

## **KADANGODE MAKKAM : ANTHROPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF MYTH IN THE CONTEXT OF WOMEN IN FOLKLORE**

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### **Abstract**

Expressive tradition is one of the concrete manifestations of social structure. Folklore, an expressive tradition of ordinary people and a part of their culture plays an important role in transmitting culture and preserving tradition. This is more symbolic in its expressions of social structure and normative values. In this context, this paper analyses the myth of the Theyyam Kadangode Makkam, in an Anthropological perspective. The myth is expressive of the family structure, status of women, customs and traditions based on gender and caste, values of purity and pollution in a society where matriliney prevailed. The paper would try to show how the intangible cultural heritage of folklore and the norms symbolised in its performative manifestations that are indicative of changing social norms on women's status, are evoked in the myth of Kadangode Makkam.

**Keywords:** *Expressive tradition, myth, theyyam, matriliney, patriarchy.*

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## Introduction

Kerala has a rich variety of folk arts, most of which comes under the ritualistic activities of different religious groups. Folklore of Kerala includes folk tales, folk festivities, folk beliefs, folk songs, and folk dances etc. which have drawn their themes from mythology and agricultural activities and from incidents in real life. It throws light on the cultural heritage and social life of the people. The ceremonial and ritualistic institutions are supported by the folk literature while worshipping god and goddesses. The themes of folklore in each society are culturally defined based on specific functions. Folklore of Kolathu Nadu (Kannur and Kasargod districts and parts of Kozhikode and Wayanad districts) is connected with religious and spiritual needs. The ritual dances are staged in temples with a view to propitiating deity. Theyyam is a ritual form of worship in north Kerala. It is the dance of the God. Theyyam is the corrupted word of Daivam which means God. The performer in this ritual dance is believed to be the impersonator of the popular deity. The expressive feature of theyyam is rhythmic dances and the performer gets possessed and gives expression to the activities of the deity till he gives up the role. This performing art is the traditional occupation of particular castes called Malayan, Vannan, Velan, Pulayan, Munnuttan etc. (Theyyam performing castes of North Kerala).

Myth related to mother goddesses indicates that the woman who challenges the customs and traditions of patriarchy will become victims of it and are evolved as goddesses. The importance of folklore for the study of the life and status of women is understood when we take into account that the life of ordinary woman which are far away from books.

According to Malinowski, "myth expresses, enhances and codifies beliefs; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of the ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of the mass. Myth is thus a vital ingredient of human civilisation; it is not an idle tale, but hard worked active force; it is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom (as quoted in Islam, 1985:385).

Levi Straus (1978) also believes that myths of primitive people reveal a kind of truth about the nature and working of human mind. "One of the many conclusions of an Anthropological research, notwithstanding the cultural differences between the several parts of mankind, the human mind is everywhere one and the same and it has same capacities. In the mythology world over we have deities or supernatural, which play roles of intermediaries between the power above and humanity below." (Straus, 1978:19,32). Emile Durkheim has analysed the social functions of ritual to be, the disciplinary and preparatory function, the cohesive function, the revitalising function and euphoric function. The vigorous singing accompanying worship and ceremonies can see how effective it is in producing an atmosphere of in which the importance of symbolic performances becomes comprehensible.

The work of Indra Deva (1989) gave a complete review on the oral literature of a large region of north India through the analysis of the content of Bhojpuri folk songs. J.J Pallath (1995) presented an analytical study on Theyyam and also the integral relation that exists between ethno-folk performance and their basic personality. Dan Ben Amos (1982) explores the theoretical implications for the analysis and interpretation of folklore. Mazharul Islam (1985) critically examines the function of folklore as the pulse of the people. Nandini Sahu(2012) analyses how the folk literature represents the real life of women.

### **Makkappothi - The Goddess of fertility**

This paper attempt to understand the cult of the goddess of fertility, *Makkappothi* (Corrupted word of Makkam Bhaghavati i.e. the goddess *Makkam*) consists of pluralistic manifestations that are religious and social in nature. '*Makkavum makkalum*'(*Kadangode Makkam* along with her kids) is a *theyyam* performing in Kannur district, North Kerala. Through analysis of the myth behind this cult, the paper would try to show how the intangible cultural heritage of folklore and the norms symbolised in its performative manifestations that are indicative of changing social norms on women's status. Mother goddesses are worshipped for different purposes like knowledge, courage, health, and fertility. Myth related to mother goddesses indicates that the women who become victims of the customs and traditions of patriarchy will evolved as goddesses. The cruelty of brothers due to the role played wives as a result of the jealousies and rivalries lead to the death of *Makkam* and her kids. Here motherhood is the reason for jealousy, so *Makkam* is worshipped as deity of fertility by the folk.

### **The myth**

*Makkam* was the lone girl child of thirteen children of *Unnichira* couple of Kadangode (A Nair tharawad) at Kunhimangalam in Kannur, Kerala. She was educated and later married to one of her relatives. The couple had two children and were living happily. *Makkam's* sisters in law have no children and so facing some frustrations in the family became jealous of her because of how well she was loved by her brothers. So they were waiting for a chance to discredit her in the eyes of the brothers. When the brothers had gone to the war field, their wives made up a story linking *Makkam* with a Vaniya (A caste with lower status than Nair in the Hindu caste hierarchy) youth who came to the house with oil as an offering to the family diety of Kadangode. When the brothers came back victorious in the war, they were received with the gossip about *Makkam*. They decided to kill *Makkam* who brought the family such shame. So they took her and her children on a long trip in the pretext of showing her a divine lamp inside a well. *Makkam* however, could foresee the treachery and the fate awaiting her but she went with them. After the long trek when the kids felt hungry and thirsty, she went into a house- Chala Puthiya Veetil. The house owner

gave enough milk for her children. *Makkam* removed her ornaments and entrusted them with the family members of this house and went on with their journey. Finally, after covering a long distance, the brothers showed her a well and told her to look in to see the divine lamp. When she bent down to look into the well they beheaded her and her children and dumped the bodies into the well. Within a few days the brothers started to fight with each other and died on the spot. The Kadangode house caught fire and was destroyed except a few divine spots and materials. The sisters in law were also died in the fire. As per astrological calculations the *Kadangode* family members started performing the *theyyyam* of *Makkam* and her kids. The family members of the house of *Chala Puthiya Veetil* began to feel certain divine happenings in the house and they also decided to perform *theyyam* of *Makkam* and her kids.

## Analysis

In a matrilineal family girl child is necessary for the existence family so girl child has important position in the family. It involves the inheritance of succession through sister's children. Though joint properties belonged to the female members the eldest male member was vested with the power of managing it. The analysis of the content of this folklore expresses intimate aspects of family relationships, status and anxieties of woman, inter caste attitudes etc. It seems that joint family not only shows the pattern of co operation but also those tensions and conflicts especially of woman. The relation between brother and sister are pictured as extremely affectionate in this myth. In matrilineal descent, female inheritance and the authority exercised by mother's brother explain the reasons for brother-sister relationship.

Even though descent is traced through female line males such as brothers or maternal uncle holds the authority of the group which resulted in the oppression of woman. An important aspect like respect and support between siblings is inherent in this myth .Their mutual obligation towards one another exists from birth. Two or more brother's pattern, where brothers go for adventures together is a very important feature of Indian society is depicted here. Brothers appear as a collective set. These patterns play a role in the tradition of joint inheritance and the joint management of brothers of family property.

Women's barrenness is considered to be the greatest misfortune in such societies and motherhood is regarded to be supreme function of woman. Women are appears to be more inclined to perform her social obligations as a sister, wife and mother and their activities are confined within the boundaries of four walls. The jealousies and rivalries of sisters in law, is the result of frustrations facing in husband's residence because of barrenness. The cruelty of brothers due to the role played wives lead to the death of *Makkam* and her kids. Here motherhood is the reason for

jealousy, so Makkam is worshipped as deity of fertility by the folk. But the brothers and their wives died by the curse of Makkam which is a moral to the society. When we explore the content of this myth we find woman are reflected in it as vividly as possible. Their ambitions style of living, performance of religious rituals and customs and dependence on man. Cultural values, work patterns, roles of men and women in society are clearly expressed in this myth. Kinship terms and their obligations, institutions of family and marriage, inheritance of property are also described. The nature of diverse relationships in the joint family, the built in tensions in them, and the resentment of woman etc. are depicted in this. Here, family structure forms the basis for the misfortune of Makkam. The family influences the whole life of the society and its changes reverberate through the whole social structure. This is a transitional picture of the initial decay of joint family system. The process of social change is a powerful phenomenon and folklore has a close link with that process. The attitudes of different castes toward each other, including that of the lower caste towards higher, customs and traditions based on gender caste, values of purity and pollution etc. in the society were expressed in this myth. It throws light on the Hindu caste system which is endogamous, hierarchically ranked social group associated with a particular traditional occupation and co operation between castes in terms of service. This type of social structure gives a chance to the sisters in law of Makkam to deceive her. This indicates a critique of the traditions and customs which have evil effects on the life of women.

## Conclusion

Deities are creations of mind and their existence depends on faith. Women used this spiritual act as a strategy against the oppression and violence by the patriarchy. Those things which cannot be done in physical world are satisfied by attaining sacred power. Thinking and feeling of women's collective is revealed through this and their ideas are free from external influence. It has inherent qualities like virtues because it has shaped by the group. Despite of Woman's faith in her own self, wisdom, and truthfulness she resigns herself to the fate. This can be taken as a form of resistance against the social system in which woman are oppressed and they could not come out to show their resistance in the past, so expressed it through folklore.

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