

# **Comparison of divine and theatrical elements in Theyyam and KuthuRatheeb**

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## **Introduction and Abstract**

Kuthu Ratheeb is a ritual performance which stems from Sufi culture and it is the huge and blend of Shiite Muslim and Sufi culture. Basically, Kerala's Kuthu Ratheeb and its origin came from Kondotty, Malapuram district, Kerala, India. Kuthu Ratheeb is practicing by Shiite people in Kerala. Though, there are some section of people in Kerala located in Ponani, they are also practicing Kuthu Ratheeb but they are the followers of Sunni religious section. Kuthu Ratheeb is performed at ritual festivals, mosques and homes. At homes they are done to escape from incurable diseases and to fulfil the aspirations of the people. This ritual performance is taking place in Iraq by maintaining commemoration of Husain's death in Karbala war, In Kerala this ritual performance is used to propagate religious ideologies.

The word "Kuthu Ratheeb" is a mixed form of Arabic verbal noun 'Ratheeb' (which means something done repeatedly) and Malayalam verb 'Kuthuka' which means to stab or to use any weapon upon someone's body. Kuthu Ratheeb is a performance among the Muslims of Kerala. This ritual performance originated in the Middle East, but later came to Kerala and became an accepted form encompassing several local customs and traditions. These are inseparable, unified and embodied in the Islam of the locals. Sufis focuses more on the religious spirituality. Sufis is constantly being tested by the almighty. They create their own rules by taking their paths. Sufis are in direct communion with God. Rifayi Ratheeb or KuthuRatheeb was related with Iran (Bhathahiya) born Shaik Sulthanul Arifeen Al Syed Ahmed Al Kabeer Hussanur Rifayi. This performance was popular amongst Sunni Muslims of Iran as Rifayi Ratheeb and in Kerala as 'KuthuRatheeb'.

## **Comparison of divine and theatrical elements in Theyyam and KuthuRatheeb:**

Similarities in the KuthuRatheeb ritual of Mappila community and Theyyam in northern Kerala where states of trance, pain and violence are considered : Theyyam is a ritual presentation that is seen in Kerala, especially in northern parts. The ritual presentation of Theyyam can be seen in the ritual presentations and observances of KuthuRatheeb. Spiritual purity, penance and belief come under these observances. When feudal system was existing in Kerala, work was divided based on caste. It is during that time that Theyyam and KuthuRatheeb started taking roots. So that the palpitations of society's belief could be seen in KuthuRatheeb and Theyyam. These rituals (KuthuRatheeb and Theyyam) are transferred from person to person. Only nominal changes had happened in KuthuRatheeb and Theyyam with the changes in time, land and culture. The ancient man who acquired dance and singing had in the first place did relate each other dance and singing. The presence of Baiths which comes as songs of KuthuRatheeb makes the performative presentation using body very convenient. In these times, the memory of the forefathers arises in the spectators. Even though the presentation is seen with fear, spectators start to worship and respect the forefathers. While singing praise songs about a person whom the spectators respect and performance is done by injuring the body, the performers are seen as people who are close to the forefathers (great beings). Theyyattam is a rare ritual which integrates the symbol of Kerala's cultural history such as sacred grove, tree worshipping, forefather obsequies, deity worshipping, mother goddesses and weapon obsequies. In MappilaTheyyam forms and Theyyam forms, it is the transference to god forms to which praying is done is what is happening. Even though Theyyam and KuthuRatheeb are existing now in democratic system, the presentation of KuthuRatheeb based on belief has diminished. The presentation of Mappila Art did not diminish in the way in which the presentation of KuthuRatheeb has diminished. Theyyam and KuthuRatheeb which are the worshipping systems of layman are simpler than idol worship. The performers are seen in Theyyam as gods which move and converse. Theyyam is an art form that implicates the idea of deity completely in man. The presence of super humanness in man is believed as God's presence and is presented in the art form of KuthuRatheeb. The performers of Theyyam and the performers of

KuthuRatheeb come from working class. When Theyyam becomes God, that is the only time that the performer is respected and blessing are sought. But there are Shaiks above the KuthuRatheeb performers. It is only when these Shaiks give permission and power to the performers that KuthuRatheeb performers start to perform super humanness. Basically, Theyyam is an art form of sacred groves. Before Aryan invasion, the epicentre of Kerala's rural ritual arts (Theyyam) was sacred groves. In the life of extraordinary forefathers and ancestors, by sharing the light of extra-terrestrial power is how the person who assumes the form is given the position of God. Theyyam and KuthuRatheeb could be seen as art mediums for the devotees to interact with the formless and imperceptible God. Those who are from special communities, such as lower castes of Vannan, Malayan, Anjoottan, Munnoottan, Pulayan etc., are the ones who present Theyyam. The holistic goodness and well-being of the society is the aim of Theyyam. Our sacred groves were the neural centres of the society and sources of culture. When the desolation inside the sacred groves has started to grow in the minds of humans as a fearful beauty of sorcery, Theyyam is also an art emotion of the commune that has originated as a cultural defence against it. Considering man as God or attributing God in humans is the mode of Theyyam. All the Mappilas who come in the myth of MappilaTheyyam are considered as gods in Theyyam culture. After a disciplined penance do the Theyyam performers play Theyyam. Theyyam is a ritual presented in northern Malabar from Vadakara to Kasaragod's frontier of Karnataka. Each Theyyam, for ages is presented by each section. Specific communities such as Vannan, Malayan, Anjoottan, Munnoottan, Pulayan, Panan, Koppalan, Velan, Kalanadi, Perumannan etc. Perform Theyyam. MappilaTheyyam is also presented by these sections. In northern Malabar, MappilaTheyyam is presented in the area of Payyannor. MappilaTheyyam is not performed by people of Mappila community. The deity form of gods who are Mappila characters is presented in MappilaTheyyam. In all the sacred groves and other places in northern Malabar, each community has got the right to perform Theyyam. In a single sacred grove itself, there are Theyyam which are presented by more than one community. Rituals that have divine elements are KuthuRatheeb and Theyyam. In Theyyam forms, it is for fire forms do severe penance is observed. The states of trance, violence and pain in the Mappila ritual of KuthuRatheeb are closely related to the Theyyam of fire forms. The one who present Thee Chamundi which is known as Ottakkolam (single form) must take penance for twenty-one days. Penance should be very hard. Into the fire heap known as melari, the Thee Chamundi falls one hundred and one times. The skill of falling into the fire is how the performer's expertise is measured. It's the people from Malayan community who present Ottakkolam. Everybody in the Malayan community does not play Ottakkolam. The chance to play Ottakkolam is considered as divine calling. The Malayan who played Ottakkolam becomes Panicker (a higher caste). Other than that, Cherukunnan, Vadakkankooran, Peru Malayan is the names of the positions given to Malayans by the feudalists. Like Thee Chamundi, PottanTheyyam is one that falls into melari (fire heap). The members of Pulayan community play the PottanTheyyam. Like this, jumping on to ember, jumping into fire, such type of Theyyams is found in northern Kerala. In the land where the Kerala Muslim ritual of KuthuRatheeb happens in nercha'spettivaravu (procession with boxes), we can see adventurous performance using fire flambeau. Like that there are Theyyams which dance by placing flambeau on the body. KuthuRatheeb and Theyyam are caste-society based. Not only caste system but the hierarchy of caste also determines the presentation. Like that in KuthuRatheeb presentation, Shaiks (those who give blessings for the performers) and one who stab and cut (performer) came to exist. But in Theyyams. There are two levels-Theyyam performers and Theyyam audience. Theyyam audience are twentyeight caste groups from Thiyyar to Kaniyan. The Theyyam performer's societies are of eleven castes from Peruvannan to Pulayan. Each community has separate names in Theyyam's language. In certain sacred groves Muslims also have rights. The performers who play MappilaTheyyam present the Muslim worship act of Namaz in between Theyyam presentation. Even the areas around the sacred groves are distributed among communities during the time of ritual. It is like giving separate space (majlis) for those who come as Shaikhs in the KuthuRatheeb.

Comparison of KuthuRatheeb and Theyyam with theatre forms giving and emphasis on Artudian idea of theatre: The first Theyyam each Theyyam performer plays is that of VeedodiTheyyam. Boys of the age of eight to ten are made to play small Theyyam and are made to perform in houses. The children born in the community of Theyyam performers knowingly or unknowingly start to learn to become a Theyyam performer. What he sees and hears from the age of understanding gets cemented in his mind. In Kerala, there are many folk theatres and ritual theatres. MappilaTheyyam and KuthuRatheeb are ritual theatre. But in MappilaTheyyams, elements of folk theatre can be seen. When compared with the idea of environmental theatre by Richard Schechner, Theyyam and KuthuRatheeb can be said as Theatre forms. Schechner's stage presentation is not focused on a specific theatre space. Theatre space and actor do not have any type of limits. To freely self manifest is its intent. It goes among the audience and does performance among them. For example, in Thiruvananthapuram (southern Kerala) Bheemapalli, in between the KuthuRatheeb performance, performers stabbed with lance in faces and heads goes into the audience without taking it off, in order to collect money. In this, the participation of audience is more. What happens in Theyyam is also the same. Besides this, KuthuRatheeb and MappilaTheyyams can be related to Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty. The position of

ritual custom in theatre space is what Artaud talked about. The societal order and social traditions which man acquired through centuries had made humans uneasy, in Artaud's view. He recognized the rituals and nature worshipping of ancient life. Through myths formed with new meaningful levels from this, the terrible state of modern man could be expressed, argued Artaud. A thorough theatre platform using completely the medium of actor is what is needed says Artaud. Through ritualistic frenzied dance is how communication occurs. In KuthuRatheeb or MappilaTheyyam, this is what happens. It is centred on Theyyam performer that the communication happens. Any play is creative, likewise the ritual of KuthuRatheeb and MappilaTheyyam also have creativeness. Belief is the basis for rituals. By being firm in a society's beliefs, dramatics is used as a tool for manifestation is what is done in ritual dramas like KuthuRatheeb. Knowledge based on experience is the basis for beliefs. If MappilaTheyyam and KuthuRatheeb can be considered as theatre, the performers can be seen as actor. In early ages, in each society, first actor has occurred when accredited as reflected image of God. He had many types of authorities. He is the one who talks to God for man. There was a belief that he could save people from attack of wild animals and incurable diseases. Having such super human abilities was the one who was the first actor. In KuthuRatheeb when self-injuries are made by cutting the body and when the Theyyam performer jumps into fire, around him a nimbus of belief of many people is being created. This consciousness is that which urge a performer to again and again self-torture or sacrifice. The myths of MappilaTheyyam and how many kinds of MappilaTheyyam are there are explained below.

The social background of Theyyams of Kerala folklore which has striking similarity with Mappila sacramental performance KuthuRatheeb: Most of the MappilaTheyyam does not have origin songs or birth songs which could be useful in tracing the legend of it. The story needs to be grasped from small indications from the Theyyam's talking or conversations with the devotees. That is also very scarce for some MappilaTheyyam. It is the knowledge of the one who does the Theyyam that we get in these situations. The belief that knowledge of the origin leads to decrease in greatness, keeps these Theyyam in mystery. The one who take care of the sacred groves has good understanding about the respective sacred groves. Theyyam is a ritualistic action plan where, by wearing non-worldly dress and ornaments and singing Thottam (praise songs), one imbibes to self and dances in frenzy as God. Theyyam happen in the villages of Northern Malabar that spread across Kora River in the south to Chandragiri River in the north. Each village has Theyyam groves. This festival where the Theyyam form rigorously dances in the role of God is known in the names of Thirayattam, Thirayutsavam, Kalasham, Perumkalasham and Perumkaliyattam. Normally, these Theyyam forms which happens in fixed dates every year is called as Kaliyattam and those Theyyam which is celebrated after ten or more years is called as PerumKaliyattam. PerumKaliyattam is celebrated in four to five day- nights. This requires preparations lasting months. The sacred groves where Theyyam are consecrated are called in different names like Kaavu, Kottam, Maadam, Madam, Vathil Madam, Gopuram, Ara, Mundya, Palliyara, Molom, Thanam, Devasthanam. Theones who act out Theyyams have got the right traditionally from the society. This right is known in the names of Jenmam, CheruJenmam etc. Vannan, Velan, Malayan, Cheron, Koppalan, Pulayan, Paravan, Pambadhan, Panan, Mavilan, Chinkathan, Monnoottan, Anjoottan, etc. Are the ones who act out Theyyams. Each caste group has its own Theyyams. There are more than four hundred Theyyams. Out of that about ninety percent are mother goddesses. Kali, Bhadra Kali, Parava Kali, Veera Kali, Rudira Kali, Kuthira Kali etc are the Kali Goddesses. To the south of Valappattanam River, it is also called as 'Thira'. The Theyyams which crossed the Valappattanam River and came to the North are called as 'Thira' in Northern Kerala. When Theyyams from Thulunadu reaches the south, there also it is called as 'Thira'.

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