celebrated in these songs. Thus, the idea is to celebrate whatever society prohibits and says no to, at least through language. Undoubtedly, it is their way of expressing the deep-rooted resistance and anger. Cray asserts that the prevailing public opinion that somehow “bawdy songs are not appropriate for polite society, permits the bawdy songster to thumb his nose at the convention even as he relieves his own fears and guilt with laughter.” He finds that according to Freud and his followers, the function of bawdy lore is to permit people to air or momentarily relieve their fears of matters that are ordinarily taboo in polite society” (xxv). Thus, their function is more or less a “humorous assault on fear” (xxvi). This aspect in no way implies that they live a lecherous life of loose moral standards. Living in society, they too are prone to its strict moral policing tools. In addition to this, they carry the dragging weight of their lineage simply because they are born to the lower caste groups created by the society out of irrational and partial indexes. We have to oversee these songs in its inception stage in the Kerala history, a period of considerable oppression, untouchability, and indignation. But today odds have changed and we live in a secular environment promised by the Indian constitution. But unfortunately, the germs of the caste system have not died out completely; they are still potent, lurking beneath every practice of the society.

The songs continue to be sung as a way of carrying forward the age-old tradition. The devotees believe that their Goddess is pleased to hear these songs. In another instance they sing, “Oh, mothers and sisters, don’t be angry / This is not arrogance, but Bharani festival” signaling their helplessness and obligation. Even criticism of Bharani

songs is evident in some versions of the song; “Thus, to sing ribald songs here / Many louts are here” and “Hearing the ribald songs, women folk chuckled / And they clapped hands in rhythm” pointing to its entertainment value and acceptance among the audience. We can perceive their fondness to their Goddess who for them is no less than their mother. They sing, “What shall I offer as a gift to you who has / Nurtured me with your breast milk?” And their grueling poverty is echoed when they sing, “How am I to offer this (rice) / Mixed with stones, charcoal, and fiber?” Somewhere else, we notice apparent anger against the authority. These lines, “Oh, policemen, sons of bitches / Are you guarding slits?” show their bitterness at police, who in the past, acting as per the vested interests of upper classes unleashed terror upon the pilgrims and stopped them from singing songs. To provoke those groups they sing, “This year no ribald song must be sung / A telegram came from Goddess’s slit” and “They brought a ladder with thousand sticks / And pushed into Goddess’ cunt” indicating the mistreatment that devotees suffered at the hands of authorities which they believed was an act against the Goddess herself. Possibly, they sing this not out of irreverence to the Goddess, but as a slap on the face of moral policing of the upper class authorities.

In most songs, some usages proclaim women’s strength and power. In the song about the Goddess of Kodungallur, it is stated that she is assertive and not like ordinary women. In the song of Shakuntala, we can see Shakuntala demanding the country (Adarsh 166). But this is not always the case, in the typical raw songs women are objectified and we see a reflection of a male chauvinistic society that loudly asserts no matter how educated a woman is, at the end of the day what she needs is a man’s care and protection. Interestingly, even International names and topics find a place in Bharani

songs. For example, a line runs, “That *pooru*, this *pooru*, Tripooru, Melpooru / Singaporean *pooru*, Chinese *pooru*.” Here, relying on the word pun, the meaning of *pooru* being vagina, they imply that all women are the same, be it that of here or elsewhere. Further, they sing, “If the right of the land is with police / The right of the house is with dick.” In a more flagrant version they sing, “If the right of the bus is with conductor / The right of the cunt is with cock” and “When the dick is full, isn’t she a sinner / Who doesn’t let to fuck?” Ed Cray asserts “...bawdy songs reflect strong masculine viewpoint. They can be said to be reinforcing the male view of the women’s sexual role...” (xxv). Following this course, most Bharani songs glamorize misogyny, representing women as masochist demure sex objects. Another line runs, “Seeing a cunt, he is a hero / But after he cums, he is timid” and “Why boy, you sit silent? / Stoop and lick my ass.” Thus, Bharani songs seem to celebrate toxic masculinity proclaiming male ideals of virility and power synchronously projecting a warped idea of female sexuality. Every aspect of sexuality finds a space in these songs, including sodomy and homosexuality.

In yet another instance, they sing, “She showed off her lemon sized tits / And deposited four thousand rupees in the bank” and “There are women in Kodungallur who let to fuck / For a coconut half.” We see two facets of prostitution in these lines, of poverty and exorbitance. Interestingly, Cray observes that rape rarely figures in bawdy song. “Seemingly, the social-and sexual stigma attached to that act makes such a subject, by its very nature, beyond the bounds of true masculinity. The rapist uses force; the hero of bawdery uses wit... He may be a scoundrel as the rapist but by guile or sexual attractiveness, by deceit or straightforward seduction, he achieves his heterosexual ends”

(xxviii). For instance, in the song of birth of Vedavyasa, Kali retorts to the lecherous advance of saint Paraswara, “Oh, will saints behave so to young? / Will they show erect cocks?” He indignantly replies, “Hey, you have to learn by fucking oldmen / You idiot virgin cunt.”

Also, these songs touch upon highly sensitive topics so much so that sung outside this ritual space, these songs can disrupt the secular framework creating much chaos and disharmony between different religious groups. They chant, “Upon opening the slit of Christian girl / It seemed like a cut Christmas cake.” Also, there is evident anger against the upper caste sects. In the earlier episodes of Kerala history, even gazing an upper caste woman was prohibited and reprimandable. In those times they sang, “What’s inside the slit of a Brahmin woman? / It stinks like a rotten rat” and “Once a Nair went to fuck / A dog and Nair together fucked.” Thus, their imagination and ingenuity know no bounds. There is also a discussion of contemporary politics within these songs from time to time. As a possible reaction to the oppressive period of emergency of 1975 in India, declared by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, they sang, “Indira Gandhi who ruled India, did not have a penis to fuck... / So, she borrowed Reagen’s dick.” This can be seen as an obnoxious attack charging Prime Minister of an illicit affair with the then American President Reagen. However, as is the case with abuse, the literal meaning of the words are not to be valued to comprehend the issue at stake, these lines rather hint at the various political alliances that were made by Indira Gandhi during those times toning down her anti-American stance and the dark despotic period of emergency under her rule. The songs are similar to a curse word or calling names in which the intensity of the emotions matter more. Further, they did not hesitate to sing against even the royal power. “Though

the King of Kochi is child / He is smart enough to fuck madams.” These lines allude to the amicable relationship of royal families with the foreign invaders that only helped to push layman into deprivation and insecurity. Ed Cray documents a popular bawdy song *The Sea Crab*, 300 years old, sung in Elizabethan times. A line from this song runs as follows; “The old wife got up for to take a long shit / The god damned old sea crab grabbed her by the slit.” Now, considering a couplet from Bharani song, “In the eight-inch cunt of Brahmin lady of Palakkad / A leech slid,” an unmistakable analogy is noticeable in them, accentuating universal human nature.

Ostensibly, these songs are exaggerated as a cartoon picture. Just as a cartoon strip by magnifying a certain aspect throws light on the ugly side of reality, these songs mock at the vulgarity of human existence and its moral hypocrisies. *Theri* denotes words that have been thrown out of language. They have no place in the accepted structure of language. *Therichavan* or *therichaval* is used to denote people who do not fit into the normal societal norms (Adarsh 161). Narayanan assumes that the term *theri* might have originated from the prankish (“*thericha*”) boy, who is running after spitting dirt (“*theripichu kondodunna*”) over the white dress or someone fallen (“*thericha*”) from the basic manners. (Fallen woman and fallen seeds (“*thericha pennum thericha vithum*”) are probing me to consider them) (my trans.; 54). M. N Vijayan writes that our perception has become upside down and twisted viewing the “description of battles and murders as great, and the description of the birth of humans as obscene. That is why, we rever the battle descriptions of Ezhuthachan, and deem the songs celebrating human’s origin, celebrating fecundity as obscene songs” (my trans.; 162). Thus, inverting the accepted convention, *theri* can probably be hailed as the ‘normal’ vocabulary of humans and it is

the refined language that humans speak that become ‘abnormal.’ Hence, it can be assumed that whenever humans transgress into their normal self, *theri* comes into use.

Notably, abuse was an inherent part of ancient comic cults and later of carnivals. “Coupled with the cults which were serious in tone and organization were other, comic cults which laughed and scoffed at the deity (‘ritual laughter’); coupled with serious myths were comic and abusive ones; coupled with heroes were their parodies and doublets” (Bakhtin 7). Also, obscenity has been recognized as one of the defining hallmarks of Greek Old Comedy. The Greeks referred to it as *aischrologia*, ‘shameful speech,’ considered as a marked language, transgressive in everyday speech but sanctioned within the generic and performative parameters of Athenian dramatic festivals. Henderson in *The Maculate Muse* comments on the obscenity of old Greek Comedy:

The cults, do seem, however, to have contributed to the growth of obscenity as a standard and accepted element in the comic performance: the use of obscene language to expose individuals and thus to make them comic was a standard feature of the cults...It was not merely the uttering of obscene language which appealed to the comic poets; it was the use of obscenity as a means of abuse, criticism, and degradation which attracted them and challenged their ingenuity. (Rosen 21)

In addition, ribald songs have been an indispensable part of ancient fertility cults. Chelnatt Achuthamenon notes about a Siva temple in Mudukkathurai, in Thalakkattu, near Mysore practicing an unusual custom; women coming from faraway places leave their blouses in one part of the temple, any man picking up a blouse can have sex with the

owner of that blouse. Also, similar practices can be traced to some other temples as well. He also claims that such songs are sung in Kottiyur Siva temple. In Sankaranayanar Kovil in Tirunelveli, devotees ‘abuse’ their goddess. In the Gangamma Jatara Festival of Tirupati as well such ‘abuse’ is performed. Ravindran records that in a tribal group named Muriyagond in Orissa, men and women after consuming alcohol dance intoxicated and fornicate (Adarsh 162). Further, Keralavarma feels that ribald songs are sung in Cherthala Pooram in Alappuzha district of Kerala as well. In Java, during the times when rice grains bloomed, people went to the fields and copulated (Adarsh 163). In the earlier, agrarian mode of living fertility rites were ceremoniously performed to increase the produce and harvest. The sexual union between a man and a woman was believed to help increase the fecundity of the earth. In many places, harvest festivals are marked by sex rites. The Bihu festival celebrated in Assam is a “period of considerable license.” Naga tribes of Manipur, a month after paddy is sown and again before the first fruits are reaped, organize a tug of war between men against women and girls, a period of relative license. The Bhuiyas of Orissa celebrates a three-day festival called Magh Porai, in which there are considerable promiscuity and intoxication, “all respect for blood relations are set at naught, and even sisters and brothers make indecent jokes regarding each other.” The Hos of Chotanagpur celebrate a feast in January, it is believed that during this period men and women are “overcharged with vicious propensities” and to give vent to these passions “servants forget their duty to their masters, children their reverence for parents, men their respect for women, and women all notions of modesty, delicacy, and gentleness.” Further, the Punjabs of Jeypore celebrate a month-long festival for a month, by “both sexes mixing promiscuously and taking partners” as per choice. The Kotas of

the Nilgiri hills and the tribes of Khondistan have a similar festival of “continuous licentiousness.” Bhattacharya views that the “association of sexual union with agriculture was universal.” By imitating the act of human procreation the primitive people tried to increase the generative powers of nature...” (35). Such rites abound in the Greek harvest festivals of Thesmophoria; tribes of Central America, Peru, backward inhabitants of Chili, New Mexico, Nikaragua, and other Latin American countries, Java and New Guinea to ensure the fruitfulness of the earth (Bhattacharya 36).

Thus, the singing of ribald songs is a universal phenomenon that can be traced in several cultures around the world. Victor Turner makes a detailed study of the singing of Rabelaisian songs during the Wubwang’u ritual in Ndembu. This is a curative ritual and while the participants collect medicines accompanied by dance, and sprinkle those medicines on the patient, they sing songs that emphasize sexual conflict and praise sexual union. They are believed to strengthen the patient both ‘sexually and bodily.’ Before the ribald songs, they chant a special formula, *kaikaya wo, kakwawuweleli* (“here another thing is done”) that legitimize the singing which is otherwise considered inappropriate. Turner in *The Ritual Process* states, “Wubwang’u is an occasion of licensed disrespect and prescribed immodesty” (80). Sexual promiscuity is not displayed but is expressed through words and gestures. These songs are in serial order. First, each sex belittles the opposite sex’s sexual organs and prowess and extols their own. They sing, “Today look at a wet vulva / Mother of penis! Mother of penis! // That will give you much pleasure....” The women jeeringly assert to their husbands that they have secret lovers to which husbands retort that all they get from women are venereal diseases. “A large vulva, a small penis / Look, a vulva as on a lion’s brow, // I will rub your penis / Mother, O

mother!” Later, both groups sing songs in praising the pleasures of intercourse. “Your swollen scrotum stimulates the vulva indeed / A strong vulva and a strong penis, // How it tickles like grass! Copulation is like sweet honey” (Turner 80). The whole atmosphere is “buoyant and aggressively jovial” (Turner 78). These songs fall into the category of “prescribed obscenity” that society allows for by withdrawing from its normal prohibition during periods of crisis. These songs bear an unmistakable similarity in meaning to the ribald songs in Bharani that underlines the fundamental human psyche.

Arguably, a similar vein runs in the Holi festival celebrated in Northern India. Holi involves disruption and inversion of the conventional social order, as well as a celebration of symbols of sexual fecundity (C. Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives* 127). It is celebrated in honor of the Goddess Vasanti and is an occasion on which “the most licentious debauchery and disorder reign throughout every class of society. It is the regular Saturnalia of India. Persons of greatest responsibility, without regard to rank or age, are not ashamed to take part in the orgies which mark the season of the year” (Rousselet qtd. in Bhattacharya 35). Holi was originally celebrated by the Sudras, disrupting the normal social order by dousing people, especially upper class people, with colored powder or water. Women who are normally docile get a chance to get into the fun of dousing men or beating them with sticks. It is said that during Holi “the bully is bullied and the high are brought low.” Lewd songs, the consumption of *bhang*, a milk-yogurt drink laced with hashish are common features. “Holi is a threat not only to one’s clothes but also to quotidian morals since Holi madness has been known to inspire sexual licentiousness and promiscuity” (C. Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives* 128). Again, Sammakka Saralamma Jatara, a four-day festival celebrated once in every two years at Medaram

village, Telangana is a subaltern festival commemorating the event of Koya tribes' revolt against the Kakatiya rulers denying to pay tax during draught. The matriarch of the tribe Sammakka was defeated in the battle and the myth is that Sammakka cursed Kakatiya rulers. Sammakka and Saramma, her daughter wielded swords much before the celebrated Queen of Kakatiya, Rudramma, and in their, memory *Jatara* is celebrated. In the 'liberating anonymity' of the fest, men cross-dress and transgenders and women equally participate in consuming beer and liquor, singing, and dancing with loose hair. Also, as hinted earlier, the Gangamma Jatara celebrated in Tirupati also includes a series of performances by lower caste males in female guises. It is performed as a reminder of the goddess's victory over Palegadu and for seven days men of specific castes of Tirupati perform *veshams* each of which is stylized to depict their castes and occupational groups. Flueckiger notes about Gangamma Jatara:

On the first two days, young children (mostly boys), dressed as *bandas*)...with the penalcode number 786 painted on their bare chests, beat the large bare feet of the goddess with neem branches while singing sexually explicit and/or "abusive" songs (*butulu*)... in the framework of the jatara aesthetics of excess, the songs help to create the excess (desire) of the goddess and at the same time fulfill it.

(45)

In this ritual, criminal behavior and sexual excess, two traits considered detrimental to the welfare of society is amply celebrated. Peter Manuel finds that among North India's regional music scenes 'spicy' songs portraying the traditional flirtation between the young wife and her husband's younger brother are quite popular. Bhojpuri vernacular music also consists of similar spicy ribald songs. The Braj region to the southeast of

Delhi enjoys special renown in India as the legendary home of the God Krishna, in his pastoral amorous persona. It is famous for songs called *rasiya*, distinguished by “playfully erotic lyrics, abounding in euphemisms and double-entendres.” In these songs, there is an ambiguous conflation of the dramatis personae of the archetypal lovers, Krishna and Radha, with the stock devar-bhābhi/jījā-sāli personages of North Indian secular ribald songs (Manuel 110). Another set of ribald songs of Braj is *languriya* songs, though associated with the worship of Kaila Devi profusely use ribald innuendos.

Moreover, abuse is a ubiquitous phenomenon that often is taken for granted. We can sense the presence of abuse, explicit and inexplicit in mass media discourse. Humor with sexual overtones is profusely used in popular culture. Certainly, cinema is a medium that reflects everyday reality but is subjected to severe censorship making it conform to norms of decency. When other kinds of songs are not learned by the younger generation, “two types of folk songs are stubborn exceptions to this general rule: children’s rhymes and bawdy songs.” Gershon Legman writes that the form of humorous folktale falls largely into two classes: those with sexual themes involving castration or pseudo castration, and the scatological. The sexual joke dealing with castration reassures the listener with laughter; the scatological joke’s function is to shock. Castration can be in the form of contracting venereal diseases or homosexuality-which is “a psychoanalytic form of castration” (Cray xxviii). But ‘cultured’ society does not either relish the joke or stand the shock, and has its own tools of containing this nature. For instance, in 2018, Punjab police under their Cultural Affairs Minister Navjot Singh Sidhu decided to set up a ‘Punjab Culture Commission’ to eliminate “vulgarity in lyrics by working zealously

towards its complete eradication.” The commission is expected to take stringent actions against singers or artists ‘polluting’ the cultural scene of the state.

In a motion moved in the British court against idolatry in India in 1830, asking for the eradication of opprobrious behavior from Hindu temples, Mr. John Poynder, the pleader cites British historian Mill’s words that Hindu religion encourages the “loosest morality” and “depravity of manners,” and is a “religion which subjects to the eyes of its votaries the grossest images of sensual pleasure.” The worship of the “Yoni, and the Lingam, cannot be regarded as favorable to chastity” (Higgins 89). Poynder charges the Hindu moral text *Hitopadesha* to be essentially amoral, which an English scholar cannot translate but a “Hindoo lady, from grosser habits, might hear them without a blush” (Higgins 89). Poynder also cites Mr. Ward’s findings that proclaim Hindu religious practice to be dismally gross and obscene. He is appalled at the innumerable lingam placed in Hindu temples and the “daily worship of this scandalous image” among Hindu women. Ward chronicles the Durga festival in Calcutta in the year of 1806, “Four sets of singers were present, who entertained their guests with filthy songs, and danced in indecent attitudes before the goddess.” He was so appalled at the sight that he writes these people were “perpetrating a crime of high treason against the God of Heaven.” He continues that “at the end of the ceremonies the parties cook and eat the flesh of the sacrifice, drink the spirits offered to the goddess, and then in a state of intoxication the men and women dance together, and commit the greatest indecencies.” Further, Ward testimonies to have seen young men standing naked in front of idols, and young men dressed as women performing indecent dancing with men (Higgins 91). Ward further alludes to the female worship practiced in Hindu temples. After the worship of the

presiding deity, “the female who sits naked” before the idol is worshipped. He accuses this ritual to be corrupting the priests, “his passions are inflamed and his mind polluted.” He also asserts that “it is not devotion that leads the Hindoo to the temple, but a licentious appetite.” Ward also charges Hindu women to be infidel to the core (Higgins 92). Apparently, such forms of worship are not generally seen in the present religious atmosphere of India. Female worship, Durga festival, and Holi is still prevalent in the country but have become refined and cleansed; from these notes, we can understand that this has been largely due to the blight of the British concept of virtue and morality. Thus, the moral code of India has undergone a radical shift under the British puritanical rule. We cannot but laugh at the British historians’ infantile reactions to the *linga* and *yoni* worship and naked statues in the Hindu temples. In a sweeping generalization, they charge everything connected to Hinduism, including their epics, gods, priests, and devotees immoral. This intolerance to label everything ‘other’ as vulgar and ‘refining’ them is a typical colonial syndrome. And the present-day attempts to contain the surviving rituals and practices can only be seen as an extension of this colonial hangover.

We cannot fix Bharani songs in time as they are always evolving. We get a hint of their periods of its conception from fixing the topics mentioned in it. Also, there is no proper order or pattern to these songs. They can be sung in any combination, by mixing lines of different songs. This aspect gives room for so much novelty and freshness. Another feature of the song is that they are spontaneous reactions. They are sung in response to whatever the performers see in front of them while moving around. Thus, they ‘abuse’ the auto-rickshaw drivers, bus drivers, vendors, and the like when they chance upon them. Songs also change according to places and singers. Each group

incorporates their family history and lineage into the songs. Within Kodungallur, Bharani produced a male-dominated space. Women belonging to Kodungallur did not participate in the festival in the past, even as spectators. This is mainly because of the presence of ribald songs. Such an environment is not deemed to be suitable for women to be present.

C. Achuta Menon notes that Bharani pilgrims believe that if they do not sing these vulgar songs throughout their journey, the offerings will not yield the desired effect (16). This offbeat belief remains unaltered even today. With the popularization of virtual platforms, people are finding it easy to voice their contempt and protest against Bharani. Most people consider Bharani as an onslaught against Indian culture and heritage. But, rare enough, there can be heard voices that question the role of society in defining culture, vulgarity, and propriety. This eagerness to view anything comprehensively gets reflected in the present-day Bharani as well. While in the past it was considered improper for a 'cultured' woman to participate in the fest, now women belonging to Kodungallur along with their families take part in the fest as spectators. Thus, the taboo is broken and this is certainly a welcome change.

Adarsh argues that we see certain life elements that are simultaneously seen as sacrilege and a celebration. Sexuality is one such thing. Similarly, menstruation is seen at once as a lifetime achievement and pollution. Maybe this is due to the irony arising out of the merging of two different cultures (my trans.; 164). Subaltern goddess is a goddess with 'tits,' slit' and 'cunt.' Humans imagine their god in relatable images, mostly in anthropomorphic form and we do not know exactly when the tradition of using clothes for divine beings began. The sculptures of Ajanta and Ellora point to the celebrated sexuality of ancient humans. With the advent of pseudo-moralism, human beings came to

a consciousness that the body needs to be covered and the first step taken might have been to drape the gods. In their prayer to the Goddess they sing, "...I bow before you to relieve my sins // May the desire to fuck be always alive / Grant me *moksha* upon death." Intelligibly, these rustic folk have simple demands from their Goddess, and the very fact that they who ask her to purge them of their sins, in the next line asks for a fecund sexual life points to their idea of sexuality that is divorced from the notion of sin. To them, sexuality is simply one of the basic needs of life. Further, Bharani occurs in a thick framework of devotion. The life of each Bharani devotee is onerous; he stands firm devoting everything in their Goddess's hands, equally accepting the happiness and pain that Devi gives them in return. Their steadfast *Bhakti* is their lifeblood; there is no adultery in it. They who sing the *pacha* ("raw") songs are raw human beings. As in any other walk of human life, exploitations and shams might have crept into Bharani as well, but the dominant sentiment remains unaltered, namely hardcore *bhakti*. The attitude of the upper castes and authorities are reflected in the following lines by Venu Menon in his article, "Everyone agrees that the practice of singing scurrilous songs must stop. The general observation is that it has been on the wane over the years. State and temple authorities prefer to let the convention die a natural death" (32). In Bharani, the process of 'subordination' is inverted, the men and women of the upper castes become the popular idiom, and even those in power are not spared; more than the sexual renderings, it is this subversion that increases the shock value of Bharani songs. Those who advocate the need for banning this festival, on the ground of disturbing morality must sit back and ponder over the truth of morality. If humans had been a refined and superior race, child abuse, rape, murder, and war would not have occurred in this society. Vulgarities is

everywhere in human existence and is subjective; each period had its own versions of vulgarity. J. Devika, in an interview voices that the Indian tradition of wearing *sindhooram* (“crimson powder on forehead”) by married women, is essentially vulgar to the core and characteristic of “Indo-Gangetic barbarism” as this tradition symbolizes penetration and legitimate sex. Such vulgarities abound in every tradition, but since they are devised by the dominant groups, they are transmitted across generations. We see an anthropomorphized goddess in Bharani; she is a mortal woman having feelings of lust, love, motherly affection, anger, revenge, and pain. A community that views the female body as essentially vulgar and generates its values only in relation to male needs and desires may not be able to apprehend or appreciate the deeper levels of meaning embedded in this festival. The narrow mindedness that does not accept or tolerate anything deviant from normal or traditional values is the major impediment. To conclude this chapter, it is the inequalities, injustices, and violence prevalent within a society that must be considered obscene and vulgar and not sexuality or bodily activities. And if by Bharani, somebody’s moral values are in danger, then they must realize that those values are only skin deep.

Conclusion

Kodungallur Bharani Festival had been analyzed primarily from a historical and religious point of view in the former scholastic studies. However, this ethnography adopts a variety of theoretical stances and undertakes a holistic view of the festival laying more importance on the experience of the performers, placing their transformation at the pivotal point of the study. There is an undeniable connection between performance, ritual, body, space, language, and society. This study is an attempt to deconstruct this network operating in the Kodungallur Bharani Festival and understands how these elements play together in creating the cumulative identity of the performer.

Performance studies is primarily focused on the behavior of human actions, drawing meaning from the points of contact between the performer, performed, and the spectator. The body plays an evident role in performance, being the fundamental site of struggle. Ritual is found to be abounding in performative qualities, as rituals are evidently behaviors that are structured or ordered into a pattern. Turner identifies the liminal quality of the ritual; the body interacts with its space in rituals to attain a transformation. Thus, the 'performing' or 'ritualized' bodies bring about the liminal experience. It is the time and context that decides the ritualistic nature of a performance; it can involve everyday activities to complex orders of existence.

Rituals can be an important element in the psychological growth of its participants; it can offer a space where the repressed desires and dreams can be projected. This fact is underlined by Freud's argument that taboo necessitates the ritual. Rituals had a definite role in the evolution of humans. The first and foremost of it would be the

production of a community through ritual performances forging a community of one's own, after which humans climbed up the ladders of culture. Various studies had been conducted on human ritual dimensions producing theories on sacrifice, violence, fertility rites, social dramas, liminality, and *communitas*, etc. An exhaustive study on these aspects is attempted; analyzing how they tackle, tame, and subjugate the individual behavior and interests to succumb to the interest of a group.

There is a considerable difference in an individual before a performance and after the culmination of a performance. This is particularly evident in rites connected to certain important phases in life, what Arnold Van Gennep (1909) terms as 'rites of passage.' Through the study, we have come to realize that rather than being mere ceremonies of celebrations, they have a grave psychological effect on the person being initiated. These rites allow easy passage from one stage to another, without disturbing the normal structures of the society. Rebellion and intolerance prevailing in the society find expression, in some extreme cases, in anti-social behavior. Rather than using force, rituals allow for accommodation of contrasting moods and feelings, creating a healthier society. This is best viewed in 'rituals of rebellion' identified by Max Gluckman (1954) that exaggerate the social conflicts and by providing a means to stage them, affirms social unity. This can be seen as a social control mechanism that can check the unwanted behavior and keep the balance of society. However, in the hands of the dominant groups, it becomes a tool of normalizing social hierarchies. Indubitably, the Bharani festival can be tagged as a ritual of rebellion; by allowing for a few days of extremities, the moralistic society allows room for disruption and subsequent order. At the end of the day, the moral order of the society prevails; any kind of rebellion if it was there has been died out. In

contrast to the lawless situation of the carnival, Bharani operates within a stringent pattern; the behavior of the participants is controlled by the dominant at every stage. The indispensable role accredited to the royal head points to the nature of Bharani's controlled rebellion; though occasional parody and hate practices against the dominant are displayed.

In rites of passage, the individual is released from the structure into *communitas* only to return to structure revitalized by their experience of *communitas*. What is certain is that no society can function adequately without this dialectic. The postmodern societies, in which rules of law and traditional customs have undergone major upheaval or change, individuals and communities are left in a continually unfixed, destructured, and liminal state of existence, caught between the conventions of customary social practices and the burgeoning social practices of new and radically different social formations. It is in the marginal or liminal phase, between the societal and categorical structures of modern society, that a new creative and collective *communitas*, or unstructured community, emerges and traditional boundaries of class, race, religion, and personality dissolve. Here, liminality becomes not a source of alienation but a communally shared experience as in cultural events such as music concerts or sporting events, wherein everyone who participates shares and revels in the sacredness of community. In another sense, *communitas* is a community without frontiers and is charged with cultural and revolutionary potential; it is through this *communitas*, during which people are removed from the structural order of every day, that the political discourse of liminality becomes most sharply focused.

Kodungallur has been an important place in the history of Kerala; it had witnessed several ups and downs in its evolution. Kodungallur lost its prominence as a port probably due to the natural interferences. It had trade relations with major countries like Greece, Rome, and Srilanka and had been subjected to violent intrusions and colonization by Dutch, France, Portuguese and British powers resulting in a conglomerate culture. It is understood that the past of Kodungallur and the Bhagavathi temple is intrinsically linked, deriving its name and force from the rich heritage of the shrine; now Kodungallur has become synonymous with Bharani festival. There had been many contrasting views about the origin of the temple, the exact time and circumstances of the origin of the temple is still shrouded in mystery. The same uncertainty is evident in the origin myths of the Bharani festival; however, historians assign it to have commenced somewhere around 8 BC, playing a categorical role in the erasure of Buddhism from Kodungallur.

Temples served as important centers of administration in the past, Hindu upper caste groups constantly tried to displace the original inhabitants by securing their groves thereby aligning to the center of the power circuit. To maintain a balance, certain allowances were granted to the lower castes that further allowed them to keep the subaltern under control. The month-long festival evolves through numerous *tantric* rites, enthusiastically participated by people belonging to a different order in the caste hierarchy. Undoubtedly, Bharani supports the economic sphere of Kodungallur apart from the social bonding it creates. The borrowed space is accommodated and becomes a pivotal point of their spiritual growth; also memory of the battlefield is recreated. Bearing a close resemblance to shamans, oracles of the Goddess are central to Bhagavathi rituals. An analysis of the initiation ceremony of the oracles reveals their liminal experience; in

trance, they receive the inner call from the Goddess and ascends to the higher level of communion. *Velichappadu* tradition hints at the massive cultural entreatment that occurred in the past; these non-Aryan groups were later accommodated into the mainstream goddess worship.

An attempt is made to understand how such a contesting tradition as Bharani came into being and how it manages to continue amidst the general discontent of the natives of Kodungallur. The story that it was a festival inaugurated by the Nair community to ward off Buddhist saints from the place might hold true. But curiously enough, even if such an incident had occurred, that would have been buried in the history by the upper castes rather than lending centuries of uncurtailed freedom to lower caste groups. Hence the story must be that of a snatching away, a clever appropriation by the Brahmanical groups, and the compensation of a few days. Whatever be the original tradition, the participants of the festival see it as an occasion of utmost faith and devotion to connect with their mother goddess Bhadrakali. Different narratives are at play in the festival lending color to its popular view.

An analysis of the origin and spread of the Kali Cult and Pathini Cult in Kerala reveal that Kali is originally a goddess of tribal groups but in time adapted into the Great Devi Pantheon. Through a textual analysis of the different versions of Kali-Darika and Kannaki-Kovalan tales prevalent in Kerala, the power relations and the political interventions that have played to create each version of the story is brought out. The tension that has been prevalent between Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism resurfaces through popular narratives. The myth of Darika is unique to Kerala, though it resembles some portions of *Devimahatmyam* which recounts the story of Durga-Mahisasura

combat. The story is believed to have its origin in oral traditions and has been variously interpreted as the symbolic representation of the conflict that occurred between Aryans and Dravidians or Syrians and Assyrians. Bhagavathy is believed to have been a tribal deity in her inception named Kottuvai worshipped by Dravidians; during the Vedic and post-Vedic periods Kali was superseded by Aryan gods and *Darikavadham* is linked to the pre-Vedic period. Therefore, in Kali there is a mixture of Aryan and Dravidian elements, thus forging her dual nature. Kodungallur temple has undergone major power shifts; it has been a site of numerous assimilations and acculturations. Further, the Pathini Cult is centered on the mythical figure Kannaki, which is a dominant form of worship in Srilanka and certain parts of South India. Kannaki was later appropriated into the Kali Cult pointing to the shrine's transgression from Buddhist allegiances to Hinduism. When compared to Kali, there is a relative absence of Kannaki in the folk legends of Kerala; the humane element of the story can be the plausible reason. Also, the heroic nature of the marginalized woman of the tale, Manodari, the wife of demon king Darika is revealed through a textual analysis of the Kali-Darika story. Discerningly, the narratives were seen to be aiding the hidden agendas of dominant groups, and necessary changes were accordingly made retaining the basic form.

Maintaining a separate realm, having a separate goddess, the lower caste communities were independently organizing themselves around a central power. This might have alarmed the elite groups who always wanted the 'other' to be in subjugation. By assimilating their goddess, sovereign groups were proclaiming that even the goddesses of tribes were the protectors of the upper caste groups, and rebelling against them means disgracing the goddess herself. This was a premeditated attempt to bring the

tribal clans and lower castes into the power circuit of elites. Bhadrakali is a virgin menstruating goddess who is seen upon both as motherly and destructive. Her wrath or *ugram* which is believed to originate from her lack of sex and procreation must be satisfied by the devotees by cooling her through songs, offerings, and prayers. Bhadrakali is seen as an anthropomorphic goddess who exhibits the same demands of that of a woman who passes through the experience of a woman like menstruation and sexual desire and who possesses infinite energy which if not controlled can cause a greater imbalance in the natural order. She is referred to as *agnigolam* or 'ball of fire' that can cause much havoc and destruction.

Body and mind have always been treated as separate entities reflected in the notions of Cartesian duality. Feminist studies argue that body dualism is gendered; body with its irrational nature has always been associated with femininity whereas mind being a superior faculty possessing reason and logic was read along with masculinity. The body by acting and sometimes by not acting brings visible changes to the performance. Feminism has suffered a backlash for restricting the choices and advocating heterosexuality and in time it has evolved into a broader realm of gender studies where bodies through performance create their identity. Thus, identity and gender are not fixed categories. This theory gives ample space for homosexuality and other sexually deviant practices that are looked down upon by our society. The body is seen as a site of pleasure and pain and site of radical power shifts. The 'marked' or 'inscribed' body is seen as a door to experience this multifarious world. Feminist theorists argue for binary terrorism of accepted dichotomies of gender that is based upon biological nature. Butler views gender as an 'achievement,' a result of repeated performances, rather than a fixed truth,

and thus ascribes an agency to the performing body. The framework of the festival gives due space for each of the gender groups to interact and share, sexual differences are suspended in the festive time. The distinction between sex and gender forms a major topic of the contest in any discussion of the body; the feminists have always sought to disrupt the idea of gender as a natural extension of one's sex. The body is the microcosm of society; it forms a major link in the interactions of individuals and society. Thus, bodies in action result in the construction of the broader social space, the 'ecstatic' body is seen no longer as the passive instrument of mind but an entity in itself namely 'social person.' Female body bears the brunt of desire and hence is always positioned as impossibility; feminists are constantly striving to make their body 'explicit,' by marking them aim at binary terrorism.

Whatever is unclear is deemed to be polluting by the societies everywhere. Female bodily experiences are viewed with skepticism and disgust and are therefore cataloged as 'pollution' and 'disease.' These pollution and taboo ideas further work towards creating gender separations in society, resulting in the ostracization of women. Sexuality and menstruation are seen as unfavorable phenomena that must be hidden; against these notions, gender studies call for an exaltation of body celebrating its life-giving abilities. In the notion of metaformic consciousness, Judy Grahn goes to the extent of placing menstruation as the root of all rituals and epistemology. These notions of sacred and profane have little value in Bharani, all the restrictions are toppled, and the body is unregretfully celebrated. It challenges the notions of female propriety and pollution; male, female and transgender display similar behaviors, the gender disparities are erased out by the bodies in performance. Further, the Bharani festival appears to be a

‘ritual of power’ where the upper castes assert their superiority through the convenient framework of rituals. Through various rituals, bodies are disciplined to turn them docile as Foucault proposes. Many caste groups interact in the space of Kodungallur Bharani Festival but they all come under the overpowering regal authority now and then. Even when the subaltern exercises power, they become the representatives of the royal power.

The visual technology has considerably changed the festival in recent years. It has been revealed that many layers of space emerge during the festival and each of them ultimately aids the participants in attaining a liminal experience. Through their performance, the body, and space merges to provide a transformation. Space becomes ‘lived space’ where the divinity, humanity, and material world intersect and play. The natives of Kodungallur as well as people who come to watch the festival constitute the ‘accidental audience’ in contrast to the ‘integral audience’ of the performance. They come to watch Bharani, mostly out of curiosity and seeking entertainment. They may not be completely aware of the ritual procedures associated with the festival, but feel content with the fragmentary information they derive. As Bharani comprises of varied performers and practices, the performances are not uniform. Each group has different talents to put forward and thus the experience a spectator gains from the festival is varied and unique. Each performance varies in its passion and intensity; one part may be severely religious whereas in other part, entertainment dominates. Viewed as a whole, Bharani is a spontaneous and versatile festival, each part bustling with different activities, and is constantly in motion; it is amoebic, elongating and spreading out but with the center always fixed at the temple.

The physical body is a representation of the social body. Feminist writers as Luce

Irigaray, Helen Cixous, and Judith Butler are concerned with the 'lived body.' The body is located in its socio-cultural context and the bodies in action are an important key in understanding the space in which it is located. Along with the physical and social side of the body, the relation between the inner and outer world of the individual is also an important element in the production of space. The imagistic city saturates the users and space is seen only as a backdrop of everyday activities. 'Disneyfied' environments simply serve as a spectacle and fail to provide a liminal experience for its viewers as well as participants. A spectacle is an ultimate form of abstraction, where identities, dreams, and memories are contained into fantastic images. We usually view an event visually, whereas the experience it delivers appeals to the whole body. Thus, a gap evidently exists. This can be overcome by 'rhythmanalysis' enabling the viewers to 'see' the performance through a complete bodily experience. Mapping is a process in which the user gathers thematic fragments of the city by 'rhythmanalysis.' The bodies of performers move through the spaces of Kodungallur; temple premises, pilgrim routes, and similar charged spaces, bridge gaps and join pieces, which are projected to construct a complete understanding of the space. In tracings, these spaces as visualized are represented whereas in mappings, the city as experienced is presented. Also, we come across hidden powers operating at the deeper levels in the Kodungallur, in its everyday space. Oracles through the use of their body in space construct a space of power. Though they belong to the lower castes, they have the capacity to exercise control and reconstruct public space through their performing body.

Another major thrust of the study is the question of language, 'abuse,' and censorship in Bharani songs. They are oral, not acceptable in printed formats due to strict censorship.

Nevertheless, they are part of human's indigenous culture and hence must be attended to. Bharani songs are licentious, extremely lewd, and full of sexually loaded terms shocking ethical consciousness. But, these songs reflect humans' need to shout out their suppressed sexuality, humiliations, and pangs. Vulgarized language (curses and abuses) and gestures, self-infliction, and violence are common features of rites and rituals of lower castes groups. This 'hate speech' is a mode through which they give vent to their suppressed anger against the establishment. Seemingly, it is the decided nature of the frames that vulgarize events. It is evident that a detailed description of the Goddess' body is present in *devistrotras* which happen to be acceptable and appropriate. It is the Sanskritization of the language that very cleverly hides the erotic content in these texts and thus they become acceptable to the society. Within the secure framework of high or classic art, these texts are intact and are beyond the reach of any critical analysis. But the *theri* songs sung by the lower castes in their rustic language do not have any such defense and they are open to attack. As seen, a 'binary terrorism' or strategic implosion of binaried distinctions can transgress the space between sacrality and obscenity and appropriate and inappropriate.

Being a native of Kodungallur has given me an extra edge of becoming one among the groups and not being an 'other.' At the same time, a critical distance has always been maintained to not to get lost in its emotional intensity. Linguists are now more into the study of cursing behavior and profanity and a comprehensive study of ribald songs of Bharani footed on these insights can be attempted in the future. Also, the life of oracles and their similarities to the shamans, their psychological and physiological experiences can be a material for potential study. Spatiality is a vast area of study and in my dissertation, I have applied the elemental concepts of space to the Bharani festival.

These arguments can be further extended by bringing in more spatial theories, especially those in relation to architecture and mapping of the space. Such festivals of ‘abuse,’ though rare can be found in many societies across the world. Several of such festivals lie deep, buried in the history. Some might have died out owing to many social pressures and unearthing them would be a rewarding task. Recently, the transgender groups are increasingly making use of the neutralized space of Bharani that is reflected in their growing presence. A more detailed study of their spatial relations can evidently contribute more to the understanding of Bharani.

Kerala is rich in rituals and the rituals of the lower castes had been, as in any other part of the world, is in marked contrast with the rituals of the elite class. While grace, luxury, and subtlety form the key features of elite rituals, the lower class rituals are often ‘primitive’ and pagan, rich in color and throbbing with life. An unmistakable streak of violence runs in through their rituals. Even their gods, we notice, are fiery, loud, and wrathful. Masked by racy tones, rhythm, and beat in their ritual songs they registered their traumas and agonies of oppression. Kodungallur Bharani is no exception and is an interesting site where histories and narratives, cultures and subcultures intersect, interact and complement. Meaning is drawn from a rich storehouse of myths and folklores and the constant interaction of polyphonic voices within these festivals serve to democratize these performances. Here, Bharani is elevated from being merely a festival to the life-force of a generation.

The notion of sacred and profane influences the whole of human activity. Taboo subjects abound in human life; some societies steadfastly adhere to it. Ostensibly, a man’s body and bodily functions are different from a woman’s body. It has been realized

that almost everything connected to female experience is considered taboo; her sexuality, pregnancy, menstruation, etc. This taboo-ness apparently is an invention of the society rather than a naturalistic phenomenon. In the Bharani festival, this notion of pollution is everywhere, in fact, *theendal* is the very purpose of the festival. But it is understood that the pilgrims do not see them as pollutants, for them, the touch is a vitalizing phenomenon, a means of communion with their Goddess. Paralleling the rejuvenation of Goddess after the polluting touch of the pilgrims, the king and the power structures too emerge sanctified. The view of the Goddess as oversexed and her body as dangerous can be identified in the Sanskrit *slokas* depicting her. Possibly, this idea is implanted into the psyches of the subaltern, and by placing the peripheral groups as extremes for placating her lasciviousness; the upper caste groups had tacitly devised both the problem and the solution. In contrast to the popular notion circulated by media that Bharani is defiance staged by the subaltern, Bharani does not get elevated to the level of a rebellion as it occurs in a controlled environment; therein lays the reason of Bharani not serving much to alter the peripheral positions of the performers despite having a longstanding history and tradition.

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Appendix-English Translation of Kodungallur Bharani Songs

(Every couplet is rendered twice and is accompanied by the refrain

“Thaanaroo...thannaroo...

Thana... thaanaroo...thannaroo...”)

Song 1- The Birth of Vavar

Friends, I'm going to tell a story,

I will tell the story of the birth of Vavar.

Oh, Goddess Saraswati! Drooping your eyes with shyness,

Please shed your shyness and reside in my tongue.

The deity installed in the temple,

Is the clit, who is the mighty lion, I bow before you!

In front of the Lord Ganapati's dick and Goddess Saraswati's slit,

I bow with love!

If you find any mistake,

Well versed scholars, please forgive!

The good teacher who taught me this story orally,

I bow before you as well!

Friends, do you know who Vavar is?

He is the son of Lord Siva himself.

To kill Tripurar, Siva,

Took the avatar of Yaksha.

During this time in the land of Mecca Medeena,

She resided as a peacock.

As a single child to her parents,

She grew up as beauty.

During this time, Siva went to Mecca for hunting,
With an erect dick!
When this nomad reached the land,
He saw a house named Kethaka.

Like a shining silver star in the sky,
Like cassia flowered in the land of Kunnam,
A girl like an unfading jasmine flower,
Was seen standing in the door by Rudra.

She wore a blouse and a headscarf,
And a silk cloth draped in the waist.
She wore strings of chains, black colored bangles in hands,
And earrings and rings.

Though short, Pathumma is good looking.
Seeing the full breasts, his legs shivered
Between the legs, dick turned on.
I'm in danger, oh mother! Stood Sankara, lost in thoughts.

Rain splashing in Mecca,
He peeked into a garden.
And Siva in a garden of Mecca,
Stood firmly on the ground.

Two legs took the form of wood,
Fingers became branches,
The dick as big as an elephant trunk,
Entwined in the waist as small twigs.

When the ten branches of the tree flowered,
The whole world is filled with its smell.
To see the unique flower tree,
Goes Pathu, devotees, and friends.

The people coming from Mecca,
Reached under the Siva-tree.
Limitless flowers dancing in the wind,
But no single flower is falling!

They formed a circle under the tree,
But no single flower is falling!
Since no single flower is falling,
Goes the ladies with heavy butts...

Then, the ladies with heavy butts,
Pulled the tree with their clits!
Since no single flower is falling,
Pathu tried to pluck them by jumping in the air.

Her heavy tits began to tremble,
Her navel dip too is visible.
Siva gazed with his third eye,
Saw the whole beauty of the girl.

Since no flower is falling,
Pathu ascended the tree!
Pathu ascended the tree,
And stood on it keeping her legs apart.

While plucking the flowers stretching her legs apart,
The small twig touching her clits!
When the small twig touched her clits,
Pathumma became aroused.

Not only that, but the tree also began to tilt,
And finally became Siva himself!
Siva's dick as big as an elephant trunk,
As fritters stringed on a stick!

Like the butterfly perching in the headless coconut tree!
Struck by lightning in the *Idava* month.
Like a large areca palm in wind,
She wavered at the tip of his dick.

When the dick penetrated the slit, three-fourth,
Her slit flowered as a fishing net.
After the fuck, when the slit is full,
The cream overflowed into the earth.

After the fuck when Pathu left,
The cream fell in drops from her slit.
The ladies following her,
Touched it; some licked it!

Some said honey, some dick's cream,
They began to argue.
Ladies who had fucked before,
Decided that its dick's cream.

After fuck when Pathu reached home,

Her mother asked Pathu,
What happened daughter?
Did you stand wonderstruck, seeing the tree till evening?

It is not a flowering tree... mother, he is my groom, mother!
He ascended my body,
Inserting a dick larger than mahout's stick!
My slit became bottled up.

Hence Siva's sperm,
Got deposited in Pathu's belly.
After ten months,
Pathu gave birth to Vavar.

Let this story stop here, friends!
I need to sing some other time.
Vallachira thattakam, Thrissur,
Vallisery is my region.

Caste Kadupottan, status Ezhuthachan,
Name Sivan, a union employee.
Oh, mother of Kodungallur *kavu*,
Bhadrakali, kindly give your blessings and boons.

Song- 2 (Prayer to Goddess)

Oh, the deity installed in the temple,
I bow before you!

Oh, the Lord Ganapati and Goddess Saraswati,
I bow with love!

Today is the festival of *bharani* star,
In your sufferings, hear!

Oh, mothers and sisters, don't be angry,
This is not our arrogance, but the Bharani festival!

Oh, Sreebhadrakali, mother of Kodungallur,
I prostrate before your legs.

Song- 3 (Prayer to Goddess)

Oh, mother Bhagavathi, ocean of kindness,
The divinity residing in *kavu*.
A crown of gold, in a hair bedecked with flowers,
A face red as a lotus!

A forehead contesting a full moon,
Three eyes and a nose.
Lips as red as a plum!
Beautiful teeth.

Chin and nice throat,
In it glowing necklaces!
Hands with swords,
Bangles in eight hands.

Sparkling gold pots like,
Beautiful breasts!
Body hair with a bluish tint,

Legs and good middle part.

Attire made of elephant skin, anklet in legs,
I bow before those legs.
As Gouri, Bhadra, and Sreemahalakshmi,
In the abode of Sree Kurumba temple.

You always reside, Oh mother, Bhagavathi!
I bow to erase off my sins!
Oh, dear daughter of Lord Siva!
Mother of this world, I bow before you.

Song- 4 (Miscellaneous Songs)

Oh, mother, Bhagavathi, royal mistress!
Please protect me!

I have to sing some ribald songs explicitly!
Otherwise, Devi will be angry.

Oh, policemen, son of bitches!
Are your mouths stuffed with dicks?

If the right of the land is for police,
The right of the house is with dick.

They brought a ladder with thousand sticks
And pushed into Goddess's slit!

When the dick is full,
Isn't she a sinner, who does not let to fuck?

Though M.A graduate, though B.A graduate,
What all slits need is dick itself!

If you have to fuck mother goddess of Kodungallur,
You need a dick as long as a flagstaff!

Since there was no dick as long as a flagstaff,
Borrowed the dick of Bhima!

Do you need raw songs or ribald songs?
I can give Ramayana stories as well.

The mother goddess of Kodungallur is a dirty bitch,
She shows her slit to all!

Why boy! You sit silent?
Stoop and lick my ass!

There are women in Kodungallur who let to fuck,
Just for a coconut half.

The mother goddess of Kodungallur is not so good,
She secretly fucked Lord of Guruvayur!

When a Nair went to fuck,
A dog and Nair fucked together.

That *pooru*, this *pooru*, Trippooru, Melpooru,
Singaporean *pooru*, Chinese *pooru*!

She showed off lemon sized tits,
And deposited four thousand rupees in the bank!

This year no ribald song must be sung,
A telegram came from the Goddess' cunt!

In the eight-inch long cunt of a Brahmin woman,
Of Palakkad, a leech penetrated.

Upon opening the slit of a Christian woman,
It was like a cut Christmas cake!

Indira Gandhi who ruled India,
Did not have a dick to fuck.

As she did not have a dick to fuck,
She borrowed the dick of Reagan!

Though King of Cochin is a kid,
He is good at fucking madams!

If the right of the bus is with the conductor,
The right of the cunt is with cock!

Song- 5 (Prayer to Goddess)

Mother Goddess, your highness!
Please protect me!

What shall I offer as a gift to you who has,

Nurtured me with your breast milk?

How am I to offer this (rice) stinking with stones,
Charcoal and fiber?

My husband! Drink up the gruel, as we have to
Go on a journey.

How am I to drink this gruel stinking of stones,
Charcoal and fiber?

Sing some obscene songs,
If not, Devi will be angry.

We have to cross the canal in the plantain farm,
Stream and the Bharani pond.

However, we have not brought the,
Ritual sword for you, mother!

O Goddess, your highness,
Please look after us!

Song- 6 (Bharani Festival)

In the dawn, accompanied by music,
We walked to the shores of the lake.
While ascending the skiff sword is not taken,
On reaching the shores, the sword is taken.

When the sword is taken, it follows frenzy,

Then frantically runs to see the temple.
 The Goddess comes before in frenzy,
 People move toward banyan mounts.

They take the swords from them,
 And keep it in the mount's corner.
 They tell some stories,
 And stays taking refreshments.

At 3 p.m they leave,
 To see the Lord of Thiruvanchikulam.
 One and a half ghee lamps, garland and pudding,
 Were offered and money in the box.

Together people come to watch the lamps,
 The next day is *Kaavutheendal*.
 In the dusk accompanied by music,
 Walks to the seashore.

Thus, to sing songs here,
 Plenty of louts are here.
 Hearing the ribald songs, women folk chuckled,
 Clapped their hands in rhythm.

The northern groups came with sticks,
 Stood on the banyan mount in line.
 By the order of Kochi King,
Kaavutheendal is decided.

Chief YogimooPan touches first,
 Followed by chief KunjikozhimooPan.

Along with them, northern groups and crowd,
Touches the temple with noise.

Some policemen come,
And arrange the people on four sides.
If seen during the time of *Kaavutheendal*,
Even Lord of Death too would be scared!

The Makaravilakku festival of this true form,
It is worthy to be seen by the world.
Nine huge elephants,
Are brought from the house of Manakkal.

The procession starts from Tiruvanchikulam temple,
It is impossible to describe it.
Hearing the percussion instruments,
Even the white elephants would waive the ears.

Song -7 (Goddess Speaks to Devotees)

Oh, mother to the world, I stoop before you!
Oh, Sankari, Sambavi, Chandrachooda mother!
Remove my difficulties, ancestral mother!
Oh, Dakshayani Devi, protect me!

Protector of trinities,
Mother to the world, Saraswati, Bharathi!
Ruler of the world, the first protector,
Born from the third eye of Siva.

On the first day of Makara month,

The Thaalapoli festival must be commenced.
Eleven huge elephants must be present,
Flags must be stringed.

The royal chief must accompany in the front,
To sing the stories.
One lamp must be held in the front,
With four beautiful girls.

Flags and ornaments must be held in the front,
The percussion must be played.
For five days the festival goes on,
Circumambulate those days.

On the fifth day, *guruti* is performed,
As Parvati performed it.
There are many other needs as well,
You will only flourish.

On the Meena month,
There is a bharani star.
To the one who prays to me during this period,
I will always be there as a guardian.

During Kumbha *bharani*, *vrata* must be observed,
Smearing yellow paste.
I make the orders now,
The folks must believe me.

All must follow my words,
Then I will consider them as my children.

The town of people going to Bharani,
Will flourish!

Song-8 (The Birth of Vedavyasa)

Oh, bird! Residing in the five arrows of Lord of Love,
Shed your shyness and sit by my side.
Sugar, milk, tender coconut water, sugarcane, and honey,
You can have as you like.

After your hunger and thirst subsides,
Soon tell me a story, oh parrot!
Reminiscing the five love arrows,
It uttered unhesitatingly.

To make the rendition of this poet nice,
I bow before the lord with the color of milk-ocean!
Uparicharan went for hunting in the past,
You hear the story of that journey!

He made the women whom he fucks
Stay back at home.
He heard the noise of the drone,
In search of honey.

Seeing the elephants and donkeys fucking,
The mighty King's dick turned on.
It erected, and became heavy and large,
The dick peeled off.

While thinking of the beautiful wife,
Standing in memory of the cunt,
In the panties of the lovely king,
The dick came with liters of cream.

This cream that came without fucking,
Was wrapped in a teak leaf,
And looking at the king of birds,
The king ordered hastily!

You take this cream to my wife,
Pull her legs apart, and force it to the cunt!
Thus, he ordered,
Hastily the bird took it and fled.

On the way, it collided with another bird,
And fell off into river Kalindhi.
When the cream of man fell on the water,
The fish slowly gulped it.

A brave fisherman cast the net,
And by fate caught this fish!
Upon cutting the caught fish,
Saw two children in it!

The child with dick,
Was presented to the king.
He became the king of fishes, Virata
I know this for sure.

The cunt child was named Kali,

The servant took her with the cunt and brought her up.
To ferry the boat in Kalindi,
He assigned Kali.

The news that Kali is ferrying in Kalindi,
Was heard by saint Paraswaran.
When there were a few hours for dawn to break,
The saint reached the shores of Kalindi.

The moment he saw Kali,
The dick in his panties came!
The dick devoid of prey till now felt a spurt in desire,
And therefore it came!

Then the saint told Kali,
To bring the boat instantly.
Till now my dick was fine,
Till I reached this place.

It came, desired and now lies tired,
You grope and find if it is dead.
Thinking the saint was speaking in earnest,
She groped and the dick was startled!

It was startled not twice, thrice but more than
Eight to ten times!
We have to go with this dick,
And we need a boat suited for this.

You soon prepare the boat,
We have to go to the other side!

When the boat was parked,
She stooped and touched the saint's feet.

Before other people reach, the saint,
Ascended the boat and told her.
You soon row the boat,
I know how to play cards!

The crooked saint's intentions are not so sane!
When the boat sailed a few distances, his dick bent like a bow!
It rose, it came, and it fell,
I am not feeling well!

The dick is screaming like an arrow,
The saint sat in hesitation.
When the boat reached the mid of river,
The old saint wanted to fuck!

Leaving coyness he said,
This to the beautiful Kali.
Oh, girl, I want to fuck you!
Leave your coyness aside and come to me.

He peeped through her legs,
Saw the cunt and came.
The saint about a thousand years old,
Become happy seeing the virgin cunt.

Seeing the cunt, a happy saint,
Kissed the cunt!
I too want to fuck, Oh saint!

But you hear me first!

Why you old man is displaying such atrocity?

Why your dick is coming in this old age?

Will the saints to young,

Display such erect dicks?

You have to learn by fucking the old,

You idiot virgin cunt!

Do you like the smell of fish,

Owing to the birth from a fish?

Is it right for the saints,

To lust upon a virgin girl?

This slit is unpenetrated,

Your cock will be ruined!

For a dick as this to screw,

A slit as large a ship is needed!

Oh, saint! Having devotion,

Please keep your dick in the panties!

By hearing this,

The saint retorted again.

You have to learn by fucking the old,

You idiot virgin cunt!

Even it stinks, no matter, after all, it is a cunt!

You remove your dress, I want to see the cunt.

Realizing the saint would not budge,

She went to him.

Seeing the lust of the saint,
Hastily removed the dress from cunt.
Thus Kali removed the dress, and presented,
Him with the slit hastily.

To screw the ten-year-old Kali,
The saint thousand years old!
To have gained a cunt that haven't grown bush,
Isn't it the luck of the one with the grey bush?

Happy by seeing the cunt,
He kissed the cunt.
The saint fingered the cunt,
Gathered the moss from cunt!

The saint gathered moss from the cunt,
And smelled it with the nose!
After feeling the smell with the nose,
He tasted it with the tongue!

When he felt an uneasy sensation,
He decided to remove it and fuck.
The saint then removed the fishy smell,
And gave the cunt the fragrance of musk.

Parasharan made her lie on her back,
He ascended her and inserted dick into the slit.
To have gained a cunt that hasn't grown bush!
Isn't it the luck of the one with the grey bush?

The saint who knows three worlds,
Used the force of three worlds and fucked.
When the boat scaled in waves,
The dick reached with ease!

When the dick was forced,
Kali pushed back embracing.
Saint pushed, cunt pulled!
It burnt and cunt swelled!

The desire burned,
The cunt splashed, the dick is pained!
When they fucked in the middle of the sea,
The land was shrouded in mist.

As Parasharan created mist on that day,
The people who fucked on that day were limitless.
After the routine fucking,
People were fast asleep.

As there was snow in the dawn,
The dick of all men came!
As all were resting after a fuck,
In the country, nobody swept the courtyard!

The women who don't have their men nearby,
Did something in haste.
Inserted bottles in the cunt!
Thus playfully spent the night.

Such things occurred to all,

As the saint came to fuck.
After the tedious work done to the virgin cunt,
It sparked like amber!

When the cream splashed into the cunt in gushes,
Kali giggled!
After the saint is done fucking,
Vedavyasa took birth!

Oh, Vedavyasa! Who took birth like this,
I bow before you to relieve my sins!
May the desire to fuck be always alive!
Grant me *moksha* upon death!