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## Research Article

### RITUAL AS A PERFORMING ART A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF 'TUKKAM' IN KERALA

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#### ABSTRACT

This paper tries to understand a ritual called tukkam in Manarkadu temple in Kerala. The temple is located in Kottayam district. It explains the social process of transformation of ritual and its practices. Narrating the ritual process of Manarkadu tukkam, the paper locate a local history of the ritual and its artistic performance. Further, it delineates the historical-social process of transformation of ritual to performing art. As a traditionally embedded ritual, tukkam has been shifted to as an art for which special training institutions are formed to teach the ritual to perform any place which is not a ritual space too. Thus, paper takes us to understand ritual on the one hand and the transformation to art on the other.

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#### INTRODUCTION

Tukkam is a swinging ceremony which is mainly associated with the Hindu believers of Kerala and it is occurred at different places of Kerala including Trivandrum, Ernakulam and Kottayam districts. As a ritual, it crosses different spheres of the society for which the present study is focusing. As a case study, the present study is concentrated on the ritual practices of Tukkam and its specificities which is mainly conducted in the Bhagavati temple of Manarkadu of the Kottayam district of Kerala.

Manarkadu tukkam conducted in the Manarkadu Bhagavathi temple of Kottayam district. In this temple, garudan tukkam is the popular ritual and it was conducted three times a year in the earlier times, i.e., in *meena bharani* (the day which is known as the birthday of Mother Goddess) *kumbha bharani* (It is the day of bharani in the month of kumbham) and *pathamudayam* (The tenth day of the Malayalam months thulam and medam). At present it is performed at *meena bharani* and *pathamudayam*.

The special pujas, *kalamkarikkal* (the nercha payasam or nercha kanji which is already prepared in the temple for providing for the worshippers after the nivedya) and *bharani sadhya* (the sadhya for the devoted people) are arranged in *meena bharani* day. In olden days *bharani sadhya* was provided in the temporary shed near the temple ground. But

today it is done in the new auditorium which is also arranged with the facilities of idathavalam (temporary rest house) for the devotees of God Ayyappa. Mayilpili tukkam (a kind of tukkam) was another famous swinging ceremony conducted in this temple. But now this ceremony is not performed this temple because of the lack of efficient and dedicated devotees or swingers<sup>1</sup>.

In Manarkadu temple 'Nairs'<sup>2</sup>, one of the upper caste Hindu communities of Kerala have the traditional right to conduct this ritual. Members of other castes dedicate *nercha or Vazhipadu* which means special offering. But it is done by the devotee from the Nair caste. Aripparambu karakkar<sup>3</sup> have the right to conduct the garudan tukkam at first. In this temple, the Goddess Manarkattamma is in the form of mirror deity. The idol of *naga raja*, *naga yakshi*, *kshetrapala*, *neeli*, *elamba*<sup>4</sup> and *velicchapadu* (oracle) are situated in the various sides of the temple.

The ritual *kalamezhuthum pattam* (a floor art with songs) is conducted in the temple during the month of vrischikam for a period of 51 days. It is carried out by the unit of Nair Service Society of the locality and the traditional families related to the temple. *Kumbha bharani*, *meena bharani* and *pathamudayam* are known as *aattavisheshangal* which means specificities of dances<sup>5</sup>.

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In this temple, *ottatukkam*, and *irattatukkam*, are the two forms of *tukkam*. *ottatukkam* means one devotee or *garudan* in one *tukkacchadu* or hanging thread. *Irattatukkam* means two devotees or two *garudans* in one *tukkacchadu*. *Thalapoli* (it is a traditional mode of welcoming deities by girls holding lamps and flowers in a vessel) is also conducted in relation to this *tukkam* ceremony<sup>6</sup>.

### **Garudan Tukkam**

In *garudan tukkam*, the devotees wear dressings and makeup of *garuda* (eagle). Earlier the local people brought the devotees who lived from 8–10 kilometers distance from temple on their shoulders. The votaries give feast and *dakshina* or offering to the local people. Later the devotees were brought to the temple by rickshaws and now by vans. The major stages of *garudan tukkam* are *garudankeli* (playing by devotee wearing *garudan's* dressings), *kalithattu* (the playing stage), *eduthuvaravu* (bringing the *garuda* on shoulders) and *kalithattin parava* (the playing stage which conducted *garudanirtham* (dance of *garuda*). In the past, *karakar* (local people) gave cloths to the devotee after conducting the *garudan tukkam*. Now they give cloths and money. The devotee gets flowers and garlands from the priest and handover them to the hook-fixer. After the *tukkam* ceremony, the devotee buys it and takes this to his own house.

There is a ceremony called *thalavattom*. It means to say *thalam* with using *uruttuchenda*. In the past saying *thalavattom* was done more times till morning because of less number of devotees but now because of the increase in the number of devotees, saying *thalavattom* has shortened. Each *thalam* (rhythm) has its own time. Each *thalam* reaches its maximum level and begin to slow. After the *thalavattom*, a small hook is fixed into the *thookkacchadu* (a wooden beam using for hanging the devotee) and, in the past, *ottapradakshinam* (running around the temple) was conducted. After this the hook-fixer hands over the flower and garland to the devotee. *Garudan parava* means the devotee playing rhythmically before *tukkam*. After this the devotee takes rest while *melakkar* (instrumental players of particular ritual) plays *keli* (play or dance).

In the *garudan tukkam*, musical instruments such as *chenda* (drum) and *elathalam* (a kind of musical instrument) are used. The so called *eleven garudan tukkam* had been performed some years ago. In the *eleven garudan tukkam* the *tukkacchadu* moves with twelve members, including one who represents *Devi*. The special *tukkacchadu* for it is kept in the temple. This special *tukkacchadu* is constructed with huge wheels having 12 holes. The *thadicchadu* (wooden scaffold) is pulled by the people at the time of *tukkam*. The wheel of the *tukkacchadu* is connected only when the *tukkam* starts and otherwise the wheel of the *tukkacchadu* is separated from it. There is two *tukkacchadu* kept in the temple for *garudan tukkam*.

The dressings of *garudan tukkam* are a peculiar one. The dressings and make up of *garudan tukkam* looks similar to *kathakali* (a ritual art form of Kerala) *Garudan's* beak is connected with the mouth of the devotee. *Uduthukettu* (a kind of dressing) is similar to *kathakali*, which is the classical art of Kerala but there are some differences as well. One difference is with the beak of the *garuda*. Other one is the dress which covers the lower part of the body in the *garudan tukkam* lying

down like a skirt while it is not so in the *kathakali*. Dressing is very colourful. There is a crown similar to *kathakali*. Before adorning the crown, *mudi* (the headgear) is used<sup>7</sup>.

There is a myth behind the *garudan tukkam* which is connected with *Darika* (a demon) *vadham* (killing). The significance of *garuda* is seen in the fight of *Darika*. *Devas* want *Siva* to safeguard them from *Darika*. Then they went to *Mahavishnu*. *Vishnu* sent *garuda* to understand the situation and the seriousness of war. *Kali* cut *garuda* because of misunderstanding her enemy. At this time *garuda's* blood fell into the ground. *Garuda* told the real fact and *kali* blessed him. *Devi* pleased in *garuda's* blood and blessed him. So there is a belief that bloodshed is inevitable for pleasing the goddess. On the basis of this *garudan tukkam* performed. Mean time, *Darika* had a boon that if one drop of his blood fall into the ground, thousands of *asuras* (demons) will emerge from this. The egoistic *Darika* began to kill all the people. To avoid this, *vethalam* (a ghost being) comes near *Darika*. According to this at the time of war *vethalam* thrown out his tongue and the blood of *Darika* fell into the tongue of *vethalam*. So no *asuras* were created. When the fight became in its extreme level *Kali Devi* killed the *Darika*. The anger of *Devi* was not stopped after killing *Darika*. Then *devas* performed *theyyam* and *padayani* (the two folk lore arts of Kerala that are popularly practicing in Malabar regions and Pathanamthitta district of Kerala). But anger of *Devi* could not be stopped. At this time *garuda* was shedding blood from its feathers. *Devi* blessed the *garuda* and later *garuda* became *devi's* vehicle. *Garudan tukkam* is conducted to symbolize this.

There is a myth also behind *mayilpili tukkam*. *Arjuna* tried to please the Goddess *Bhadrakali* in the *Arjuna* war. In this time, *Devi* wants *Arjuna* to give *kuruthi* (sacrifice) to her. *Devi* asked devotees to perform *kuruthi* by dedicating themselves, i.e., self-dedication and self-sacrifice which means each change himself by performing bloody sacrifice of their mind's evil spirits. Therefore *Arjuna* dedicated himself to Goddess and performed *mayilpili tukkam*. Thus, this kind of *tukkam* came into being. In the *Bharatha* war, *Arjuna* who succeeded, rejoiced and adorned and extolled *bhagavathi* in a dancing style by using bow and arrow. There is a belief that this is the basis of the origin of this dancing ritual art. So it is known as *vijaya nritham* or *arjuna nritham* (a kind of folk art). This is another kind of myth related to *mayilpili tukkam*<sup>8</sup>.

Certain mythological belief associated with *Sree Manarkadu Bhagavathi Temple*. In accordance with *Thanniyil Illam* (Members of this *illam* become the administrators of the temple in the earlier times) is related to it and they have the right to held enshrined *Kodungalluramma* in *Manarkadu*. The place *Manarkadu* is earlier known as *Elambanakkadu*, the *yakshi elamba* lived during that time. *Manarkattu Bhagavathi* killed *elamba* and throw her *mani* (bell). Thus the *maniyerkadu* became *Manarkadu*. Such kind of myth reveals the social acceptance of this ritual<sup>9</sup>.

*Garudan* is the vehicle of *Bhagavathi*. For pleasing Goddess *Bhagavathi garudan tukkam* is conducted. The day of *kumbha bharani* is regarded as the arrival of *Devi*. So every year, the temple is kept opened for the whole day of *kumbha bharani*. Initiation ceremony of Education, marriage and other offerings are conducted in this temple. *Kuruthi* or sacrifice is not conducted in this temple."<sup>10</sup> *Kuruthi* to get rid of all sorts of

blood sacrifices in this temple. It could be considered as a reforming ritual practices that suit to vedic forms of worship.

### **Influence of Folk Art and Ritual Art**

The ritual tukkam referred as the folk art while its ritualistic significance. The costumes, dressings and make up performance are similar to folk art. In Manarkadu temple, the folk influence seen in garudan tukkam and mayilpili tukkam (it is a kind of tukkam using mayilpili). Mayilpili tukkam was a famous dancing art which exists in the Bhadrakali temples in Kerala. It is also known as tukkappayattu (using sword and shield in tukkam). The vilkaruppans (a caste, performing priests and barbers) community performs it. Farmers conduct this dancing festival at the resting time before starting the next farming after harvesting.

In mayilpili tukkam, the devotee wears mayilpili. They wear crown and kalchilanka (anklet). Mughathu theppu (make up) and uduthu kettu (dressings) in mayilpili tukkam seems to folk nature. Saying kavitham (bhagavathi sthuthi, it's doing martial steps with musical songs) is a peculiarity of this tukkam. The subject of kavitham is taken from the story portions of Ramayana and Bhagavatha. The dance is rigorously rhythm based and each kavitham is composed to a particular rhythm. The asan (master) or hook- fixer gives instructions to the devotees for this ritual. That means the saying kavitham by the asan on the ground and the devotee in the air. After the tukkam ceremony, the pujari gives flowers and garland to the devotee<sup>11</sup>. Garudan parava (flying or playing like the bird garuda) is an important art which conducted before performing tukkam. The devotee practices various steps like martial arts and other dancing steps up to three years. After competes the practices necessary for the garudan parava under the discipleship of a kalari asan and performs the arangettam (give a public performance for the first time). After this arangettam, the devotee performs garudan tukkam. It is necessary for teaching various physical exercises, yoga and meditation.

After eating food given by the votary, the devotees show many practices such as certain martial arts in votary's house accompanied with chendamelam (drumstic performance). Along with the devotees, the persons who carry torch and the experts in chendamelam also round the house. They perform various practices in each corner of the house. After one hour, the devotees jump on the tukkachadu and then fly. This is called garudan parava or garudan keli. Later they reach in the temple by playing certain steps. During the time of entering the temple they perform garudan keli and rest few minutes after removing the crown. Then the devotee flies into the ground of the temple and jump after from the tukkachadu to the kalithattu. Then the devotees walk near the arch and the hook-fixer pierces a mild hook into the back of the devotee. This is known as chundakuthu or churalkuthu. After the garudan parava, the devotees along with the votaries and others, enter the temple and round once.

In Manarkadu temple, both the tukkam and garudan parava are conducted. But garudan parava is conducted as a part of the ritual tukkam. These kinds of peculiarities of garudan parava show its artistic nature along with its ritual behavior.

“Most of the folk arts come under the religious group and ritualistic in character. The primitive folk songs and dances

practiced by the ancient people to the accompaniment of instrumental music praised the deities of the forests and hills. The ritual dances are staged primarily in Bhagavathi temples with a view to propitiating the deity. Hindu folk arts known by different names as *Kumbha Nritham*, *Arjuna Nritham*, *Garuda Nritham*, *Pampatti Nritham*, *Pana*, *Mariamman Puja*, *Kuthiyottam* etc. in different parts of Kerala.”<sup>12</sup> Schechner refers, “ritual has its own symbolic time, the performer possessed in trance, audience participates and believes, criticism discouraged while collective creativity formed.”<sup>13</sup> “In ritual, the audience is a full participant in the event. The active contributions of the audience-vocal display, direct action (dance, movement, entering into trance etc) and presentation of gifts to deities, priests, or the other participants-are essential to the success of the event.”<sup>14</sup>

“Colonial as well as recent historic records identify dual features within tukkam, i.e., reading it sometimes as a performative ritual, but other times as a performative art.”<sup>15</sup> “Folk arts like *Theyyam*, *Mudiyettu*, *Tiyattu* and *Garudan Thookkam* have exerted influence on classical arts like *Koothu*, *Koodiyattam* and *Kathakali*. This influence on has bearing on various aspects of classical arts like their structure, costumes, make up performance, *mudras*, It also means incantations, i.e., positioning or intertwining of the fingers in religious worship and supposed to possess occult meanings and magical efficacy<sup>16</sup>.”

“The folk influence in classical art forms is exemplified in the level of characters. The *chenta* an instrument to accompany the dance of demons (*asura vadhya*) was in existence with the folk forms at the very outset. Prior to the beginning of some classical performing art forms like *kathakali*, a kind of ritual to serve as a formal notice (*keli*) of the ensuing performance is often conducted. This is an obvious borrowal from folk art forms like *Mudiyettu*,”<sup>17</sup> The myth of Kali-Darika fight, dramatically presented through this drama.

The performance of garudan thookkam is considered as performing art demanding adornments for the performer as well as theatrical dance from the performer apart from the performer after observing *vritham* or a form of penance allow himself to be lifted on a lever by a hook attached to a waist band. In that it is performed as an offering it is not meant to please the audience but mainly for propitiating the goddess. The performer uses various elements of this classical art like its structure, costumes, make up performance and *mudras*. Rituals like ‘*tukkam*’, ‘*kuthiyottam*’ and ‘*kavadiyattom*’ are related folk arts<sup>18</sup>.

### **Transformation of ritual to performance**

“Performance deals with actions more than text: with habits of the body more than structures of symbols, of illocutionary rather than propositional force, with the social construction of reality its representation. Performances, whether ritual or dramatic, create and make present realities vivid enough to beguile, amuse or terrify. And through these presences, they alter moods, social relations, bodily dispositions and states of mind.”<sup>19</sup>

In the ritual *tukkam*, these kind of amusing or terrifying views are presented. The spectators viewed it in different attitude. Some people viewed it in a terrifying attitude thinking it as a

barbaric and cruel practice whereas some other people viewed it as curious and amusing one. However, this ritual practice is performed in a dogmatic devotional mood.

Sacred space and sacred time together inseparably provide the setting for meaningful performances of the kind broadly called ritual.<sup>20</sup> In the case of *tukkam*, it has a specific space, specific time and setting for meaningful performances. This endorses the view that “rituals originate in collective constructions such as myths, legends, and other traditions and to perform a ritual is to re-substantiate them and to re-affirm their effects.”<sup>21</sup>

Garudan *tukkam* is considered as a performing art. The field reports reveal its artistic nature. When we consider Manarkadu *tukkam*, it is a ritual sacrifice and artistic performance. The dressings, costumes, music, dance, martial steps, and all arrangements related to this ritual include artistic kind of behavior.

“In Travancore,” according to (K.P. Padmanabha Menon), “there are two kinds of swinging ceremonies known as Garudan Thookkam or kite-swinging (brahmanikite) and thoni thookkam or boat-swinging conducted in the temples of erstwhile Travancore in Kerala. For the former, a sort of car is conducted which will rest on two axles with four wheels. On this beam there is small decorated roofing, and beneath this, the performer swings. In some parts this arrangements is simplified by having only a small pole on which rests a horizontal beam provided with a metallic ring at one end. The beam acts as a lever and is connected with the hooks and the waist-band of the performer. For boat-swinging, the same kind of apparatus is used only that it is not set up on wheels.

For Kite-swinging, the performer has face painted green, with a red coloured beak, as that of the kite, attached to his mouth and is supplied with artificial wings so as to stimulate the bird garuda, and also wears long locks of hair like those of an actor in kathakali. He performs the feats taught him by his instructor, from his accompaniment of music, with which the car is drawn or the pole or the frame work is carried round the temple 3,5,7,9 or 11 times. In boat-swinging, the man does not have to put on the false wings and beak. In both forms he carries sometimes a sword and shield in each hand which he flourishes aloft while swinging”<sup>22</sup>

According to L.A. Ananthakrishna Aiyar, “another type of *tukkam* is known as pillatukkam or pillayeduthutukkam, or swinging with a child in fulfillment of vows, wherein the child is taken to the temple by his parents who pay to the temple authorities’ thirty four chakrams (puthens and coins) in Travancore, and sixty four puthns in Cochin. The child is then handed over to the devotee, who carries the child as he swings”<sup>23</sup>.

Garudan *tukkam*, mayilpili *tukkam* and darika *tukkam* are conducted various other temples keeping its artistic nature. In Darika *tukkam*, the devotee wears the dress and make up of Darika<sup>24</sup>.

### **The Socio-Economic Ordering**

The most important of factors influencing the performance was caste. It was the lower caste who mainly practiced the swinging ceremony. Nairs are the only higher castes conducting this ritual. In Manarkadu temple Nair caste have the right to

conduct *tukkam*. But there is no caste distinction to perform garudan parava and garudan *tukkam*.

According to GA Oddie, “all available evidence suggests that the swingers were, with few exceptions, low caste Hindus. Many of them were Harijans including pariahs and pallars. Others belonged to castes and classes slightly higher in status and sometimes economically better off than Harijans. It was also performed by Kallars and Maravas. Some of the swingers in Travancore or Tiyans, while, in nearby Cochin; they included Izhavas, the equivalent of Chogan or Tiyans in Travancore, Kuruppans, who appear to have been a barber caste, Kammalans and Kuravans in Tanjore village. A possible exception to the great majority of swingers who came from low or outcaste groups was the Nairs of Cochin who also swung. Higher castes not only shared with the lower caste Hindus a continuing belief in the need for preparation, but was also patrons and votaries were sufficiently committed to the practice to pay out sums of money”<sup>25</sup>.

The interviewee Vijayakumar reveals that traditionally Olloor family which included Nair caste has the right to do the *tukkam*. Father of Vijayakumar was a traditional devotee. He is the main devotee who does the ritual for almost thirty years. Besides the devotee, the asan and the hook-fixer come from the traditional Nair family for performing the ritual *tukkam* (common *tukkam*)<sup>26</sup>.

According to Edgar Thurston, “the ethnographic records look at this ritual as a money making enterprise. In a few instances that they cite like in the Kistna district (Madras, 1852-1854) several years ago, at the time of the swinging ceremony, swingers received one to four rupees from a general fund subscribed by the villager, or granted for the purpose by some public spirited, individual. Evidences related to swinging festivals in other parts of the South, including Trichinopoly, Travancore and Cochin, also suggests that local landlords or pujaris or both made considerable profits from donations received as a direct result of the practice”<sup>27</sup>.

In Manarkadu temple, before performing the ritual paying the amount of 201 rupees to temple<sup>28</sup>. The votary make all facilities to the devotees and giving cash to them. The devoted people and the relatives of the devotees (swingers) give money and kasavu mundu (dress). Besides the economic need, the devotees regarded it make social status to them.

### **CONCLUSION**

The ritual Manarkadu *tukkam* has a lot of peculiarities. Manarkadu temple has a long history of about 2500 years. Three times a year, viz., meena bharani, kumbha bharani and pathamudayam, *tukkam* ritual is done in this temple which is the great speciality of the temple. Another most important point about the *tukkam* of this temple is that there perform three types of *tukkams*, viz., mayilpili *tukkam*, garudan *tukkam* and common *tukkam*. Mayilpili *tukkam* is known so since the devotee decorates himself with peacock feathers or mayilpili, and dances in front of the *tukkachadu*. Garudan *tukkam* is known so because of the costumes used for it which is similar to a big eagle or garuda. Common *tukkam* is the traditional ordinary type of *tukkam*. Aritual named Garudan parava, which is a type of artistic dance, is performed prior to *tukkam*. Manarkadu *tukkam* is unique since we see the garudan parava

and garudan tukkam only here. In Manarkadu temple though tukkam is considered as a ritual, but we see many artistic and folklore elements like costumes, dancing steps, martial art and the like.

Thus the ritual explains the social transformation of ritual to performing art. And it covers the origin, history and various myths related to this ritual. It focuses not only the ritual space but the temple space, artistic space and performance space accept the social significance of the ritual.

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2. Nairs, Mr. H.A. Stuart writes, are a Dravidian caste, or rather a community, for we find several distinct elements with totally different occupations among the people who call themselves by this title. The original Nairs were undoubtedly a military body, holding lands and serving as a militia, but the present Nair caste includes persons who, by hereditary occupation, are traders, artisans, oil mongers, palanquin bearers, and even barbers and washer men. Nair may at present be considered to be a term almost as wide and general as Sudras. See in Edgard Thurston and K. Rangachari, Caste and Tribes in Southern India Vol. V, Delhi: Asian Education Society, 1990, 283 – 330.
3. Manarkadu Bhagavathi is the deity of 28 half karas in Manarkadu. At first 29 karas were there. Later half kara separated from it and joined Muttambalam. Hence now only 28 half karas as there. Administrative affairs were decided after selecting the members by election from 28 half karas. Ariparambu kara is one of the kara which included in this 28 half karas.
4. Elamba: Before constructing the Manarkadu temple this place is known as the dwelling place of the yakshi 'elamba.' The presence of Devi makes fury in elamba yakshi. She disturbs Devi by making violent laughter and jingling the bells. Devi killed the yakshi and her followers. (Interview with Prabhakaran Nair)
5. Interview with a devotee, Vijayakumar
6. Kannan, a devotee
7. A.P. Anilkumar, Temple Secretary and Vijaya Kumar, a devotee
8. Narayanan Elayath, President of the temple and a senior pujari
9. Kannan, the security staff of the temple
10. Told by Narayanan Elayath who is the President of the temple and a senior poojari.
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28. Interview with Prabhakaran Nair

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