Nimisha. K. Jayan "Gender, Space and Performance: A Study of the Visual Narratives of Kodungallur Bharani Festival." Thesis. Research & Post Graduate Department of English, St. Thomas' College (Autonomous), Thrissur, University of Calicut, 2020.

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, Kavoor, 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 1 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
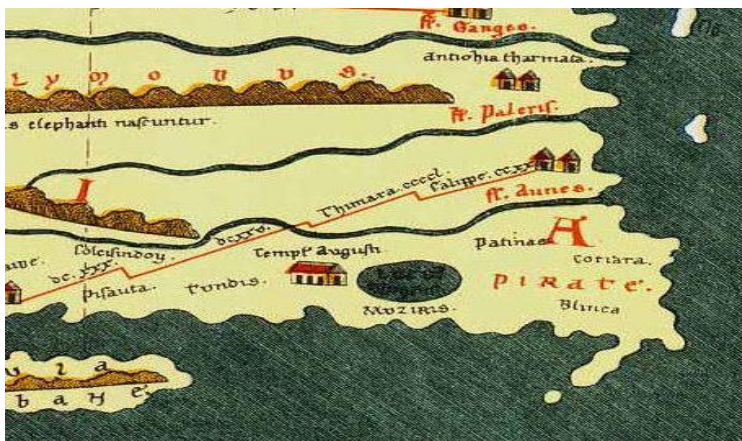
hinting at its historical value.

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 smoothened 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 Vasoorimala, etc.

The icon of Vasoorimala deserves a special mentioning. It is in front of her icon that the ritual *Guruti* is carried through. Vasoorimala 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 where 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.

Chelnat 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 point 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 laminous and obstruse 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 Thattan[3] (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 Thamburan[4] 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, *Kodikayaral* ends. This is an important

ceremony initiating the month-long festival; the first day marks the mythological battle

between Kali and Darika; after *Kodikayaral* 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 *Kodikayaral*, 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 battlefront 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 Kodiyuyarthal* (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 Vallon[9] 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; initiant 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 disrupture 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 initiant. The initiant 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 initiant. 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 initiant has to observe severe *vrata* for months. In the initiation ceremony, the chief hands over his sword to the initiant 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 songs[20] (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 quavering 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 battlefront. *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:

$Aa.B^1C\uparrow F^1F^9G^2H^1I^1K\downarrow$

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 (η¹): Kartyayani/Kali disguises as Brahmin woman and persuades Manodari to reveal *mantra*
5. Complicity (θ): Manodari submits to her deception
6. Villainy A^{14}: 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: $βγζη^1θA^{14}$ a.DF¹H¹J.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, reinstitution 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
1st version of *Darikavadham*	Darika, Narada, Siva, Bhadrakali, Vethala, Manodhari, Kartyayani (Brahmin lady), Ganapathi, Messenger
2nd version of *Darikavadham*	Brahma, Darika, Siva, Bhadrakali, Kartyayani (Brahmin lady), Manodari, Gantakarnan
3rd version of *Darikavadham*	Danavathi, Pannivakthan, Darika, Bhadrakali, Vishnu, Narada, Vethala, Karthyayani (Brahmin lady), Manodhari
4th version of *Darikavadham*	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, Tiyyattu, 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*

Mahatyam 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

battlefront. 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 Jainas. 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 (↑.): Kannaki leaves home and reaches the palace
7. Struggle (H.): King knows the truth, dies; Queen dies
8. Victory, killed without a preliminary fight (I^5): 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 (↓): They both ascend to the sky

The scheme of this story can be noted as:

B.η. θ.A.^{14} a.↑.H.I^{5}K.^{9}↓

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

Story	Main Characters
1st Version	Kannaki (Hindu), Kovalan (Hindu), Madhavi, Manimegalai, Kavunthi, King Nedumchezhiyan and his Queen, King's jeweler, Chera King Senguttuvan, Indra, Kamadeva, Madari
2nd 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
3rd 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 Unnichekkan 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 Avakashikalethi.*" *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 *Trichandanachaarthu* 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. "*Trichandanachaarthu 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 Avakashikalethi.*" *Mathrubhumi*

[Thrissur], 08 Apr. 2019, pp. 04.

15. *Variyari* grain is offered to the Goddess by the representative of Keezhepattu
    House from Kuranjiyur of Guruvayur. The pudding is made out of 12 *idangazhi*
    (measuring vessel) *variyari* ("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. "*Moonnu Divasangalilayi Randu Laksham*

Perkku Annadanam." *Mathrubhumi* [Thrissur], 02 Apr. 2019, pp.