

A Case Study on Folklore and Culture of Kerala

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Abstract

The folk culture deals with the study of the customs, manners, traditions, beliefs, values, and goals of a social group. It sheds valuable information on the various facets of human life including the influence of surroundings, the system of amusements, recreations, fairs and festivals, rituals, mannerism, customs, food and drinks, expression of sorrows and pleasures, the social structure and the pattern of village community, experience of peasants, and other workers and adventurous exploits of their warrior chieftains. The oral traditions, ballads, stories, legends, customs, usages and rituals of the common people constitute the source material for the researchers on folk culture (Lee and Dorson, 1961). It represents the spontaneous manifestation of original and inherent creative powers of the village folk. It is expression of the undiluted feelings and sentiments of the common people. Similarly it furnishes precious information about the status of men and women, religious beliefs, ceremonies, social taboos, modes of recreation, impact of industrialisation, agricultural mechanization of the rural society and the ceremonies connected with birth, marriage and death. The present study is largely based on the oral sources collected through field investigations.

Keywords: Folklore, Traditions, Rituals, Local History

Introduction

Folklore under various names has been with us ever since man began to take an objective view on their culture (Frykman and Orvar Lofgren, 2008, p.54). The folk culture represents some of the purest and sublime thoughts that controlled and regulated the human relations from time immemorial (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983). The folk culture found its manifestation through a number of devices like festivals like Pongal, Onam, Vishu, Tiruvathira, Maargamkali, entrainments like kuthu, therukuthu, villupattu,

kummipattu, pallupattu, purapattu, kavadiattam, puraviattam, onakkali, kolkkali, vattakkali, Ochirakkali, velakkali, karakattam and other dance forms, religious and ritualistic plays like Teyyam, Mudi yettu, Padayani, Tiiyaattu, Paana, Kaniyar Kali, Kaaliyaattam etc folk songs like Kummi, Krishapattu, Tira, Poorakali, Thottampattu, Vadakkanpattu, Thekkanpattu, Mappilapattu, Karakkam, Kavadi and martial exercises, folk tales, folk riddles, proverbs and legends.

Pongal is a folk festival celebrated by the Tamils all over the world. This festival was originally celebrated by the agrarian classes and was called Ulavar Thiruvila, the ploughers' festival. It is celebrated in the beginning of the Tamil month Thai/January every year. It is lasted for three days. It is believed that the Tamil month Thai/January is very auspicious and noted for its fortunes. There is a popular saying that "*Thai Pirantal Valipirakkum*", when the month of Thai is born the way for hope will also come. The saying is practically true because the Thai is the harvest season and the farmer's granary would be filled with grain. Pongal is an occasion for joy and revelry of the common people. The ordinary agrarian folk purchase new mud pots called Pongal *panai* for fresh cooking. But the wealthy people purchased new silver and bronze vessels. The houses have to be decorated and white washed on the occasion. The housewives decorate the portico of their houses with *kolam*. The members of the family take bath before sunrise and new dresses which specially purchased for the purpose. They made an oven in front of their respective porticos and smeared the place with cow dung mixed with water. The cooking pot is decorated with saffron. Then the pot is placed on the oven and milk is ceremoniously poured in it. Then fire is lit by the senior female member. When the milk boils up a male member of the family puts the fresh rice which they gathered through the latest harvest. While the rice boils up jaggery, cardamom, cash nut etc are added to increase the taste. The cooked rice is called sakkarai pongal. When it is getting ready they shout pongalo pongal, hail pongal.

Thereafter they proceed to the offering ceremony. Fragrant materials like benzoin are to be burnt. A little portion of the sakkarai pongal is taken out from the pot and placed in three banana leaves along with other things like sugarcane, pumpkin, turmeric and beans. A portion of the cooked food is offered to Surya, the Sun God and to Varuna, the God of Monsoon. There is no special mantras are chanted at the time of the offering (Iyyer, 1990, p.19).

Pongal is a time for the parents of married girls to give gifts including new silver and bronze vessels, rice, fruits, jaggery, cardamom and other things including money. In any case the parents of married girls fail to give such gifts it would lead to misunderstanding and discontent with the family of their son in law. Pongal festival is greeted by the children with great joy and happiness. They wear new dresses and eat sugar cane as a mark of the sweetness of the Pongal is a folk festival. They used to the houses of their friends and convey Pongal greetings called Pongal valthukkal.

The day following the Thai Pongal is known as is known as Mattupongal. On that day the cattle's are washed and fed sumptuously. They are given the cooked food and sugar cane as a gesture of veneration and respect. Special attention is given for the decoration of the cattles. The horns are sharpened and painted beautifully. With red saffron they decorated the body of the cattles. Bells and clothes are tied on their necks. The bullocks are also exempted from doing work to their masters on that day. Instead they are garlanded and taken to procession through the villages. In the afternoon they undertook entertainments like jallikattu and manchuverattu. This day is noted for the bull fight which is popularly known as jalliket. Jalliket is a highly adventurous exploit to exhibit the courage and braveness of the agrarian communities. Considering the nature of its risk and communal calamities the governments have put forward certain rules and regulations to check its display.

Pottan Theyyan had its origin in Pulingom Sankaranarayana temple, Kannur. lupadam Sangham Kali is a temple art form originated in Thrikkariyur Siva temple, Kothamangalam Ernakulam. Yakshagana, an artistic form had its origin during Circa 1700 A.D. by Parthysubha one of the famous temple servants of Shedikkav Sankaranarayana temple, Kumbala. He formulated Yakshagana, and later it developed into an independent art form like Kathakali. Siva is worshipped in many Sankaranarayana temples. Vishnu Shrines are venerated there in many temples along with Sastha or Ayyappa. In some Sankaranarayana temples, Ayyappa is worshipped as Dharma Sastha and has separate Sreekovil, at Pulingom, Kannur and at Thiruarachanakunnu, Malappuram. Koliyoor Theyyam is also performed during festivals. The Theyyams performed here are Durgalaya, Mantraya, Doomavati, Peeli Chamundi, Kurathi and Raktswari. In Koliyoor temple the Mandala Puja is conducted from Samkramam day of Vrschikam to 18th of the Dhanu. The special offering of the temple is thulabhara seva. In Shiriya temple the other deities are

Sastha, Naga, Veerabhadran, Devi. The Theyyams performed here are Gulikan, Chirambilathaya, Kurathi. In Shiriya temple the Sivarathri and next day are observed as festival days. In Karkkula temple Ganesh, Durga, Vishnu and Sastha, Bhadrakali are worshipped along with Sankaranarayana. Karkkula temple, the Akshaya thrithiya is observed as a festival day. In Shedikkav the minor deities worshipped are Rakeswari, Gulika, Naga, Ganesh and Sastha. Theyyam is performed during festivals are Rakeswari, Gulikan and Nagar Panchami. In Shedikkav temple one day festival is conducted on Sivarathri day. Dhoomavati Theyyam was performed here. Desamangalam Sankaranarayana temple the other deities worshipped are Kuttichathan, a variant of Siva, Panchaurili daivam, Naga, Chamundi, Dhoomavati, Rakeswari, Gulikan etc. In Desamangalam temple the Makarasamkramana festival is conducted. Kundikana temple, the sub deity is Annapoornesvari. Theyyams performed in this temple are Dhoomavati, Raja daiva, Rakeswari. During Medam Thiruvathira festival is observed in Kundikana Mana temple. In Neerchal temple, one day is observed as festival day. Naiker and Viswakarma communities have some special rights over the temple during festival days. In Ikkeri temple, Deepavali pujas are observed. In Mudurankai temple the sub deities venerated are Shastha, Ganesh, Durga and Naga. Dhoomavati idol is placed beyond the temple wall. In Madurankai temple, the Prathishta festival is observed on two days (usually in March).

In the Kasargod district there is presence of Theyyam performed by the lower sections of society. Most of these Theyyams performed here shows that though the lower sections of the Hindus were given some rights during festive occasions to venerate and to perform before their original folk deities. This Theyyattams may perhaps, exhibited by the so called avarnas as a protests and agonies against caste hierarchy and caste barriers. Most of the minor deities worshipped are of a lower order gods or village totem gods and goddesses. Later appropriation, amalgamation and assimilation of the lower culture by the higher culture can be viewed from this study.

In Kannur, the Ramanthali temple, the other deities venerated are Bhutatharaeeshwaran, and Dharma Sastha. Here the Bhuthathareeswaran Theyyam is performed as Velutha bhutham and considered as Siva Gana. In Kannur district, the

Ramanthali temple Erppu festival is celebrated. It is mentioned as Athirippu Utsavam observed for three days from Kumbam. Now the festival days are shortened for two days. Temple foundation day or Pratishta festival is observed from Meenam 17 to 22. Most important offering of the temple is chathu shatham, which is meant for the childless couples. This offering is very special and many devotees came here for receiving chathu shatham offerings.

In Sree Sala temple, Kozhikode seven days festival is observed. Cattle market and fares are famous. The Ezhavas have the right to Murikadathi Kettal (cattle entering ceremony and tender coconut was also served by Thiyyas (Ezhavas) during the festival season. Tinur temple the sub deities are Ganesh, Dakshinamurthi, Sastha. Tinur temple idol installation day is observed as Pratishta festival day. In Malappuram district, the Elanji temple the sub deities are Siva, Ganesh, Dakshinamurthi. Ganapathy is termed as (Okkathil Ganapathi) Bala Ganesh. Thiruarachana Kunnu temple the other deities are Sastha, and Devi separate Shrine are here. Kulanelur temple, the sub shrines dedicated are for Ganesh and Dakshinamurthy.

At the Trikangot temple in Palakkad the sub deities are Naga, Ayyappa, Sreekrishna, and Bhoothathan etc. In Panamanna temple the other deities are Ganesh, Sastha, Bhagavathy and Naga, In Panamanna temple the festival commenced from Thirvonam astericism in Kumbham and lasts for 10 days. Important ritual observed during festival day is 'Kalamezhuthu Pattum' dedicated to Bhagavati. Makaram month's puyam astericism is observed as flagstaff day. While the other important auspicious days are Vishu in Medam, Vaishakha festival, Akshayatriya, and lot of festivals and rituals are now observed in this temple.

In Palakkad district the Tirunelli temple have Ganesh as the only sub deity. In Tirunelli temple the festival is commenced from Uthram 1 to 8 days. Mathur temple Siva is venerated as the only sub deity. In Mathur temple the festival is almost like Kalpathy car festival. Festival day os commenced on Thulam full moon day and the free food was offered. The Siva linga conceptualized as Sankaranarayana is covered with heap of rice and special pujas are conducted. Around 30 kg of rice is being cooked and other sweets are

also made on this occasion. Around six types of libation is also performed. Thiruvathira, festival is also celebrated here on Uthram astericism of Meenam. Here the Tamil Brahmins had a different culture, which have been assimilated with the culture of Palaghat. In Palaghat region the festivals of some temples are quite interesting and the cultural diversity is visible even in the festivals like the car festival of Mathur. Elamandam temple the six days festival commenced on puyam and ended in holy bath (arattu). Elamandam temple. The temple has sub deities like Ganesh, Sastha, Hanuman, Muruga, Naga, MahaVishnu, Sreedevi and Bhudevi. In Karamkod temple the sub deities are Vishnu, Ganesh, Ayyappa and Durga. In Karamkod temple Sivarathri is celebrated as a festival day.

Analyzing the Malabar temples most of these minor and sub deities of Sankaranarayana are of high profile gods of Hindu pantheon. It shows the drastic change in the geographical area, where the Malabar region was earlier under the hegemony of Brahmins and also subjected to many raids from Hyder Ali and Tippu Sultan, which had its impact on the temples and the deities. Most of these temples are subjected to destruction during this period.

Analysing the Cochin region especially in Thrissur district, in the Vatakkunathan temple complex, the Siva and Vishnu have equal importance with Sankaranarayana. The minor deities worshipped here are Ganesh, Sree Rama, Nandi, Kali, Parasurama, Simhodaran, Ganges, Sastha, Vyasa, Sashala Kracohna, Vrishabhadeva, Kasiviswanatha, Chidambaranathan, Sethunathan, Urkathamma, Kudalmanikyaswami, Kodungallur Bhagavati, Vasuki Sayana, Nataraja, Vettakorumakan, etc. This Temple Complex is also the complex of religious beliefs and amalgamation of various cults. So the most important thing is that the temple passed through different epochs under various Kingdoms and enjoyed patronship as state temple as well as the temple under the siege of Tippu Sultan. This temple might have earlier relationship with Jainism as it is evidenced from the Rishabadeva, the first Thirthankara of Jains but in Vadakkunathan temple this deity is worshipped as Nandi.

In Vengidang Sankaranarayana temple the other deities are Vyasa, Saraswathi, Ayyappan, and Bhagavaty. Thalikulangara temple is bestowed with sub shrines of

Dakshinamurthy, Siva, Nanadurga, Sastha, Nagaraja, Nagayakshi, Rakshass and Bhagavathy. Sree Karur temple the sub shrines is dedicated to Ganesh alone. Analyzing later Ezhava owned Sankaranarayana Shrines like Panchavadi, the sub shrines are Devi, Ganesh, Dambathi Rakshasu, Sastha, Gopala Das, Sree Narayana Guru, Ayyapa. Travancore

Travancore region is also bestowed with the presence of Sankaranarayana shrines especially in Ernakulam district, the famous Thirunayathod temple the sub shrines found are Saraswathi, Nandi Ganesh, and Dakshinamurthi. In Thirunayathod temple, the Makarasamkramanam day is the commencement day of temple festival and observed for 10 days and ended with an *arattu* (holy dip). In Anicad the two temples belonged to Ezhavas and Nairs. The Muzhiyil temple is owned by the Ezhavas and the Anicad Sankaranarayana temple remained the Nairs. In these two temples the festivals are commenced on the same day and their *arattu* (holy dip) ponds are situated nearer to the temples. These temples are around 4 kms distance. Chereanallur temple sub shrines are dedicated to Siva, Vishnu, Dhanuvanthramurthy Subramaniya and Devi. In Palluruthi temple the sub shrines are Durga, Balabadrana, Sastha, Ganapathi, Nagaraja, and Brahmarakshasu.

In Kottayam district, Thottakkadu temple the sub deities are Ganesh, Sastha, Durga and Bhadra. Alakkukadavu temple has Ganesh, Sree Narayana Guru, Brahmarakshas, Nagaraja, Nagayakshi, and Vadayakshii as sub deities. Karur Kovil Parambu in Alappuha district, the sub shrines are dedicated to Parashakti Devi, Ganesh, Mutharamma, Kottakali, Nagar, and Pechi Amman. Karur kovil Parambu temple the festival day brings on Meenam and lasting for 10 days. In Karumadi Kamapurathu temple, the sub shrines are for Sastha, Naga idol (three tiers), Yakshi or Bhagavati, Brahmarakshasu, Siva, Parvathi, Ganesh, Valli, MahaVishnu and along with ghosts of Vaikkathu Padmanabha Pillai, Kunjikutti Sarvadyakar, and Govinda Pillai. A broken Buddha idol is found in the outskirts behind the temple nearly 50 mts away along the lake sides. In Karumadi temple, the festival day commenced from Chathayam star in Makaram and ended on Thiruvonam, the temple foundation day. It was observed that the central shrine base has an inscription, reveals that the Sreekovil was constructed by Putukkottattu Iravi Iraman and Kotai Iravi. M.G.S.

Narayanan treated that this inscription was one of the few records to refer the name of the person who the constructed the shrine.

In Kollam district the Ayathil temple sub shrines is dedicated to Naga and a large Serpent grove is also there of around 1.5 acres. In Ayathil temple the festival was observed on Uthram star before 100 years. At present the festival is fixed on another date. Kalkulam temple the sub shrines are dedicated to Ganesh, Sastha, Durga, Indillayappa, and Naga. Kalkulam temple the Thiruvathira star is observed in Kumbahm as festival day. In Mangad temple Naga Shrine is there. Thayyil temple the Sub deities are Sastha, Devi, Mahalakshmi, and Ganesh. In Thiruvananthapuram the Thathamala temple the sub deities are Ganesh, Sastha, Durga, and Naga. In Thathamala temple, two festival days are observed one in Utrattathi star of Edavam and Chingam Athrassery temple, the festival is on Ashtami Rohini. The temples have their own peculiar festivals and rites and rituals. Each one is different in its nature depending upon the cultural diversity and geography. The local traditions have their own role in maintenance of temple festivals and rites.

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