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"Exploring Sacred Traditions: A Comprehensive Study of Kali Worship at the Mannadi Mudipura Devi Temple"

Anugraha Roy,
M.A,NET
Asst Prof on Contract,Dept of History
S.B College,Changanacherry
Address – Marutholickal (H)
Kuriannoor P.O
Thiruvalla
Pathanamthitta
689550

ABSTRACT

Mannadi Bhagavati Temple, situated in Kerala's Pathanamthitta district, venerates goddess Bhadrakali and holds a mystique surrounded by eerie and captivating tales. It's the ancestral deity of the Pandalam Royalty. The temple follows Kerala's traditional architecture, lacking a roof over the main sanctum sanctorum, with the idol facing east. Legend has it that the goddess bestows blessings of offspring upon childless couples, a belief affirmed by historical figures like the rulers of Pandalam, Kayamkulam, and Mangalathu Panicker. The temple received the "Ponmudi," symbolizing the goddess's golden hair, as an offering from the Kayamkulam king after his prayers were answered. Within the temple compound stand three shrines: Pazhayakavu Devi Temple, Puthiyakavu Devi Temple, and Mudipura Devi Temple. Mannadi is listed among the self-manifested Kali temples documented in "Aithihyamala" by Kottarathil Sankunni.

Keywords: Mannadi Bhagavati Temple, Kerala, Pathanamthitta district, goddess Bhadrakali, Pandalam Royalty, traditional architecture, childless couples, blessings, Ponmudi, Kayamkulam king, shrines, Pazhayakavu Devi Temple, Puthiyakavu Devi Temple, Mudipura Devi Temple, swayambhu Kali temple, "Aithihyamala," Kottarathil Sankunni.

The discovery of the idol of mother goddess Bhagavati at Mannadi Temple was serendipitous. In what was once a dense forest, women from the Pulaya community noticed blood flowing from a stone. The ruler, Mangalathu Panicker, was alerted to this phenomenon. Upon investigation, he recognized the divine presence and instructed his attendants to fill the cavity in the stone with sand, hence giving rise to the name "Mannadi," with "mannu" meaning sand in Malayalam.

Panicker then directed a Brahmin to prepare Naivedya (offering) for the goddess. However, a person from the Oorali caste suddenly appeared in a trance, proclaiming that the goddess preferred offerings like Aval (beaten rice), flowers, and bananas, and insisted that Panicker himself offer them without the presence of a Brahmin priest. Despite skepticism, the individual displayed extraordinary feats by scaling a nearby mountain, further affirming his divine connection.

The credibility of Kambithan, the individual from the Oorali caste, was solidified as people witnessed the accuracy of his instructions. Following his guidance, which included offerings and rituals, became the norm at Mannadi Temple. Kambithan gained renown for his accurate predictions, all of which eventually came to fruition. Notably, he assisted the king of Travancore in recovering valuable items lost from the revered Anand Padmanabha Swami temple, showcasing his remarkable abilities and spiritual insight.

Legend has it that the Mannadi Bhagavati Temple holds immense power, capable of granting wishes to those who pray with sincerity and dedication. The temple's origins are steeped in a fascinating tale:

In the past, the region was governed by a Brahmin feudal lord named Vakkuvanjipuzha Pandarathil, who employed a private army led by a commander named Panicker. Panicker resided in a village surrounded by dense forests on three sides. Once, while laborers under Panicker's command were clearing the forest for cultivation, a woman inadvertently drew blood from a rock while sharpening her sickle. Alarmed, she fainted, and her companions hurried to inform Panicker of the peculiar incident. Upon hearing the details, Panicker swiftly relayed the matter to his master, Pandarathil.

Pandarathil, being a Brahmin scholar, recognized the significance of the event as a sign of divine presence. He instructed Panicker to bring bananas and boiled paddy to the site. When Pandarathil arrived, prepared to offer the offerings, a tribal man emerged from the forest and advised against performing any rituals. Claiming to be the vessel for the voice of Kali herself, he conveyed her message that she rejected Brahmin rituals. Instead, she instructed Pandarathil to leave the offerings there for a period before retrieving them.

Despite the tribal man's warnings, many doubted his words, suspecting Panicker's influence. Frustrated by the skepticism, the tribal man demonstrated his divine connection. He boldly proclaimed, "Don’t you believe me? Then I will show you who I am," before vanishing into the forest, with eager youths trailing behind.

Within the depths of the forest lay a hill crowned by a rock resembling an umbrella, known locally as "Kuda para." Climbing this rock was deemed impossible for ordinary individuals, yet the tribal man effortlessly ascended and descended it three times. To further astound the onlookers, he emerged from the forest riding atop a tiger, solidifying their belief in his divine affiliation with Kali.

Inspired by this revelation, Pandarathil, a devout follower of Ma Kali, erected a temple known as Puthiyakavu or Padinjare nada and commenced worshiping her. However, despite his devotion, Pandarathil lamented his childless state. In a divine encounter, the old tribal man appeared once more, prompting Pandarathil to pledge a bunch of golden hairs to Kali if blessed with a son. True to the divine promise, Pandarathil's wife bore a son within the year, and he fulfilled his vow by offering the golden hairs, preserved within the temple to this day.

With the departure of the tribal man, sadness gripped the community, mourning the loss of their conduit to the goddess's words. Yet, the tribal man reassured Pandarathil of a new oracle's arrival. Soon after, a man with a flowing beard and hair emerged in the village, taking his place beneath a towering tree near the temple. Suddenly, he leaped up and began speaking in a manner befitting the divine.

The tribal man, showcasing his divine connection, climbed the Kuda Para rock and emerged riding a tiger, earning the approval of the gathered people who recognized him as the new oracle, subsequently naming him 'Kambithan.'

During Kambithan's tenure, the king of Kayamkulam offered a Golden Crown in exchange for a child, fearing divine retribution from the goddess. The king's wish was granted, leading to Kambithan's appointment as the shrine's oracle. Subsequently, the king of Pandya offered a sword and anklet to Kambithan without specifying the recipient. Angered by this, Kambithan demanded the promised items from the king, who eventually provided them.

Upon Kambithan's demise, the sword and anklet were cast into Parakkadavu pond, where the next oracle would retrieve them to assume the role. Funeral rites for the deceased oracle could only be performed upon the arrival of the successor, but in the absence of one, the oracle's body was preserved in a box filled with salt and camphor.

Presently, Mannadi Temple lacks a Kambithan, with the divine sword resting beneath the water, awaiting another chosen oracle.

The pond's red color originated from a significant event involving a conflict between the elder and younger brothers of the Panicker family, resulting in tragic consequences.

The Mannadi Temple conducts rare and unique rituals associated with three temples, each dedicated to different manifestations of Kali, reflecting a blend of Dravidian tribal culture and later Aryan traditions.

The date and rituals of the festival are determined by senior members of the Kaniyan community, with ceremonies conducted over seven days, including the Thirumudi Ezhunnallath procession to Puthiyakavu Temple, featuring diverse musical instruments and ritualistic practices performed by lower castes.

Choottukatta means, specially tie a dry coconut tree’s leaf. In the past times it was used for lighting in the villages.

Komb, it is made of copper, brass and bronze. The Komb is not an instrument that can behandled as lightly as a trumpet (shunkh). During the Sangam period, the Komb was sounded of the war.

On the day of Kodiyettu, the demons of the goddess Pe, Pishach, Madan, Marutha and Yakshi were released. So, no one walks alone at the night after Kodiyettu. The demons ofthe goddess are then locked with special Pujas after the festivities, Parayeduppu and Mudivachu poottal.

The goddess is seated on a special pedestal in the Pazhayakavu temple. Then the Kaniyan (ganagan) community conducted the `Onnam pattu´ (praises of Kali) with a `orukk´ in front of the Thirumudi. Nandhuni,

Chengila, Kinnan (made of bronze, brass) include instruments were used. After the Onnam pattu, to conduct Mudipooja, Balikkuda, Thukilunarth, Choottuthalam…and then the Devi take to the Mudippura Temple. After the secondday of Kodiyettu, to held the Orukkal chadang (ceremony of makeup) of Devi. Its knownas Niram nalkal. This is done using pigments obtained from nature.

The period of time Velan Panicker(Purangadi), as came to each of houses in the village area for diminish the sick and other problems. He become makeup Kurutholas crown, earing and so on.

One the second day, the 'Randam Pattu´, `Vazhiyoottu´ and special ceremonies conductin the Pazhayakavu Temple.

One the third day, the `Moonnam Pattu´, and many praises of Kali held in the Pazhayakavu Temple.

One the fourth day, the 'Nalam Pattu´ its based Nandhuni, Chengila and Kinnan includedinstruments also used in the Pazhayakavu Temple.

One the fifth day, conduct the `Choottuthalam´, Aarppuvili and `Ottakalan Thullal´ in the midnight. Choottuthalam means, the artist, who perform the Darika character, walksthrough the Choottu (dried coconut tree's leaf) before dawn without any costumes. Ottakalan Thullal means, a person who stand and perform in one leg in the overall ceremonies. Through the Aarppuvili, all of them are feared.

One the sixth day, conduct 'Koodiyattam´, Thukil unarth and praises of Kali. The Koodiyattam is a traditional performing art form in the state of Kerala. This Koodiyattam presented here is not include in UNESCO's list. Koodiyattam, uses hair in made from courgette bark (kavungin pala).

The midnight of the day Koodiyattam, the Kuravar community perform the Bharathakali (kuravar kali), Kambadi (kolkkali). This event held in long far away from the temple. This is done in a place where the vision of the goddess is not directly available. That is, near the largewormwood tree on the right side of the shrine. Through its proves we can realize, the goddesswas praised and danced during the period of untouchability. This ritual stand stable today here.Kutti, Maddalam, Chengila are also used in the Bharathakali.

Kutti means, specially cut and shaped a part of a ripe bamboo.

Maddalam means, made from the core of the rip jack tree's wood. The sound occurring part is made of the skin of udumb and veruk.

One the seventh day, conduct the "Uchabali" (noon festival). The Uchabali will be onFriday or Tuesday after the 10th day of Malayalam month Kumbham. During this day willheld the Mudipooja, Balikkuda and Mudipech.

Uchabali aarambham (the beginning of the uchabali) **:** it will conducted by the lower caste.In this ceremony, the associated elder person says that, "Valyaveettilpura Thamburan…." (in three times) and "Uchabali thudangatto…." (in three times). Thenstart the ceremonies.

Balikkuda means, sacrifice. `Narabali´ were performed here a thousands years ago. That too only once in Twelve years. The victim was a virgin girl. After the time immemorial, Cattle's, Goat, Chicken and Cucumber (Kumbhalanga) also sacrificed. Now, the Arinjavellam (mixed with turmeric and lime) used for this ceremony.

Cooked Naivedya is prepared only on the Uchabali day in the temple. This is prepared using Unakkalari(sun dried rice), tender banana, tender jackfruit, jaggery and coconut. Thisis offered to the deity.

Thousands of deity arrives at the Althara to witness the mudi which is only taken out on this particular day.

Evening of this day, `Thirumudi Ezhunnallath´ will held to the Mudipura temple to Pazhayakavu temple with the performance of instruments.

The midnight of this day, the `Mudipech´ or `Thirumudipech´ (Kali and Darika). Mudipech which is the re-enactment of goddess Bhadrakali killing Daruka is held at night. Goddess Kali comes out the shrine accompanied by Bhootaganas to the Vethal stone (Vethal Kallu thalam chavittal) and becomes ferocious and annihilated the demon Darika. Adivi and Balikkuda areoffered to reduce the ferocity of goddess who has just annihilated demon Darika.Kali tried toa lot of times to kill Darika. Then Daruka hide in the Mudi and Kali used the Thrishoola to kill the Daruka. The event held on the Oottukalam.

Then the goddess transformed into a serene from and taken to Mudipura ways of Puthiyakavutemple and the Udayanpalam (Madan Thara) border area of Mannadi. And also held many rituals during the time include Thalappoli and so on. After two or three days ago conduct an Para Ezhunnallath(jivita ezhunnallath). Through the Ezhunnallath, Devi reaches each houses of the village. It means Devi's blessing get directly each of them and their all things. This timeeach of the home members draw a kalam (rice powder mixed with water) in the dung waxed floor.

After the Para Ezhunnallath, Devi's crown or Mudi become lock with many special Pooja's based. Before the Mudipooja, were conducted Guruthi. At the same time locked the demons ofgoddess include Pe, Pishach, Madan, Marutha, Yakshi with special Pooja's. Rakshakettal : Rakshakettal or Elasu kettal means to safe from evils. The string on the hands is considered as a way to avoid fear. It is made by secret mantras on a ezhuthola or palmleaf. Peditheerkkal : Mudippanikar puts a trident (Thrishoola) on head and sound Ohm of a frightened person.

COMMUNITY BACKGROUND

The Mannadi temple held under the power of Pulaya community but during the festivaltime others castes include Kurava mainly participated many rituals include Kuravar Kali or Bharathakali. In around Kerala, the Pulaya community have their own Kali temples and worships, as the Kuladevata (family deity) in different parts. They worship Smasanakali, Chamundi and so on.

The Pulayas were one of the primitive Adivasi's (dweller's) of primitive Tamil was their language. They were also called Adi-dravidians by some. They had the basic features of Proto-Australoids mixed with features of Negrito race.[3] The main features of Proto-Australoids weredark complexion, short stature, flat nose and long mandibles. The Pulayas have been called bydifferent names.[4] There are various opinions over the question of the origin of their names. Scholars see in these names some traces of the origin of their caste. Interestingly enough, almost all names have a link with traditional occupation of the Pulayas, namely, work in the field. Even though Pulayas is the name by which the entire community is generally known now, they were also

called ‘Cherumas' till the early part of the 19th century. The name Cheruman, was officially given to the Pulayas as per their request to the government because they claimed that they were the descendants of ‘Chera empire' who ruled over Kerala in the AD 1st century. The name came into official use from the time of Sreemoolam Thirunal Maharaja. But even today, they most widely accepted the name is Pulaya.[5]

Logan tried to derive the term Cheruman from the word ‘cheru' which mean ‘small' in Malayalam. He argued that Cheruman denoted the short physical stature of these people. He believed that a race which had for centuries and centuries been fed by its masters on a minimumof what would keep body and soul together, was pretty sure in the long run to degenerate in size.[6] An interpretation related to their indigenous origin and their work in the field as agricultural labourers is given by Padmanabha Menon in the “History of Kerala”. Accordingto him Cheruman or cherumakkal was derived from the Malayalam word cheru which means soil and makkal meaning children. The term thus meant ‘children of soil' or ‘sons of the soil'.According to tradition accepted by several scholars, Cherumas were the original owners of theland.[7]

According to Kusuman, the word Cheruman had the meaning of ‘slaves’ in certain places of Kerala.[8]

Mateer makes a different observation. He thinks that the term Pulaya expressed the idea of impurity because the word ‘Pula' is used to denote ‘pollution' or ‘impurity'.[9]

Pulayan means one who work on land. He is one who work in paddy fields. In original sense, Pulayan meant either the owner or caretaker of a field. The word ‘pula' was not used in the sense of pollution, till the period when the Namboothiri domination over Kerala society was established. The `Pulachi´(pulaya women) were also given a very high position in the traditional society. As Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai wrote in his book ‘Annathe Keralam'.[10]

Malayalam, the word ‘pula' has also another meaning as ‘knowledge'. Hence the word Pulachi,means one who has knowledge, it is also said to mean virgin. All these probably indicates thatthe Pulaya women also were given a high position in the past.[11]

The Pulayas were the most numerous of the agricultural labourers of Travancore -Cochin, two erstwhile kingdoms which now constitute almost two third of Kerala state. According to the tradition, they are believed to have had an influential past. They are said to have owned land and controlled the whole agriculture of Kerala. It is claimed that they even ruled over certain regions of Kerala and that they held high social and economic status. According to T K V Pillai, mentioned in the Travancore State Manual, that the Pulayas had a glorious past till AD700.[12] “The tradition current among the Pulayas themselves points to their having been an influential community in the distant past”. For example, tradition refers to the Pulaya chieftain called Aikkara Yajamanan whose ancestors were Pulaya kings. He was duly acknowledged as the chieftain and lord by the Pulayas of North Travancore. The name Aikkaranad sill remains to suggest that there is some truth in the ancient tale.

The ‘Pulayanar Kotta' a place in Trivandrum city means ‘the fort of the Pulaya chief or king'.Though there is no fort in existence now, the name of the place strongly points toward the existence of one in olden days. A Pulaya princess named ‘Kotha’ is said to have ruled over Kokkothamangalan in Nedumangad taluk near

Trivandrum.[13]

As the 'Cochin State Manual' says, the Pulayas were probably in possession of the country for a long period. But historians believe that the arrival of the Aryans by AD 700, marked the decline of the Pulaya supremacy. They accepted the strong from among the local population and made them king or leaders (Kshatriya) who accepted the Aryans as their guardians and advisers. The Brahmins together with the Kshatriyas are said to have succeeded in making thelocal population believe in and accept the superiority of the former. Making use of the influencethey gained, the Brahmins built temples and persuaded the original inhabitants to offer their properties as gifts to the gods and goddesses who would protect them from all dangers and evils. Gradually, the temples which grew rich with the farmers land and money became the property of the Brahmins. 'The land and properties transferred came to be regarded as Devaswam and Brahma swam and enjoyed freedom from devastation b the enemy forces'. Later, the right of ownership itself was vested on the Brahmins by law. The farmers who wanted to keep their relationship with the land became daily wage workers in their properties. Generally,the farmers were sold along with the land. Eventually, they become salves of the owner of theland as well as essential commodity for the workmanship on the land. Thus all the Pulayas became agrestic slaves. Thus by AD 1800, all the glory of the Pulayas had vanished and theywere reduced to a state of slavery. Slavery was very strong in Kerala in beginning of the 19th century. There were even slaves market. When the Pulayas and their work in the soil began tobe regarded unclean and they became untouchables and unapproachable.[14]

The Pulayas were denied entry to temples for worship in early period of time in Kerala. Not only that, they had to stay 64feet away from the temple. They worshipped at places called Kavus or groves. They believed in a non empirical world of supernatural beings called Pisachus which expected propitiation from human beings in various form. The principal Pisachu which the Pulayas worshipped were Kali, Chathan, Apasmaram, Parukutty, Karimkutty, Marutha and Mallan. They were worshipers of ancestral spirits also.[15]

In Mannadi temple, the Pulayas has their own identity and power throughout the religious practices. Basically, the idol of Kali or Murti, become identified by them. One day a pulaya women sharped blood flowed through the stone. Then the Mangalathu Panicker reached their and says that it is self originated Devi swaroopam. Then the time to till the present, the Pulayacommunity worshiped Kali goddess with many rituals based. The one of the most important as that, the Uchabali. Most widely the Kuravan community also participated the Kuravankali during the annual festival. In early period, the Kambithan as an oracle here but now their haven't any Kambithan. Only a community based priest or high positioned member belong to the Kavinal family(pulaya family). We have to know most of the Kali temples, today under thecontrol of the high class sections. But in Mannadi Devi temple till the ritual practices of the Pulaya community.[i]

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