



## *Folk Dances*

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**K**erala has a rich variety of folk dances. They are highly developed and reflect the temperaments and moods of the localities in music and costume. Nature silently and unobtrusively has moulded these dances just as the lives of the people who dance them. Religious colouring is seen in almost all of these folk dances, even in those performed in connection with harvests, sowing of seeds, festivals etc., so much so that their secular nature is always at doubt. There is difficulty in classifying these dances as social, religious and martial. Many of these dances are performed by men alone, some exclusively by women. There are also dances in which men and women perform together. Most of the folk dances are performed to the accompaniment of songs which are sung by the dancers themselves or occasionally by a group of musicians. Some dances are performed to the accompaniment of musical instruments only. In several dances the performers form a circle and clap as they dance. Sometimes, instead of clapping they strike small sticks which they hold in their hands. The costumes and ornaments are peculiar to the places to which they belong. The eloquent, effortless ease with which the dances are executed and the overwhelming buoyancy of spirit are wonderful. In these folk dances there is no difference between the performers and the audience. Almost all of these folk dances are simple but beneath this simplicity is a profundity of conception and a directness of expression which are of a high artistic order.

There are more than fifty well-known folk dances in Kerala. Of them the *Kaliyattom*, *Mudiettu*, *Kolan thullal*, *Kolkali*, *Poorakkali*, *Velakali*, *Kampadavukali*, *Kanniyarkali*,



*Parichmuttukali, Thappukali, Kuravarkali and Thiruvathirakali* are the most popular.

India is a land of varied cultures. It is a home land of myriad traditions, beliefs and customs. As a conclave of different castes, religions, varnas and linguistic groups, our country is enriched with a colourful tradition of folklores.

### KAIKOTTI KALI

*Kaikottikkali* (literally means a play with clapping of hands) also known as *Thiruvathirakkali* is a dance in which a group of women move in a circle with a lighted brass



lamp at the centre, dancing to the rhythm of the songs they sing. Two such songs recited are the following.

Nandanandanam Govindan.....

Angane Jnan Angupovaathengane .....

While playing the participants wear the traditional dress consisting of two pieces, a *kasavu dhoti* and *kasavu* upper garment across the breast, and a red or green choli blouse.



The blouses they wear are of uniform colour. The hair is kept in a knot above the head and the knot adorned with garlands of jasmine flowers. They wear gold ornaments as well as *kuppivala* (glass bangles). Uniformity is maintained in all these matters. On the whole the women look elegant and sprightly for the game. The leader of the party sings the first line of a song which is repeated by the rest to the simple rhythm of clapping hands. There is no restriction in joining the dances provided the participants do not break steps. The body is gyrated gently by all alike. The dance is very lively and singularly devoid of monotony because of the varieties of steps taken according to the tune of the songs. The hopping and clapping dance is the most lively piece of *Thiruvathirakkali*.

The songs used for *thiruvathirakkali* is called *Thiruvathira pattukal*. It has come to be separate branch of literature. These songs are mostly based on the marriages of our puranic heroines like Parvathy, Sakuntala, Rukmini, Sathyabhama, Seelavati, Sita etc.

## MUDIYETTU

This is ritualistic dance springing from the *Bhagavathy* cult. The theme depicts the glory





and triumph of *Bhagavathy* over the demon *Darika*. The characters are all heavily made up with gorgeous costumes, intricate and elaborate and with conventional facial paintings, tall head-gears etc. Attired and adorned exotically with a unique weirdness and hideousness, the characters seem quite



KUDAM THULLAL

supernatural. Their mien and array make them colourful, imposing and awe-inspiring in the extreme. The dance is performed by a set of people known as *Kurappanmar*, mainly in *Bhadrakali* temples.

In the dance, a *kolam* of *Kali* is first made up to which floral offerings and other rituals are made. Then it is taken round the temple to the accompaniment of percussion instruments. The *kolam* is then installed in a suitable place. The dance proper is then enacted. In the first part *Narada*, the celestial sage, is seen informing Lord Shiva of the evil deeds of the demon *Darika*, and the consequent sufferings of the people. Shiva agrees to send *Bhadrakali* to kill *Darika*. In the next phase, *Bhadrakali* and *Darika* enter and the whole temple yard is turned into a battlefield. In the end *Bhadrakali* kills *Darika*. *Chenda* and *elathalam* are the instruments used.

### SANGHA KALI

This is also known as *Sastrakali*, *Chathirakali* or *Vatrakali*. Essentially a socio-religious dance which was a very favourite and popular pastime of Namboothiris, it was performed as a votive offering. The origin of *Sanghakali* may be traced to the numerous gymnasia (known as *Kalaris*) in ancient Kerala where physical exercises and military training with special stress on



physical feats and swordsmanship were given. Periodic celebrations were held in these *Kalaris* with special displays of skill in weapons and the techniques of combat. With the infiltration and stabilization of Aryan culture in the land, the Namboothiri Brahmins-the Aryan immigrants-entered these gymnasia and their participation and influence gave the celebrations a religious turn.

A number of people with red scarfs on the head and red cloth on the wrist get together and the performance begins with procession to the gymnasium to the accompaniment of the reverberation of the *chenda, maddalam, elethalam and gong*. The dance has a number of phases of ritual worship, recital of devotional songs, pure dance, comic interludes, etc. They include the *kottichakampookal, kottiyarkal, pana, velichappadu, nalupadam, slokam, neetuvayana, kandappanpurappad, poli kaimalothika samvadam, paradesipurappad* etc.



JEEVATHA

The last phase of the dance is called *Kudameduppu*. It is martial in character and actually in the form of combat exercise displaying the skill in swordsmanship and the mastery of techniques in the use of other weapons.



Of the dance part in *sanghakali*, the *kurathiyattom* is the most graceful and eloquent.

### BRAHMANIPPATTU

This is a type of domestic devotional offering performed usually in connection with marriages. Women of a special set of caste Hindus called *Brahmanis* or Pushpinis alone are entitled to do it.

In the dance, the women stand round a decorated stool on which some symbolic representation of *Bhagavathy* is placed. They then sing devotional songs to the rhythm of the beating of bronze plates. Gradually the songs ascend in pitch and the women dance in ecstasy.

### DAPPU KALI

A groupdance of the *Moplahs* of Malabar. The performers form two rows of ten to twenty. They beat on the *dappu* which each dancer holds in his left hand and dance with exquisitely





symmetrical swayings of the body and astonishing co-ordination of rhythm steps, flexion of body and timing of *dappu*.

### KOLKKALI

A mixed dance in which both men and women participate. The performers move in a circle, striking small sticks and keeping rhythm with special steps. The circle expands and contracts



as the dance progress. The accompanying music gradually rises in pitch and the dance reaches its climax. Sometimes it is performed on a specially constructed wooden stage. Thus the name *thattinmelkali*.

### VATTAKKALI

An extremely vigorous ring-dance of the *Vettuvar* community. Both men and women participate in the dance. Twelve different types of steps are executed. The beauty of the intricate footwork is heightened by the tinkling of anklets and bells and also by the *rhythmic* clapping of hands. The whirling movements become faster as the dancing reaches a climax. The dance is also called *chuvadukali*.



### POYKKALU KALI

Also known as *marakkalattom*, this is a still-dance performed in connection with temple festivals. Theme songs are sung in which the fight of the goddess *Durga* on stilts against the *Asuras* who attacked her in the guise of snakes, scorpions etc., are portrayed. The rhythm is kept by percussion instruments.

### KAKKARISSI KALI

Prevalent among the *Kuravas* of Thiruvananthapuram district, this group dance is very vociferous because of the shoutings of the participants and also the wild beatings of primitive drums like *para*, *veekan chenda* etc.



KAKKARISSI KALI

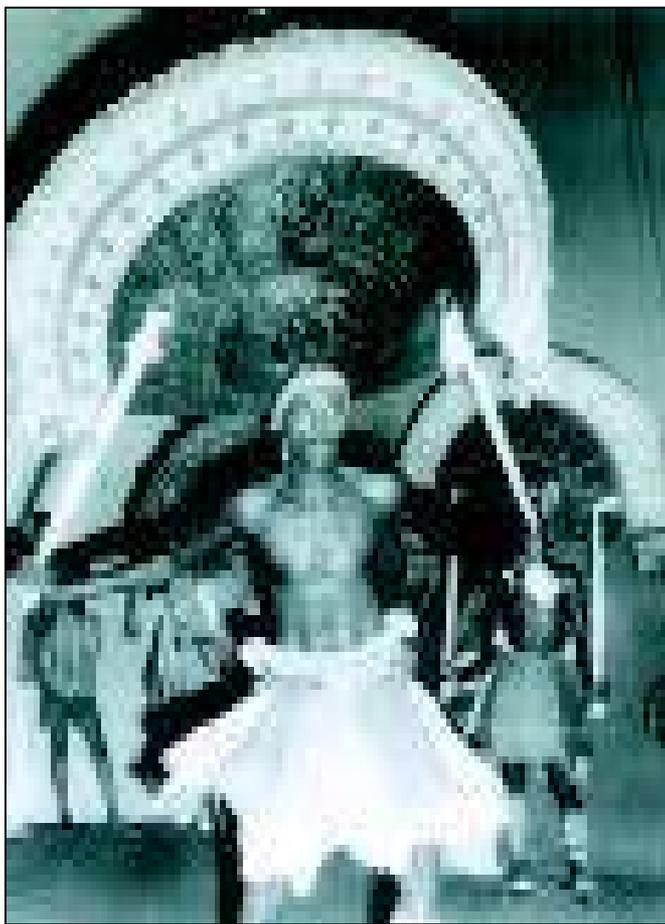


### KOTHAMOORI

This is a dance prevalent among the *Malavans* of North Kerala. Models of oxen are made up with leaves and twigs, and carried on shoulders behind which numerous dancers with crude facial marks and skirts made of tender fronds of coconut, dance in exotic jubilation to the accompaniment of instruments like *chenda* and *kinni* (a bronze plate).

### PAANA

This is ritual dance propitiating the goddess *Kali*. Small temporary shrines are constructed and variously decorated. A branch of the *Pala* tree is taken round the temple by about 10 to 12 persons who dance all the way to the rhythm set by percussion instruments and to the vociferous shouting and chanting of the accompanying crowd. This part of the dance is called the *Pana piditham*. The branch is then installed in the centre of the shrine as the deity and *Pooja*, is performed by the village leader. The *Pooja* consists of floral offerings to the accompaniment of dancing round the deity. Then a person dances round the deity with burning torches. This is followed by ten or twelve persons again dancing round the deity with burning torches. This is followed by ten or twelve persons again dancing round with canes in their hands. After this, songs are sung glorifying the victory of *Kali* over *Darika*. The last part of the dance is *velichapad thullal*.



POOTHANUM THIRAYUM



## SARPAM THULLAL

Many ancient family houses in Kerala have special snake shrines called *Kavu*. *Sarpamthullal* is usually performed in the courtyard of houses having snake shrines. This is a votive offering for family wealth and happiness. The dance is performed by members of a community called *Pulluvar*. In the first stage the *Pullavan* draws a *kolam* (picture) of two or more twining snakes in the



courtyard. An oil-lit traditional lamp and one full measure (*nirapara*) each of paddy and rice are then placed in front of the *kolam*. In the second stage, the idol of the snake is brought out from the *Kavu* in a procession called *thalapoli* to the uproarious tumult of percussion instruments (*panchavadya*). A number of girls with their hair dressed up like the hoods of snakes and reminiscent of the legend of the naga kanyakas partake in this procession. The idol is placed in the *kolam* and the *poojari* performs ritual offerings while the girls sit in two rows on the sides of the *Kolam*. The *Poojari* then dances round the *kolam* to the rhythmic beatings of *para* and *elathalam*. All the while a *Pulluvan* and *Pulluvathi* will be singing special devotional songs set to tune and *rhythm* by *nanthuni* (a primitive type of *veena*) and *kudam* (a primitive form of modern *khatam*) respectively. As the song gathers momentum the girls go into a trance and begin to dance, swaying their body slowly at first and steadily ascending in tempo. The dance finally erupts in a violent frenzy of rhythmic fervour.



### VELICHAPPAADU THULLAL

This is a ritual dance common with *bhadrakalipattu*, *ayyappanpattu* and *vetaykorumakanpattu*. Since it seals with trances and evil spirits, only a few are allowed to perform



it. Usually the members of the *Kallathukuruppanmar* enjoy this right. In the first stage of the dance there is *kalamezhuthu*, in which the form of the deity is drawn on the floor with the aid of five types of coloured powders. Then devotional songs are sung to the accompaniment of *nanthuni*, a musical instrument. After this the dancer known as *velichappadu* enters, with red flowery clothes, red scarfs, a girdle of bells at the

waist, and a sword in hand. Slowly he gets into a trance and executes vigorous movements which is technically called *idumkoorum chavittal*.

### KURAVAR KALI

*Kuravars* were not permitted to enter the precincts of temples. The *Kuravarkali* dance is usually performed outside the temple walls in connection with festivals. The costumes of the dancers are peculiar with conical caps called *palathopi*, white dhoti and red sash. Sandal paste is smeared all over the body and face and garlands of red *chethi* flowers are worn. The dancers have anklets tied to the legs. The *Kuravars* circle round a traditional lamp and dance to the timing and rhythm set by percussion instruments like *veekkan chenda*.

### AYYAPPAN VILAKKU

Numerous miniature temples are constructed out of tender coconut frond and plantain leaf-stalks. Then songs are sung on the legendary fight between *Ayyappan* and *Vavar*. In tune with the various rhymes and rhythms of this devotional song, two dancers in the costume and



make up of *Ayyappan* and *Vavar* perform, striking with swords and defending with coconut fronds. The dancers execute vigorous foot-movement. In the last stage, a huge fire called *aazhiis* lit and the dancers jump into the burning embers still dancing.

## VELAKALI

The Velakali of Ambalappuzha is a martial art form. The military crafts in the times of chieftaincy are exhibited in this dance. This art form was originated in the same place which gave birth to the Thullal movement of Kunjan Nambiar. Naturally, the dance background of Thullal influenced Velakali also. The oral expressions (*vaithari*) - velappara, madhalam and kombu



- accompanied the performance. Though Velakali is performed in the temple, it has no other explicit religious influence. Yet the villagers believe that Velakali is an adoption of Mahabharatha war and the war between devas and asuras. Whether it is in the simple recreations or worldly art forms, religious influence permeates all our arts.



### PURATTU

The word *Purattu* means imitation or mimicry. It is a humorous folk-play which many characters like *Chettiar*, *Chettichi*, *Kuravan* and *Kurathi* are cleverly imitated to evoke laughter. The accompanying songs are almost Tamil. The *Purattu* is performed by *Ezhavas* or *Pulayas*.



### KAMPADAVU KALI

A war dance which is the legacy of an ancient past. The dance is performed in circles and the dancers utter wild war cries as it gathers momentum. The group formations are many and varied and the power and variety of rhythm exquisite. There is stepping, hopping and squatting; every moment keeps perfect time with the strokes of the sticks which the dancers hold in their hands. Unique for its footwork and the striking of sticks which very closely resembles the movements of the sword and the shield in ancient duels in Kerala. This dance is also known as *kampadi kali* and *koladikali*.

### PULAYAR KALI

The *Pulayas* were mainly agricultural labourers. *Pulayar kali* is their gay group dance, noted for its rhythm, vigour and beauty. Women also participate in this dance which is usually performed after the harvest season. The songs are all based on themes relating to incidents in mythologies like Mahabharatha and Ramayana. Instruments like para, veekan chenda, kavu etc., are used.

### KAALAYUM KUDAYUM

A dance of the Pulayar community. This is performed after the harvest. Models of oxen and horses are made out of bamboo and forest twigs and decorated with white clothes. Umbrellas



of five to seven storeys are also similarly constructed and decorated with tender coconut fronds, flowers etc. These are then taken round from house to house. The bearers execute a very simple dance, moving the legs to the left and right, front and back.

### CHATHANKALI

Prevalent in many areas of Ponnani and Tirur Taluks in Malappuram District. In the garb of *Chathan*, a village deity, they dance to the accompaniment of percussion instruments like the Chenda etc. In both hands the dancers of *Kolams* carry two short sticks. They click these sticks together to the rhythm. Each particular dance sequence takes about ten minutes. A particular type of Chenda is used as background rhythm. Usually this is performed during daytime.

A lion cloth and jingling bell round the waist and heavy clanking anklet and on the head, a headdress made of arecanut fronds base and tender coconut fronds. A face mask of arecanut frond base, with an exaggerated nose. These form the costume.

### POORAKKALI

A folk dance prevalent among the *Thiyyas* of Malabar, usually performed in *Bhagavathy* temples as a ritual offering during the month of *Meenam* (March-April). *Poorakkali* requires

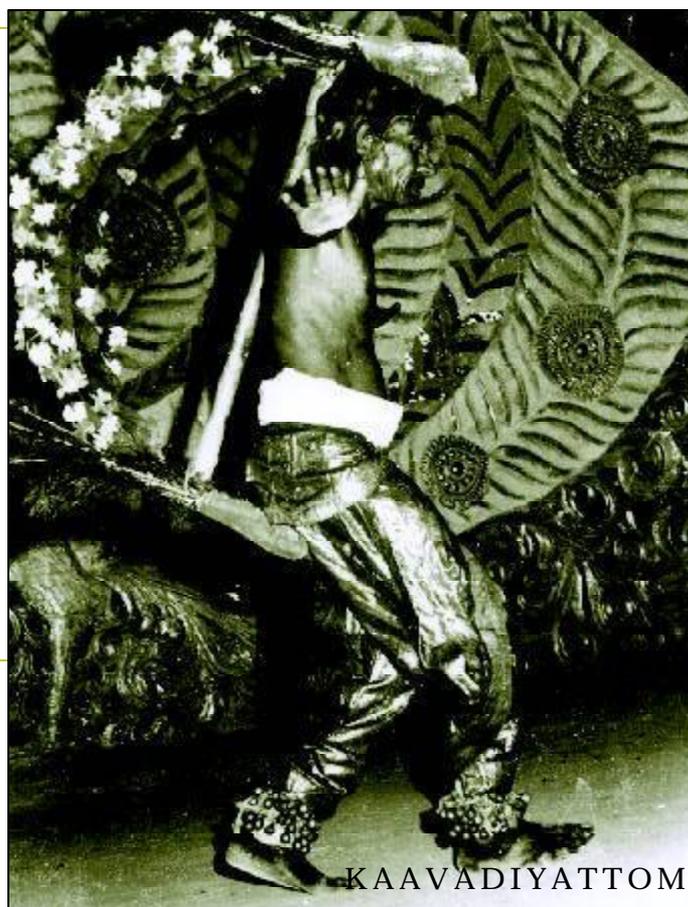




specially trained and highly experienced dancers quite thorough with all the techniques and feats of *Kalaripayattu*, a system of physical exercise formerly in vogue in Kerala. Standing round the traditional lamp, the performers dance in eighteen different stages and rhythm, each phase being called a *Niram*.

### KAAVADIYATTOM

Mainly performed as a votive offering in temples where the presiding deity is Lord Subrahmanya. Here a number of dancers dressed in yellow or rose clothes and smeared all over the body with ashes and each with an ornate *kavadi* on the shoulder, dance in a row to the rhythmic beatings of instruments like *udukku*, *chenda* etc., sometimes *nagaswaram* is also used.



### BHADRAKALI THULLAL

This is a devotional offering of *Pulayas* for the deity *Bhadrakali*. Special *pandals* are constructed in the fields after the harvest and the dances are performed. They are quite drawn-out and have numerous phases. Different types of make-up and costumes are used for each phase and the participants dance to the accompaniment of devotional songs and percussion instruments.

### THOOKKAM

This is a votive offering performed in *Bhagavathy* temples. The costume of the dancer is as in *Velichappadu Thullal*, red scarf on the head and a red flowery cloth at the waist. Anklets are tied to the legs. The performer goes round the deity dancing to the rhymes set by *chenda*,



*maddalam, thimila and elathalam*. After worshipping the deity he gets over a one wheeled platform over which is the pillar-like *utholakam*. There is a hook at one end of the *utholakam* to which is attached the backside skin of the dancer. This end is then raised up. Hooked to the *utholakam*, the dancer is thus suspend in the air almost horizontally in which posture he executes certain physical feats and dance movements and the whole platform is taken round the temple deity thrice.

Sometimes the make-up of the dancer will be in the shape of garuda, the mythological bird, hence the dance is called *garudan thookkam*.

In another local variation a number of dancers in the costume and make-up of *garuda* with beak, wings and pleated skirts assemble before the temple deity and dance to the accompaniment of *thimila, chenda, maddalam, elathalam* etc. The dance is thus known as *garudanparava*.



POOPPADA



### AIVAR KALI

Aivar Kali literally means the play of the five sets. This is performed by members of *Asari*, *Moosari*, *Karuvan*, *Thattan*, and *kallasari* communities. It is often staged in connection with temple festivals like *Velela*, *Thalapoli* etc. This is a ring dance in which the dancers with small sticks in their hands perform a vigorous and powerful dance. The twinkling of the bells attached to the sticks adds to the charm of the accompanying



AIVAR KALI

music which is skillfully varied to avoid monotony. With the singing, the dancing rises to a crescendo of rhythmic fervour and the dancers swirl round, feet in step and the sticks striking perfect time.

### EZHAMATHU KALI

This is a form of social satire performed as domestic entertainment by members of the *Variar* and *Pisharady* communities. A group of people gather round an oil-lit lamp before which is a copper pot placed upside down. It is by beating on the vessel with the hand that the rhythm is set. One from the groups stands up and asks a question in the form of a song to another in the group. Those who fail to answer have to enact various roles. Though devoid of much dance



element, this humorous play gives plenty of scope for buffoonery and clowning which is done with great agility and gusto. This dance is almost extinct now.

## PADAYANI

*Padayani* or *padeni* in colloquial speech, is one of the most *colourful* and spectacular folk arts associated with festivals of certain temples in southern Kerala (*Alappuzha*, *Kollam*, *Pathanamthitta* and *Kottayam* districts). The word *Padyani* literally means military formations or rows of army, but in this folk art we have mainly a series of divine and semi-divine impersonations wearing huge masks or *kolams* of different shapes, colours and designs painted on the stalks of *arecanut* fronds. The most important of the *kolams* usually presented in a *padayani* performance are *Bhairavi* (Kali), *Kalan* (god of death), *Yakshi* (fairy), *Pakshi* (bird) etc. The *kolam* consists primarily of a huge head gear with many projections and devices with a mask for the face or a chest piece to cover the breast and abdomen of the performer.





*Padayani* probably has its origin in ritual and religion, by today it can be viewed as a folk art with a genuine secular appeal. The whole performance consisting of the dancers or actors who wear the *kolams*, the singers who recite a different poem for each *kolam*, and the instrumentalists who evoke wild and loud rhythm on their simple drum called *thappu* and cymbals, etc., takes the form of procession of Kali and her spirits returning after the killing of the *Asura* chief *Darika*. The *kolams* are traditionally painted by members of the *Ganaka* community and the dance is performed usually by Nairs who in old times had regular physical exercises and elaborate training on the model of *kalaripayattu* but without the use of weapons. The influence of *padayani* may be clearly seen in the more famous theatrical dance drama of Kerala Viz. *Kathakali*.

### PARICHAMUTTU KALI

This is martial folk-dance which had its origin during the days when *kalaripayattu*, the famous physical exercise of swordplay and *defence*, was in vogue in Kerala. The performers dance with swords and shields in their hands, following the movements of sword fight, leaping forward, stepping back and moving round, all the time striking with the swords and defending with shields. Martial songs are sung throughout and the cymbals chime in perfect unions with the steps and the striking of swords against the shields. In the Malabar area this dance is performed by *Thiyyas* and in the *Travancore* area by Christians.



PARICHAMUTTU KALI



## BHOOTHAM THULLAL

This is a ritual dance performed in connection with Vela, *Pooram*, *Thalappoli* etc., which are special festival in Kerala temples. *Mannamars* are usually allowed to perform this dance, and



very rarely *Panar* and *Pulaya*. The concept is that the devil-aides (*Bhoothams*) of Lord Shiva are coming to see and enjoy the temple festival. The make-up of the *Bhoothams* consists of peculiar costumes, at once colourful and captivating. Large headgears, projecting rounded eyeballs, high-ridged noses, protruding tongue, flowing black hair behind the pleated skirts and overcoats all conspire to make the dancers appear completely supernatural. Each dancer has a girdle of bells. Anklets are also attached to the legs and each dancer holds a shield and club in his hands. A variety of dances are executed to the rhythm set by an instrument called *thudi*.



### PENTHARUMO NRITHAM

A graceful group dance of women, performed only very rarely nowadays. The girls link their arms and form two lines. Facing each other, they move forward and backwards to the rhythm of songs. The head and body sway in perfect unison with the different steps executed. The ease of movement and supple grace furnish an experience of rare beauty and enjoyment. The songs are in the form of questions and answers in which one party request the other to give them a girl. The request is promptly refused, but is repeated along with offers of various ransoms and rewards and turned down time and again. In the end a mock trail-of war is executed between the two groups.

### THIYATTU

A devotional offering performed in *Bhadrakali* temples. A set of performers known as *Thiyyattunnis* alone are entitled to perform it. The theme is usually the killing of *Darika* by *Bhadrakali*. The Unnis first draw the picture of *Bhadrakali* (called *kolam*) on the floor, with a five different types of colour powders. A decorated stool called *peedhom* is placed in front, facing a traditional oil-lit lamp. Then the dancer in the costume and make-up of *Bhagavathy* with special head gears, pleated skirts and painted face dances before the *Kolam*, to the accompaniment of devotional songs. A small-sized *chenda*, *thimila* and *kaimani* are the instruments used.

Sometimes *Thiyyattu* is performed before the deity Ayyappan by a set of people known as *Nampis*. In the *Ayyappan Thiyyattu* the make up and costume of the dancer is that of *Nandikeswara*.



VAMANA DANCE



## THEYYAM

*Theyyam*, otherwise known as *Kaliyattom*, is an ancient socio - religious ceremony performed in Kerala since very remote times. As the word *Kaliyattom* denotes, this is a sacred



dance performance for Kali. *Kaliyattom* is sometimes called *Theyyattom* because every *thera* or village was duly bound to perform it. These names show that *kaliyattoms* were special festivals of religious and social importance.

In ancient times every village of Kerala has its own common shrine called *Kavu* and it was imperative to have *Kaliyattom* performed in front of it. As the word *Kali* has also the meaning of safety in Malayalam *Kaliyattom* may have the significance of a sacred dance for social or family safety.

The Dravidians were worshipers of the ferocious goddess called *Kottavai*. To propitiate this goddess a peculiar dance was performed. It would not be mere conjecture to say that the old



Kottavai dance performance was the actual foundation on which *kaliyattom* took roots later on. As Kerala was primarily a land of people with *Sakthi (Bhagavathi)* worshippers, the *kaliyattom* became very much a part and parcel of the social structure.

*Kali* worship made its stronghold especially in the northern parts of Kerala, known as the *Kolathirinad*, the ancient kingdom of *Kolathiri* (Chirakkal Raja). Therefore it was in *Kolathunad* (North Malabar) that *Kaliyattom* flourished more than in any other part of Kerala. In this way, a wide range of *Kaliyattom* nurtured and developed. With the passage of time along with different aspects of *Kali*, various other *Kolams* of heroes and heroines were defined and special *Kolams* were attributed to them. Thus we find Sankaracharya as *Pottan Daivam*, Thacholi Othenan as *Ponniatu Pataveeran*, Katangot Makka as *Makkapottu* and the great commander of the *Kolathiri* militia as *Vayanattukulavan*.

In short, in *Kaliyattom*, permanent forms and special attributes are given to *Kolams* and divine as well as hero worship is substantially and methodically carried out.

Each manifestation in a *Kaliyattom* is known as *Kolam*. *Kolam* actually means shape or



form. God, goddess, hero or heroine have their own peculiar and specific forms, and each form has its own particular representative aspect. To bring out that aspect each *Kolam* has special features in face painting which is a work of difficult craftsmanship and is a unique piece of art. Some *Kolam*s take eight to ten hours time to paint the face according to strict rules of tradition. In the same way the crowns, head dress, breast plates, arm ornaments, bangles, garland and above all the woolen or cotton garments are all so elaborately furnished and variously shaped that the figure of a *kolam* is something to see and wonder. It is said that the vivid and masterly ornamental dressing of *Kathakali* has originated from this.

*Kaliyattoms* are generally conducted in places of worship called *Kottams* and *Palliyara*. Besides, there are compartments set apart from family houses where the family deities are worshipped. In such houses *Kaliyattoms* are performed in the courtyards just in front of the separate compartments. (Normally the season for *kaliyattom* is from December to May).





There are various ceremonies conducted in a *Kaliyattom*, the most serious and important being the actual manifestation of the *kolam*, just before the *Kolam* a song describing the history



of that particular *Kolam* and its great strength and holy aspect is sung by a set of people to the accompaniment of *chenda* and *elathalam*. After the songs are sung the *Kolam* appears before the assembly of the people, in front of the place of worship. It is believed that the spirit of the

god or goddess or hero or heroine of the *Kolam* migrates into the person who has assumed that *Kolam*. Then the *Kolam* performs various types of dancing with *chenda* and *elathalam* as the chief accompaniments.

In the actual dancing there are the slow-paced dances and fast moving ones. The former is called *Pathiniyattom* and the latter *Elakiyattom*. Swords and shields, bows and arrows and other weapons are used. Sometimes sword play of a very high order is displayed.

*Kaliyattom* is performed generally in the night and sometimes some of the *Kolams* will go on even after day-break. Cloth torches (Panthoms) and the coconut leaf torches (chootu) are used in plenty. The red light of the torches with sharp contrast of light and shade gives the entire scene a glamorous setting. The crowns and the articles of dress receive further additions of pictorial cuttings of white tender coconut leaves and bunches of red flowers.

*Kaliyattom* is conducted for propitiating god and goddess to bless the family or community.

There are particular communities for performing *kaliyattom*. It is rather curious that *kaliyattom* which is performed for all sections of people in Kerala from Brahmins downwards, the persons authorized to assume *Kolams* are from the classes, like Malayans, *Peruvannans* and Velas.



### PANAR KALI

*Panarkali* is a mirthful dance of the *panar* of Malabar area. Here two characters, a male and a female called *Thekken* and *Thekkethy* respectively, stage a mock quarrel as in *Kurathiyattom*. But the songs which are in the nature of questions and answers between husband and wife, show the suspecting husband's inquisitive queries and the clever replies of an intelligent wife. A jester who criticise and makes fun of the customs and manners of the members of the upper strata of society also participates in the dance at later stage.

In some places instead of *Panars* the *Kakkalans* perform this dance and hence is known as *kakkarissi natakam*.

### THUMPI THULLAL

This is a dance in which only women participate. It is usually performed in connection with the Onam festival. All the girls are dressed in immaculate *Onakkodi* dress and sit round in a circle. At the centre of the circle sits the performer. Now all the girls sing in chorus to the rhythmic clapping of hands and occasional vociferations known as *Kuravai*. The rhythm and the





pitch of the clapping and the songs rise to feverish heights when the girl in the centre enters into a trance and begins to dance.

### PARAYANTHIRA

This is a ritual dance performed before *Bhagavathi* temple in connection with festivals. The concept is that the devil-aide of goddess *Bhadrakali* performs this dance after the death of



*Darika*. The costumes of the *Thira* are colourful and captivating. The large headgears, projecting eyes, high-ridged noses, protruding tongues, flowing black hair behind the pleated skirts and overcoats all make the dancers completely supernatural. For each

dancer there is a girdle of bells. Anklets are also tied to the legs. A variety of dances are executed to the rhythm set by different folk drums. The dance is usually performed by Parayas.

### KANNIYAR KALI

One of the centuries old, but well-known folk dance of Kerala, *Kanniyarkali* (also known as *Desathukali*) is a fast moving, militant dance form attuned to rhythmic devotional folk songs and *asuravadyas*. It is said to be a ritual offering in honour of the deity *Bhagavathy*.

The dances last for four days and are preceded by three days of *Karivela* and *vattakali*. The programme for each day is known by a different name; the first day's kanniyarakali being called *Erawakkali* and the next three day's items being known as *Aandikootu*, *Vallon* and *Malama* respectively. There are more than forty steps or *puratts* for the four-day programme and these are unique and impressive.



Though performed by Nairs, *Kanniyarkali* depicts the life of the Malayans, one-time slaves and dependents of the feudal chieftains and *jenmies* of the Malabar area in Kerala. The accompanying folk songs also throw some light on the ancient feudal relationship.



Musical instruments like *chenda*, *maddalam*, *elathalam* and *chengila* are used to time the rhythm. The costumes are very colourful.

#### VITHUCHORIYAL

This dance, also known as *Vishuvela*, is a ceremonial dance of *Parayas* held during the sowing season. There are two dancers, one in the make-up of a *Bhootham* and the other like a *Velichappadu* with red scarf and sword. They go about from house to house to the accompaniment of percussion instruments and are offered a full measure of paddy. This is called *parayeduppu*. Then they move to the temple where the *thullal* (dance) and *kalpikkal* (divine ordering) are



performed. It is accompanied by songs which seek blessings for an early and bountiful crop.

Certain variations of this dance are also seen in Palakkad district where it is called *Vithiduka* or *Kathiru*.

### PARUNTHATTAM



PARUNTHATTAM

Victory of the good over the evil is the concept behind the theme. The theme of the dance revolves around great heroes of ancient times. The art form is popular in the Central Travancore.

### KURATHIYATTOM

*Kurathis* are a set of gypsies who go about from place to place telling fortunes. In this dance called *Kurathiyattom*, two *Kurathis* first enter dancing, in the guise of characters representing the wives of Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva. Then they stage a controversy through songs over the exploits of their respective husbands. The favourable point in one's favour becomes the butt of



ridicule at the other's hands and while one praises profusely the other condemns sarcastically. This is interpreted with fluent mime and brought out in picturesque postures. The gestures, bodily flexions and foot-work, show perfect coordination and rhythmic grace. After this *Kuravan* (male) and *kurathi* enters and enact a mock quarrel. Though lacking in dramatic element, the technique is skillfully exploited and the exposition of different moods-suspected chastity, injured innocence, disappointment and the joy of reconciliation – are of a high artistic level. *Maddalam*, *Kaimani* etc., are the instruments used.

## KUMMI

This is women's dance prevalent in Kerala. The dancers move in a circle and the hand gestures signify reaping and harvesting. One of the women leads the singing with a favourite song while the rest take up the refrain. Each performer renders a new line in turn and the dancing stops when all get tired.

In local variations of the *Kummi* dance men also participate. Here the men with small sticks in their hands form a circle, inside which stand the women in a smaller ring. The beating of the sticks by



men and the clapping of hands by women are perfectly synchronized with the steps that they make and also with the rhythm of the songs.



### THAPPUMELAKKALI

This is a group dance of Parayas of Malappuram district in which the dancers strike rhythm on a small drum (thappu). A vigorous and powerful dance it gradually rises to a crescendo of rhythmic fervour with the dancers swirling round their feet in steps, and hands striking perfect time.

### KOLAM THULLAL

This is ritual offering usually performed to get rid of the troubles caused by evil spirits. Here a number of characters, with hideous make-up and flat big head-gears dance to the accompaniment of primitive percussion instruments. The costumes of the dancers are highly decorative and rich in colour and brilliance. There is no accompanying song.

### KADUVA KALI

This dance, also known as *Pulikali*, is performed during the *Moharram* season. Dancers realistically made up as tigers with appropriate costumes go about from house to house, dancing vigorously to the loud beating of instruments like *Udukku*, *Thakil*, etc.



### PAKKANARATTOM

This art form is performed to drive out evil spirits from hons. It is believed that Pakkanar and his wife visit hayses. They dance in tune with the beat of different drums. Usually this art form is performed during Onam festival.



## OPPANA

*Oppana* is an exquisite folk art form performed traditionally among the muslim community in Kerala. The song and dance programme is performed by females to entertain the bride and by



males to entertain the bridegroom. Harmonium, *tabla* and *ganjra* are the musical instruments used. The songs are based on *mappila pattu*

## ARJUNA NRITHAM

*Arjunanritham* is a popular dance form in Alleppy and Kottayam districts. This is performed by one or two persons at night and the lighting is done by the traditional lamp called *Nilavilakku*. Arjuna was proficient in dance among the Pandavas and he is supposed to have danced and sung praising Bhadrakali. Since the lower part of the garments of the dance is made of peacock feathers, the dance is also known as *Mayilpeeli Thoorkkam*.

## MARGAM KALI

Margam Kali is an art form popular among the Syrian Christian community of the erstwhile Travancore. This consists of group dances and martial arts like *parichamuttu kali*. The theme of the songs revolves round the life of St. Thomas.



### KUTHIYOTTAM

This is in vogue in Thiruvananthapuram District, performed mostly in Devi temples. A performer, wearing a crown, similar to that used by the 'Ottanthullal' artiste, and three other characters, with three different facial make-ups, dance rhythmically to the background of percussion instruments. The songs are in praise of *Durga*, *Padapattu*, and *Kalaripattu* and songs in praise of deities. It is usual to have partitioners of red silk at the performing arena.

### KUMMATTI

*Kummattikali* is a mask dance popular in South Malabar. The dancers wear brightly painted wooden masks. During onam season groups of dancers donning masks and adorning themselves



with leaves and grass go from house to house. The songs are melodious and deal with devotional themes. The rhythm is provided by vibrating the string of a bow-like instrument called *onavillu*.

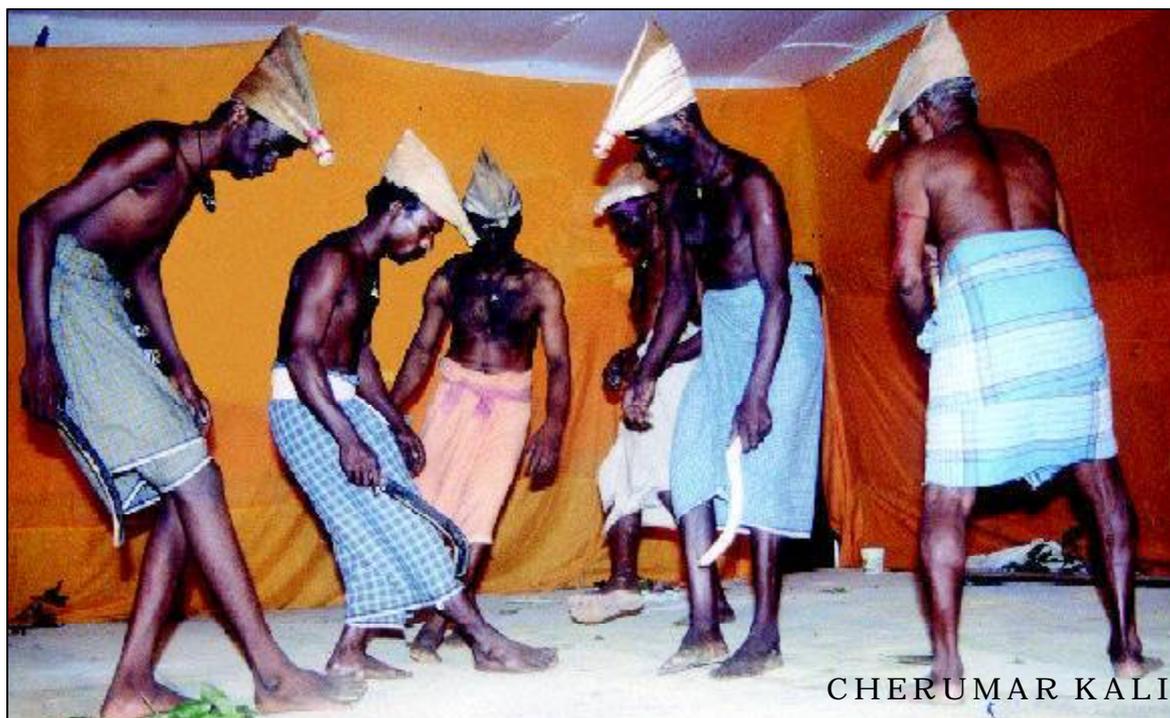
### CHERUMAR KALI

This is a mixed dance of the Cherumar community (mainly agricultural labourers) of the Malabar area of Kerala in which both men and women participate. They dance holding arms together, or shoulder to shoulder, linked in a back-lock. The dance develops into a variety of pleasing pattern, in which the men and women change their positions with amazing rapidity.



The entire group of dancers sing songs and move dexterously in swift rhythm of the feet in fascinating wave-like movement.

The costumes of the dancers are peculiar with conical caps called *palathopi*, *dhoti* and *red*



*sash*. Sandal paste is smeared all over the body and face and garlands of red *chethi* flowers are worn. The dancers have anklets tied to the legs and dance to the timing and rhythm set by percussion instruments like *veekkan chenda*, *karu*, *maram* etc.

The dance is performed usually after harvest and in connection with marriage and festivals.

### THIRAYATTOM

*Thirayattom* is performed as part of festive celebrations in *Kavus* in Central Malabar. The word *thira* means luster and the *Thirayattom* dance is said to cast radiance by virtue of his gorgeous array, made all the more dazzling by the blaze of torches, made of clusters of dried coconut fronds. The performers, through appropriate costumes, assume the roles of the divinities they hold in veneration. *Thirayattom* is the hereditary profession of Vannan community.



### AADI VEDAN

*Aadi vedan* is an ancient folk art prevalent in certain areas of Kannur district. *Aadi* and *Vedan* represent parvathy and siva. All the characters who enact these two roles normally belong to two different communities. It is performed during day time.

### KUTHIRAKALI

This is a ritualistic art prevalent in Malappuram District. A horse is fashioned with bamboo splints and tender fronds of the coconut palm. This horse is lifted and carried on the shoulders of performers who dance to the rhythm of Chenda and to the accompaniment of songs sung by them.

### KOTHAMOORIYATTAM

This art form is performed in Kannur District. The leader along with the troupe go to each house, play on the Chenda and begins to sing. Two characters with face masks made out of the stalk of coconut fronds and with yellow tassels of *Kuruthola* sing the refrain. Along with this they go through an enactment of comical gestures. There comedy characters are known as *Paniyans*. Another character the representation of bull, worn round his waist, dances in peculiar style. *Kotha* means child and *Moori* means bull. This is an entertainment which the Malayans performs when the harvest is over.

### KOZHIPPORUKALI

*Kozhipporukali* is meant as a community entertainment. The main features of the



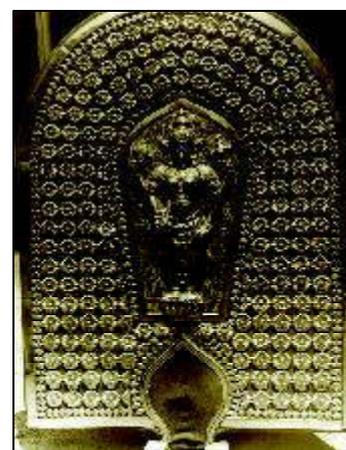
POOTHAN



performance is the singing of a rhythmic song about cock fight, with performers holding staves two to three feet long, with which they derive stylized blows in the air and show off their valour. Background accompaniments are provided by bells and dolak. There are many intricate martial movements which the performers go through. At the end of each complex move the performers shout in imitation of cock's crow. After commencing in a slow tempo this is worked up to a high pitch before the performance concludes. This art form is prevalent in Chirayinkizhu, Kilimanoor and Pazhaya kunnnummal at Thiruvananthapuram District.

### THIDAMBU NRITHAM

This is prevalent in Kannur District and in some parts of Kozhikode District, in North Kerala. Namboothiris conduct the dance. Marars play on percussion instruments. Persons belonging to the Nambissan, Varier, Unithiri communities, serve as assistance. One namboothiri to bear the *Thidambu*, seven players on percussion instruments, two persons to carry lamps, in all ten persons are needed to present this. The dance is performed with the decorated effigy of the Devi carried on the head. Foot work is most important and this is executed to the rhythm of the drums. The steps are tuned to various rhythms like *Thakiladi Adantha*, *Chembada*, and *Panchari*.



THIDAMBU

### CHERUMAKKALI

Popular in Malappuram District. This is performed by the Pulaya community. This entertainment is presented during temple festivals or during Onam, Vishu and such other festive days.

When the performers stand in a circle, the leader of the troupe recites two lines of a song. The others repeat the lines. After doing this twice, they dance in a circle, with hand gestures, to a peculiar kind of rhythm. When the song nears the end, the tempo of the dance rises. Mostly the rhythm remains unchanged. But the steps, could be circular and diagonal. No percussion instruments or lighting effects are used.



## THOLPAVAKOOTHU

This is known also as *Pavakoothu* and *Nizhalkoothu*. Prevalent in Palakkad and Ponnai Taluks. This is handled, traditionally by *Pulavanmars*. The *pavakal*, or puppets are made of deer skin, to represent characters in the Ramayana epic. The puppets are arranged behind a long curtain. Behind the puppets brightly burning oil wick lamps are kept. The singer recites songs from the kamba Ramayana. To the trend of the song, the puppets are made to move and dance. When the song ends, an entertaining description of the puppet characters take place. A chenda in the shape of *Para* (measure) *Idora* is used to give percussion effects.



THOLPAVAKOOTHU

## GARUDAN THOOKAM

This dance form is presented in some temples where the installed deity is Badrakali. Two or three dancers in the garb of Garuda, dance to the rhythm of percussion instruments. The dancer is known as *Thookakaran*. In imitation of Garuda (the bird king) the dancers preen the feathers with their beaks, carry snakes in the beak, dance with wings spread in circles, in an ecstasy of joy. And this, against the background of the rhythm of instruments, the shouts of the onlookers, and the bursting of crackers, all of which combine to produce the effect of a battle. At the end, the *Thookakaran* climbs into a cart, circumambulates the temple and donates blood.

While goddess Kali was fighting demon Darika, Garuda, the vehicle of Lord Vishnu, flew round and round and viewed the scene. Even after slaying Darika, the flaming anger of the goddess was not assuaged. She turned against Garuda. Though he pleaded a thousand times for



pardon, the terrible goddess calmed down only after drinking three drops of Garuda's blood. This art form, a votive offering, revives this theme.

Instruments like the Chenda, Maddalam, Cymbals, Horns etc. are used. This art form is prevalent in Kottayam and Alappuzha districts.

### CHOZHICKALI

Prevalent in Thrissur District. Children don the garb of *Chozhi*. The elders don the costumes of *Kalan*, *Chitragupta* and *Muthiyamma*. The leader stands in the midst of children, garbed as *Chozhi*. The leader makes the *Chozhis* sit in a circle round him and begins to sing. The *Chozhis* clap their palms. Later, the elders in the garb of *Kalan* (God of Death) and *Chitragupta* enter to the accompaniment of yells. The *Muthiamma* sings humorous songs.

After commencing the performance, in a vacant lot, the performers go from house to house and perform this.

The costume of *Chozhi* consists of dried plantain leaves, tied all over the body. And two horns would be sticking out from the forehead. *Kalan* and *Chitragupta* wear black clothes and masks of terrifying aspect with fangs bared.



CHARADU PINNI KALI

### THALAMKALI (THALIKAKKALI)

This is an art form where physical culture amount much. It is prevalent in Malappuram District, and is performed by the *Thiyas*. It is said that this used to be popular as a performance during the celebrations of *Thalikettu* (a ritual in which the young girls who attain puberty go through a mock marriage)



The performers stand in a circle and sing to a rhythm. After that they carry plates in both palms and go through intricate twisting and turning. And along with this are shown various types of gestures too. However intricate the twisting and turning, the plates will remain stuck to the palms. With a pot full of water on the head and plates carried on the palm, various dances are also exhibited.

### AMMANATTOM

Ammana is a hollow metallic ball which contains numerous metallic pieces inside. Women perform the ammanattom dance, using four to twenty-four ammanas which are thrown up and caught deft missing none. The jungling of the ammanas perfectly time with the rhythm of the Brahmani songs sung by the performer.



AMMANATTOM

### THEYANNAM

This is a ritualistic art, performed by the Pulaya and Kurava communities. Theyyannam is found in Mavelikara, Pandalam and some other places in Alappuzha District.

When man turned to cultivation, his liking and respect for this began to increase. Though he cultivates different crops, he has a partiality for paddy cultivation. This is the theme of *Theyyannam*. Eight men plough up a field and plant seedlings. At this stage the women folk enter, with breakfast for their men folk. In the ploughed up field, the women start replanting the seedlings. With women on one side and men on the other side, the preliminary work of agriculture is completed. After this comes the harvest and then the threshing. Thus all stages of paddy cultivation are represented.

Harmonium, Daka and Tabala are needed as musical accompaniments.

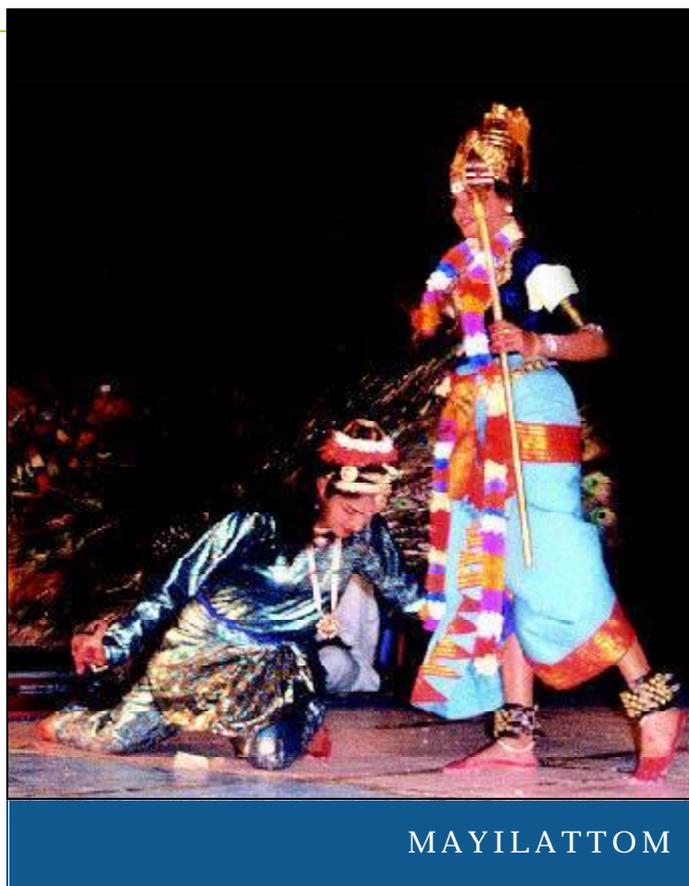


### THEKKANUM THEKKATHIYUM

Popular in Palakkad and Malappuram Districts. This is handled by the *Panars*. Their daily profession is the making of palm leaf umbrellas.

Two characters (one male and one female) and two percussion instrumentalists form a troupe. The characters sing, exchange dialogues and perform stylized movements, through well defined steps.

The instrumentalists repeat the songs and put questions to the characters. Some portions from the Ramayana from the theme of the play, sometimes, portions from the Mahabharatha are also used. When needed by the actors the accompanist keeps time with tiny cymbals (*Kuzhithalam*).



MAYILATTOM

### NAGACHUTTU

Popular in Thiruvananthapuram and Chirayinkizhu taluks and in Kilimanoor, Pazhayakunnummal and Thattathumala regions.

This is in vogue among *Vedars*, *Parayars* and *Kuravar* tribes. Eight persons for the dance and two to play percussion instruments- in all ten persons are needed for staging this.

From among the eight performers, two each twin around each other like serpents and rising up, battle it out with sticks. The techniques are repeated several times. Sandalwood paste on the forehead, a red towel round the head, red silk around the waist and bells round the ankles.



These form the costume. This is a combination of snake worship and Kalaripayttu.

### PALLUKALI

In vogue in Chittoor Taluk in Palakkad District. This is a dramatic visual art. This ritualistic art is handled by those belonging to the *Pariah* community.

An artist in the costume of *Ganapathy* appears first on the stage. He is followed by such characters as *Panakaran* (rich man), his servant his two wives, a *Kolkaran* (he is also the comedian). After the other characters make their entry the *Ganapathy* withdraws. Then the theme is expounded. The leader sings a song in *Kavu* style. According to the meaning of the song, those on the stage start acting and singing the dialogues. Of the two wives of the rich man, one turns informer against him. This and the misfortunes that follow upon this, form the core of the theme. On account of the prayers of the other wife it all ends happily.

The male characters have costumes similar to those of *Kathakali*. The female characters don dhotis and upper cloth. Facial make up is used. The female characters tie up their hair. Nandanar, who was refused admission into the temple, but finally got himself admitted through his high devotion and won many devotees to him is presented through this art form, with the help of music and dancing.

### MALAYAN KETTU

This art form is in vogue all over Kannur District. This is fully ritualistic in scope.

This is usually performed for the sake of those women who have miscarriages and who are advised by the astrologers to have this ritual. Under a decorated 'Pandal', *Kalams* are drawn with the help of rice flour, charcoal powder, and turmeric powder. The pregnant woman sits in front of this *Kalam*. Actors in the garbes of deities like Raktheswari, Gulikan, Yakshan, Yakshi, come and dance in front of the *Kalam*.