

# **Socio-Economic and Health Problems of Theyyam Dancers belonging to Scheduled Castes of Kerala**

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## **Executive Summary**

This study is an attempt to analyse health, social and economic problems of Theyyam dancers belonging to Scheduled Castes in a comparative perspective.

### **1.1 The Specific Objectives of the Study**

- Examine socio- economic problems of Theyyam Dancers belonging to Scheduled Castes of Kerala
- Analyse health problems of Theyyam Dancers belong to Scheduled Castes(SC) of Kerala
- Compare the health and socio-economic issues of Theyyam dancers with other SC and non-SC segments of the society.
- Examine the marriage practices of Theyyam dancers; with a focus on genetic problems.
- Assess social respect of Theyyam dancers
- Explore the cultural dimensions of the Theyyam dance and examine the scope for promoting Theyyam dance as a traditional dance with the financial support of the Ministry of Culture
- Critically analyze need for special intervention for the upliftment and welfare of Theyyam dancers through other government programmes
- Suggest measures to address socio- economic and health problems of Theyyam Dancers belonging to Scheduled Castes of Kerala
- Examine the replicability in relation to effectiveness of artistic forms or cultural programmes of Scheduled Castes similar to Theyyam in addressing a wide set of issues around Scheduled Castes and draw lessons from unique features and contributions of Theyyam for the consideration of other Indian States

### **1.2 Universe of the Study**

This study is limited to Kannoore and Kasargode districts, two districts that have the largest concentration of Theyyam Dancers belonging to Scheduled Castes of Kerala.

### **1.3 Sample Size and Data Collection**

An attempt has been made to make the sample size as representative as possible. From the two districts, two blocks making a total of four blocks was selected using purposive sampling method for the field survey. A total of 200 Theyyam dancers and their households covering four blocks in two districts was selected from the category of Theyyam dancers. In addition, 100 households

belonging to Scheduled Castes other than Theyyam dancers and another 100 households belonging to Upper Castes were also covered. In addition, 200 respondents consisting of elected representatives and officials of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), Government Officials, representatives of NGOs and prominent citizens were also covered. Two types of structured questionnaires were used to collect primary data. Questionnaire- 1 (Annexure -1) was used for household survey while information was captured from Panchayati Raj Institutions, Government Officials, NGOs and Prominent Citizens by using Questionnaire-2 (Annexure -1). Qualitative data was collected from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) using a separate check list and an interactive meeting with Theyyam dancers. Various types of secondary data including studies, reports and data prepared by government and nongovernmental organizations were used for the study.

### **2.1 Distinctive Features of the Theyyam Dance**

*Theyyam* is a dance performance of a section of indigenous community that combines instruments and vocals. It is a unique art form that blends religious beliefs, art, dance and music. Theyyam, a 40 minutes dance performance, is completely devotional both in its ethos and rendition. Artists perform with the necessary fasting and preparation as the whole dance programme is a dedication to God.

### **2.2 Castes and Theyyam Rights**

The dance system has a close relationship with the social systems and caste structure. The Theyyam performer belongs to Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes. The majority of the Theyyam dancers belong to Scheduled Castes while a certain section of Scheduled Tribes also perform Theyyam dances though they are not covered under the present study. One of the distinctive features of the Theyyam dance is the monopoly of marginalized communities to perform it. Exclusive right is given to families from that indigenous community who are from the lower-strata of the society to perform it. People outside prescribed castes are not allowed to perform the dance. Theyyam performers are mainly from Malayan, Vannan. Mavilan, Vettuvan, Pulayan and Kopalan..

### **2.3 Population of Theyyam dancers**

It is estimated that the total population of Theyyam dancers in Kerala is around 1,02,860. Vannan is the largest in size with 29,500 people followed by Kopalan having 25,750. While

Pulayan are 15,560, Malayan community constitutes 15,400 people. The smaller communities are Mavilan (5,600), Velan (5,550) and Anjootan/Muthuttan (5,500).

## **2.4 Types of Offerings**

Theyyam dances are performed mainly as religious offerings of four major categories of the people. The main and prominent category is the local community. Secondly, a joint family called *Tharavadu* (ancestral home) also offers Theyyam dances. The third category is single family, which also offer Theyyam dance. Apart from these categories of offerings in Kerala, non-resident Keralites offer Theyyams in other parts of India and even abroad.

## **2.5 Health Problems of Theyyam Dancers in a Comparative Perspective**

*Theyyam* dance performances have several serious occupational hazards that adversely affect the health of the performers. Health of a significant number of dance performers has deteriorated after their long involvement in the dance. By and large, health deterioration is directly related to the rituals followed by the dancers and their livelihood issues. Certain *Theyyam* performances involve dangerous activities. The physical exertion of the performer, the engagement with harmful substances and handling fire cause stress on the mental health of the dancers. Social discrimination also causes some level of mental agony.

In addition, livelihood related health deterioration is also reported from the field. While the earning from *Theyyam* activities remains abysmally low, they cannot afford to have a minimum standard of living. They are compelled to engage in other activities to supplement their meager income from Theyyam. Some of these dancers, after spending the whole night in dance performance continue to work in other fields during day time. This situation has resulted in several health- related problems to *Theyyam* dancers. Health problems reported by *Theyyam* dancers are not prevalent among other sections covered under the survey.

## **2.6 Marriage Practices and Genetic Problems**

Social customs of *Theyyam* dancers are exclusive and inter caste marriages are not permitted among their different sub castes. Marriage takes place mainly within the sub caste only. However, even a single genetic problem or marriage related problem for a new born baby is not reported during the survey.

## **2.7 Education**

Majority of the *Theyyam* performers have just basic education. Low level of higher education among the *Theyyam* dancers is a matter of concern. The analysis of the level of education of *Theyyam* dancers in a comparative perspective clearly indicates that their situation in respect of level of education is quite worrisome as compared to other Scheduled Castes and Upper Castes.

## **2.8 Income and Occupational Pattern**

*Theyyam* dance is a seasonal job and the seasonality phenomenon of *Theyyam* dance affects the economic condition of the performers. The income from *Theyyam* dance is abysmally low. The earnings from the *Theyyam* season is insufficient to sustain the dancer's family throughout the off-season period of up to 6 months. While the dancers are forced to take up other jobs for their subsistence most of the part-time jobs of *Theyyam* dancers are quite non- remunerative and strenuous.

## **2.9 Sponsoring of Theyyam Dancers as Offerings**

Community of believers belonging to Upper Castes in a particular locality sponsors Theyyam dance and single families, mainly from Upper Caste families are the main sponsors or financiers of Theyyam dance. The cost of sponsoring a dance for a community is estimated as Rs. 2,56,000 while for single family it is Rs. 1,21,000 and for Corporates and Non-resident Keralites in Indian States and foreign countries it is Rs. 2,52,000.

## **2.10 Land Ownerships and Living Conditions**

*Theyyam* performers are not land owners and the majority of them hold less than 5 cents land in rural areas. As a result, dancers cannot engage in agricultural activities as an alternative source of livelihood during off season.

## **2.11 Social Security Programmes for Theyyam Dancers**

It is a serious matter of concern that there is no adequate coverage of social security schemes for *Theyyam* dancers. The comparative analysis of the availability of social security scheme shows that *Theyyam* dancers lag behind other two categories in respect of the availability of social security scheme. It is found that about 1.5 percent dancers covered under the survey get pension.



## **2.12 Difficulties in Tapping Cultural and Artistic Aspects**

There is an increasing demand for *Theyyam* dance performed by Keralites and art- loving people in other parts of India and abroad while there is a resistance by significant section of old generation dancers in performing dances outside Kerala. The old generation firmly believes that the dance should be religious and artistic and cultural dimensions should be totally neglected. It has become a stumbling block in the initiatives for meeting the increasing demands for Theyyam dance.

## **2.13 Major Recommendations**

Considering the serious health, social and economic problems of *Theyyam* dancers belonging to Scheduled Castes the special interventions required for the upliftment and welfare of Theyyam dancers through other government programmes are listed here.

*2.13.1 Pension and Other Welfare Schemes:* At present Theyyam dancers are quite vulnerable to various uncertainties and no support system is available to ailing Theyyam artists during the fag end of their career. It is important to provide them the benefit of a regular pension scheme. A minimum of Rs. 3000 should be given as a monthly pension to all the Theyyam dancers when they reach the age of 50 years irrespective of their financial status.

*2.13.2 Risk Allowance and Accident Insurance:* Considering the high risk, a proper insurance coverage, risk allowance and medical insurance scheme should be made available to Theyyam dancers.

*2.13.3 Housing and Crematorium:* Steps may be taken to provide housing facilities to Theyyam dancers. In addition, attractive housing grant schemes may be provided to Theyyam dancers. There is a strong need for a common crematorium or cremation ground for SC and ST and it is desirable to provide these facilities to them.

*2.13.4 Welfare of Children:* Theyyam dancers need special attention especially in respect of the education of the children. The amount of students scholarships and lump sum grant to the students should be revised periodically. A scheme for providing financial help for marriage of daughters of Theyyam dancers may be set up.

*2.13.5 Special Welfare Funds for Theyyam Artist:* A contributory welfare fund may be devised for Theyyam artists. Appropriate steps may be taken to create a welfare fund for Theyyam dancers. Accordingly, temples can set aside a specific amount of money for a welfare fund, to which the artists can also contribute after each performance.

*2.13.6 Livelihood Support and Livelihood Projects:* As Theyyam dancing is quite a seasonal activity most of the artists depend on five to six month's earnings for the expenditure in the entire year. An attractive scheme may be devised to provide a livelihood support. The scheme should encompass interest free loans, training programmes, marketing support, etc. The livelihood projects can include setting up of craft centres for making jewellery and other ornaments, fabric making units for costumes, for make- up artists, etc.

*2.13.7 Promotion of Theyyam as a Religious and Cultural Event:* The following Government interventions may be made to promote Theyyam as a religious and cultural event:

*Scope for Intervention of Ministry of Culture:* Theyyam should be included in the professional art list though it has several unique features. The new generation should be encouraged to learn and perform the art. There is a need for promoting Theyyam dance as a traditional dance especially with the support of the Ministry of Culture.

*Scope for Intervention of the Ministry of Tourism:* The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India and Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala can take certain measures to promote Theyyam dance. Appropriate promotional activities, with the support of relevant ministries and departments, needs to be carried out.

*2.13.8 Training and Documentation:* As there is no written document for training new artists, a documentation of the rituals and customs of the training methodology is very important. Various aspects of dances especially the songs and stories have to be recorded in a form that enables the dancers to share it with the new generations.

## **2.13 Theyyam Dance and Empowerment of Scheduled Castes: Lessons for Indian States**

*2.13.1 Replicability of a Unique Experience:* A vast majority of Indian Scheduled Castes continue to face old and new several challenges and in this context, it is important to share the experience of Scheduled Castes who performs Theyyam dance in northern Kerala, with various

Indian States. This is a unique experience which can be replicated in other states as a tool to address diverse problems of Scheduled Castes in different States.

*2.13.2 Artistic or Cultural Performance of Scheduled Castes: A Strong Medium of Spreading Message against Social Inequality :* A medium of artistic or cultural performance can be effectively used as a tool reduce or remove the suppression of the Scheduled Castes in a society. Theyyam dances are now effective tools and weapons to resist and fight back against an unjust social system as a religious revelation during a particular dance performance influences a considerable section of Upper Castes in their positive attitudes towards lower castes.

*2.13.3 Empowerment of a Weaker Community through Identification and Promotion of Cultural Heritage:* If the roadmap sketched in the chapter V of this study report is implemented quickly with all seriousness, Scheduled Castes who perform Theyyam dance in Kerala can reap benefits in terms of social and economic empowerment. A model of upliftment and welfare of Theyyam dancers belonging to Scheduled Castes through various government programmes can be a lesson for them. In every state there may be similar artistic or cultural performance of Scheduled Caste community which may identified and promoted in an effective way.

*2.13.4 Empowerment of a Scheduled Castes with the support of schemes through inter-ministerial coordination and convergence of programmes:* Theyyam a traditional dance of Scheduled Castes of northern Kerala can be upgraded as professional art form with support of the Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. It will be quite effective when central ministries such as Ministry of Social Justice and Ministry of Culture or even corresponding departments of the respective State can come together through convergence of programmes in addressing various issues of Scheduled Castes.

*2.13.5 Value Addition, Skill Development and Conservation of Traditional Knowledge:* Employment can be generated for young generation members of Scheduled Castes in Kerala if support is given to Theyyam dancer in upgrading their skills using modern techniques. However, these interventions should be made without diminishing the traditional heritage and value system. By acquiring the skill, the new generation Theyyam performers can become dance professionals. Similar interventions can be introduced to promote artistic and cultural performance of Scheduled Castes in other States also. It can be a new field of employment for youth belonging to Scheduled Caste

## Chapter: 1

### Introduction

1.1 Theyyam, a popular ritualistic folk dance form of Northern region of Kerala, has a close relationship with social systems and caste structure. Majority of them belong to Scheduled Castes as a small section of dancers are Scheduled Tribes. Theyyam is an abbreviation of '*Theyyattam*' a Malayalam word, which means 'dance of the God' where '*Deyvam*' means God and '*Attam*' means dance. Theyyam dance (hereafter referred as Theyyam) invokes the presence of the deity in the body of the dancer. Theyyam dancing is a quite seasonal and most of them have been undergoing a struggle for a livelihood and they have been fighting for their survival with acute poverty and poor health. Dancers face serious problems of health hazards as Theyyam involves the dancers in highly harmful acts and they are exposed to various health hazards. While the earning from these activities remains abysmally low, they cannot afford to have a minimum standard of living. This compels them to engage in other activities to supplement their daily income. The present study is an attempt to analyze various health, social and economic problems and to examine various aspects of the complex issues of the Theyyam Dancers belonging to Scheduled Castes.

There are certain studies on Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Communities in different states. Some studies have reported that marginalized sections like SC, ST and OBC have become an important component in defining development policies because of their socio-economic deprivation in the traditional society of India. Among the several factors, the social system and the structure of caste in Kerala have been predominant over the activities of backward communities. The untouchability factor has not only arrested the growth of personality of these backward communities but also comes in the way of their 'material well-being'. It deprived them of certain civil rights. (Planning Commission 2006). Bhowmick conducted an in-depth study of the occupational mobility in West Bengal in 1969. In his book "Occupational Mobility and Caste Structure in West Bengal", he gives special emphasis on the employment and social mobility of Scheduled Caste women. He believes that markets are important avenues for employment for ladies, by which traditional caste occupation and relationship undergo relaxation and shifting to a large extent. According to Prof. Bhowmick, occupations are nothing but the immediate means of subsistence, assuring better economic conditions. Thus Prof Bhowmick suggests a new field of employment for Scheduled Caste women, which will lead to their social mobility, at the same time it provides an employment which does not demand higher educational qualifications.

Sharma K. L., (1972) in his article "Levels of Mobility in Caste Structure" examines the occupational mobility of castes in the villages of Rajasthan. Sharma, in the course of his study observed that all these castes, however, had some association with cultivation, besides their caste occupation, and many have forsaken their caste occupation altogether. Thus the caste occupations do not figure among the main occupations of the Scheduled Castes. On the other hand, they are retained as subsidiary occupations or as an additional source of income.

Ramashray Roy and Singh V. B., in their book "Between Two Worlds: A Study of Harijan Elites (1987) "points out that the respondents' occupational status is higher than that of their fathers or grandfathers. According to this study, a remarkable differentiation has occurred in the occupational structure in the fathers' generation compared to that of the grandfathers. This differentiation represents not only an access to a larger field of occupations, but also an upward mobility reflecting an improvement in the life conditions and life chances of these Scheduled Caste families.

Dahiwalé S. M., (1989) in his study "Emerging Entrepreneurship among Scheduled Caste in Contemporary India", analyses the various factors of occupational mobility among Scheduled Castes. He observes that encouragement from others, economic hardships, ideological impact (the ideologies of Ambedkar, Phule and Gandhiji gave self-awakening of their own degraded position), educational qualifications, emulation of others' jobs, arousal of self-interest in particular jobs, financial assistance, Government's educational policy, reservation of seats, service opportunities in Christian institutions, etc. are the factors behind the occupational mobility among the Scheduled Castes. He evaluates the success and consequences of occupational mobility of the Scheduled Castes. Occupational success would help to change the ego level, as the Scheduled Castes perceive themselves elevated of their status in society. His study proves that occupational mobility will lead to family level success apart from individual success.

Santhakumari R. (1976) examines the impact of welfare measures on the backward classes of Kerala, through her study on three Scheduled Caste groups including the Pulayas. The study found that many of the welfare programmes have not been utilized fully by the backward classes because of the social barriers imposed upon them by the higher castes. The spread of industrialization and the concomitant urbanization not only opened the field of occupation wider and created new types of jobs which could not fit with the traditional occupational structure, but also developed a rational foundation and method for the creation and practice for these jobs. So far, no one has attempted any study on various problems of Theyyam dancers

and it is quite important to study various health, social and economic problems of Theyyam dancers belonging to different classes of Scheduled Castes of Kerala.

### **1.2 Objectives:**

- Examine social and economic problems of Theyyam Dancers belonging to Scheduled Castes of Kerala.
- Analyze health problems of Theyyam Dancers belonging to Scheduled Castes of Kerala.
- Compare the health, social and economic issues of Theyyam dancers with other SC and non-SC segments of the society.
- Examine the marriage practices of Theyyam dancers with a focus on genetic problems.
- Assess social respect of Theyyam dancers
- Explore the cultural dimensions of the Theyyam dance and examine the scope for promoting Theyyam dance as a traditional dance with the financial support of the Ministry of Culture.
- Critically analyze the need for special intervention for the upliftment and welfare of Theyyam dancers through other government programmes.
- Suggest measures to address health, social and economic problems of Theyyam Dancers belonging to Scheduled Castes of Kerala.
- Examine the replicability in relation to effectiveness of artistic forms or cultural programmes of Scheduled Castes similar to Theyyam in addressing a wide set of issues around Scheduled Castes and draw lessons from unique features and contributions of Theyyam for the consideration of other Indian States

### **1.3 Methodology**

On the basis of readings of secondary sources and field experience, relevant research questions and issues pertinent to the study objectives were identified. A detailed methodology was prepared for the study. The methodology adopted for the proposed study is primarily based on primary data. The data from the field is supplemented by secondary sources. Primary data is collected through a field study covering household survey, personal interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs).

### 1.3.1 Research Design

The study involves an analysis of health, social and economic problems of Theyyam dancers belonging to Scheduled Castes in a comparative perspective. Scheduled Castes who were Theyyam dancers were compared with Scheduled Castes other than Theyyam dancers and also Upper Castes. Various health, social and economic indicators were used to carry out the comparative analysis.

### 1.3.2 Sampling Design

**1.3.1.1 Primary Data:** As per the objectives and research design, Kannoore and Kasargode districts were selected as these two districts have the largest concentration of Theyyam Dancers belonging to Scheduled Castes of Kerala. Again two blocks each from these two districts were selected as samples using purposive sampling method. The selection of blocks were made using certain criteria such as:

- Covering different types of Theyyam dancers belong to different categories of Scheduled Castes.
- Covering different geographical areas
- Covering developed and undeveloped areas

**Table 1.1**  
**Sample Selection for Field Study**

Districts	Blocks	Criteria for the selection of districts	Criteria for the selection of blocks
Kannoore	Payyannur Taliparambu	Covered highest concentration of dancers	Covered developed and undeveloped areas
Kasargode	Neeleswaram Kanjangad	Covered highest concentration of dancers	Covered developed and undeveloped areas

From the two districts two blocks each, making a total of four blocks was selected using purposive sampling method for the field survey. From each block, 50 households of Theyyam dancers were covered. Thus a total of 200 households covering four blocks in two districts were selected from the category of Theyyam dancers. In addition, from each block, 25 households belonging to SC other than Theyyam dancers and another 25 households belonging to Upper Castes were also included in the sample survey. Thus a total of 100 SC households other than Theyyam dancer's households and 100 households belonging to upper castes were sampled. Thus a total of 400 households were covered under the survey. From each household one respondent making a total of 400 respondents were interviewed. In addition, 200 respondents consisting of elected representatives and officials of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), Government Officials, representatives of NGO and prominent citizens were also covered. The details are given in Table 1.2.

**Table 1.2**  
**Household Survey: Distribution of Respondents**

Categories	Distribution of respondents	Total (Nos)
Theyyam Dancers	50x4 blocks	200
SC- Non Theyyam Dancers	25x4 blocks	100
Upper Castes	25x4 blocks	100
Others (Officials of associations of Theyyam dancers, Panchayati Raj Institutions, State Government of Kerala and NGOs)	Covered 4 blocks and districts and the state	200
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>600</b>

**Major Variables for Data Collection and Questionnaires:** Two types of structured questionnaires were used to collect primary data.

**Questionnaire- 1 Household Survey:** The household survey covered households with Theyyam dancers, SC households without Theyyam dancers and households of Upper Castes (See Annexure1).

The questionnaire tried to canvas the following information:

- Size and structure of family
- Religion, caste, gender, age and education
- Wage rate
- Earning per member in a family
- Present work nature, overtime
- Household income
- Household expenditure pattern
- Education level of family members
- Ownership of house and land
- Ownership of household items
- Food habits, health habits
- Type of medical care sought : private or public health institutions
- Distance of residence from the health institution
- Welfare schemes and social security schemes such as pension, health insurance, etc.

**Questionnaire-2 for Panchayati Raj Institutions, Government Officials, NGOs and Prominent Citizens**

As is shown in Annexure 2, Questionnaire-2 sought the following particulars from PRIs, Government Officials, NGOs and prominent citizens:

- Health, socio-economic problems of Theyyam dancers



- Availability welfare schemes and social security schemes such as pension, health insurance, etc. compared to other SC and Upper Caste families
- Suggestions for improving the socio-economic and health status of Theyyam Dancers

### **FGD and Interactive Meeting with Theyyam Dancers**

Data was collected from a number of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in all the two districts. A separate check lists was used to conduct FGDs. A total of 12 Focus Group Discussions and an interactive meeting with Theyyam dancers have been held. A total of 77 Theyyam dancers participated in the Focus Group Discussions and another 65 Theyyam dancers attended the interactive meeting. The participants of these discussions and meetings included Theyyam dancers from the study area.

**1.3.1.2 Secondary Data:** Various types of secondary data including studies, reports and data prepared by government and non-governmental organizations were used for the study. Findings of various other relevant studies in other States were reviewed. These included books, articles, periodicals and websites of relevant institutions. This has provided more insights into the critical issues and possible remedies.

## Chapter: 2

### Salient Features of Theyyam Dance and Caste Dimensions

#### 2.1 Distinctive Features of the Theyyam Dance

*Theyyam* is a dance performance of a section of indigenous community that combines instruments and vocals. It is a unique art form that blends religious beliefs, art, dance and music. Theyyam, a 40 minutes dance performance, is completely devotional both in its ethos and rendition. Artists perform with necessary fasting and preparation as the whole dance programme is a dedication to God. *Theyyam* is not just a dance but a practice with twin elements of art and religious devotion. Though it is exclusive to male artists, younger girls below the age of 10 or women above 40 are performers in exceptional cases. Different rituals associated with the dance with different practices like worship of spirit, ancestors, heros, trees, animals, serpents, Goddesses of the disease and the village deity.

The performer invokes the deity and dances while the singer or artist also recites poems in praise of the deity or narrate the story relevant to the deity. The performance ends with the distribution of 'adayaalam' or 'kuri' (usually rice with turmeric) to the devotees and blessings on them. The assembled devotees in turn offer money to the shrine. The dancers need to undergo rigorous training on characteristic traits of the deity they play. It is important for dancers to approach physically and spiritually the divine trance in which the Theyyam is performed. The artist is trained by the Chieftain <sup>1</sup> on all the nuances of the performance- such as the makeup and songs. Theyyams play an important role in the general life of people in north Kerala as they used to pray to Theyyam God to solve their family problems, health issues, social problems, etc. The performance takes place in the "Kavu"<sup>2</sup> or in the courtyards of the Tharavadu <sup>3</sup>. The worship places are decorated with sculptures made of wood. These places are quite different in nature when compared to the other Indian Hindu Temples. God may be represented by a sword, carved stones, a stool, a piece of wood or mask.

The performers wear exotic dresses. A Theyyam dancer uses colourful costumes and elaborate headgear. The performer wears a skirt or waist dress made of bamboo splices or coconut fronds covered with red cloth, the face and body is carefully painted with natural dyes and colorful pastes. The painting of the body is varied according to the deity that is being invoked. The head dress or muti is also different for each Theyyam while some of them have 50-60 feet high. These are made of arecanut tree or drumstick tree wood or bamboo splices and

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<sup>1</sup> Chieftain is an experienced Theyyam dancer who is above 50 years and are not fit for the performance

<sup>2</sup> Kavu, a *sacred grove* of trees of special religious importance to a Hindu culture.

<sup>3</sup> Tharavadu is a Malayalam word which means ancestral home. A person's Tharavadu is used to show her/his root and identity even after living in a different place.

decorated elaborately with coloured cloths, coconut leaves, flowers, etc. Ornaments such as wristlets, anklets, necklaces are used.

A Theyyam dance performance is a team effort and three sets of people associated with Theyyam are the dance performer, makeup artist and prop makers. Each team consists of 12 to 15 persons comprising of sacred dance performer, the costume decorator, the face-painter, the craft maker, lamp carrier, makeup man, singer, assistants and instrumentalists. It is quite interesting to understand that all the members of the dance team are experienced with all the activities. They are not separate classes, but are mutually exclusive. The same person can act as the dancer, make up man, or the costume decorator as the case may be. The functional distribution of activities is allocated as per requirements. Prop makers make a huge variety of objects including a skirt or waist dress made of bamboo splices or coconut fronds covered with red cloth, The dance performer has to acquire several skills like singing, material making, playing the drums and effective presentation. The presence of mind and ability to take extempore decisions, and also effectively communicate such decisions in order to help settle disputes that are brought before the Theyyam and diplomacy in handling representatives from different communities and positions are required in the dance performance.



*Altharadevi Theyyam*

## 2.2 Castes and Theyyam Rights

The dance system has a close relationship with the social systems and caste structure. The Theyyam performer, called *Kolakkaran* or *Koladhari*, in Malayalam, belongs to Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes. The majority of the Theyyam dancers belong to Scheduled Castes. As reported in Table 2.1 a certain section of Scheduled Tribes also perform Theyyam dances though they are not covered under the present study. As indicated earlier, one of the distinctive features of the Theyyam dance is the monopoly of marginalized communities to perform it. Exclusive right is given to families from that indigenous community who are from the lower-strata of the society to perform it. People outside prescribed Castes are not allowed to perform the dance. Theyyam performers are mainly from Malayan, Vannan, Mavilan, Vettuvan, Pulayan and Kopalan. (See Table 2.1). Velan, Malayan and Vannan are the predominant communities that have traditionally performed Theyyams. The principal deity in *Theyyam* is Sree Muthappan while there are over 450 varieties of forms of dances depicting various deities. Sree Muthappan Theyyam is performed around the year whereas the other Theyyams are performed seasonally. Gulikan is a local form of the Hindu God of death, called Yama. The intricate and fascinating dance steps of Gulikan stands apart from that of the other Theyyams. Padikuttiamma is believed to be the mother of God Muthappan. She is believed to have taken care of Muthappan for years. She was given the status of goddess when Muthappan became god. Muthappan Anthithira is performed only once in all the Muthappan temples of North Malabar. Puthiya Bhagavathi is the main deity of many shrines in Kannur. In some Kavus the Perum Kaliyattam Theyyam festival is conducted at intervals of 12 or more years.

**Table 2.1**  
**Caste Categories of Theyyam Performers in Kerala**

<b>Scheduled Caste Category</b>	<b>SC/ST</b>	<b>Coverage Under the Present Study</b>
Vannan	Scheduled Caste	Covered under the study
Malayan	Scheduled Caste	Covered under the study
Velan	Scheduled Caste	Covered under the study
Anjoottan	Scheduled Caste	Covered under the study
Kopalan	Scheduled Caste	Covered under the study
Pulayan	Scheduled Caste	Covered under the study
Mavilan	Scheduled Tribe	Not covered under the study
Vettuvan	Scheduled Tribe	Not covered under the study

Source: Field Survey



*Theyyam Dances are Performed as Religious Offerings*

In Agni Kandakaran Theyyam lighted torches are attached around the waist of the performer. This Theyyam is performed at Swamimadam in Kannu Veedu Kapadapuram, Valiyaparamapa, Kasaragod in Kerala. Padamadakki Bhagavathy Theyyam is performed yearly in memory of the Goddess who averted a battle. Manakott was a powerful Nair *Tharavadu* (ancestral home) and a woman named *Nileswar* in the *Tharavadu* who restrained herself from the stringent caste system existed at that time. The lady was educated and the education prompted to challenge the system. The educated pregnant woman belonging to an Upper Caste broke the caste laws by drinking water from a pot made of arecanut leaf being used by an outcast. Annoyed by this incident the head of the family killed her. The murder of a pregnant woman resulted in the end of her joint family. Later the villagers came to the conclusion that the assassinated woman must have emerged as a Goddess who they called Manakkott Amma. Her Theyyam is performed every year in April. Kuttichathan is the Theyyam of Brahmin Caste. Kuttichathan Theyyam is considered to have originated for Lord Shiva in Vishnu Maya. Popular belief is that Kuttichathan would carry out any kind of wish to those who make chathan happy through continuous prayer from the heart. As discussed earlier, Theyyam dancing is not an occupation that can be adopted at will. The rights of performing the Theyyam can be acquired by virtue of birth through the maternal lineage or through marriage to a woman of the reserved clan and this tradition is



strictly observed in every aspect. One dancer can represent more than one deity. However, the rights of representation are strictly regulated and divided between the Castes and communities. Even within each community certain families have special rights on certain *Theyyams*. As is evident from Table 2.2 Malayan and Velan have the rights to perform Vishnumurthi, Chamundi, Bhairavan, Kuttychathan, Pottan and Gulikan dances. Kopalan holds the right to perform Kurathi, Panchuruli, Padinjattamkuzhi and Chamundi dances. The Theyyams are performed by male dancers except one particular Theyyam performance held in the Kannur area once in two years. This is performed by women performers because the story is about a noble lady and men cannot represent her. This Theyyam is known as Thekkumbad Koolom Kavu “Lady Theyyam”.

**Table 2.2**  
**Scheduled Castes wise Right to Perform Theyyam Dance**

<b>Caste Category</b>	<b>Name of Theyyam Dance</b>
Malayan and Velan	Vishnumurthi, Chamundi, Bhairavan, Kuttychathan, Pottan and Gulikan
Kopalan	Kurathi, Panchuruli, Padinjattamkuzhi and Chamundi
Pulayan	Pottan and Karinchamundi
Mavilan	Karinchamundi, Vishnumurthi, Chamundi, Kurathi, Veeran, Kappalathi, Pottan, Achan and Gulikan
Vannan	Puthiya Bhagavathy, Vayanattu Kulavan, Thondachan, Kandanar Kelan, Pulloor Kannan, Pulloorali, Palichon, Kannanghattu Bhagavathy, Muchilottu Bhagavathy and Kathivannur Veeran
Anjoottan	Muthappan

Source: Field Survey



*Eye Makeup Causes Eye Sickness*

### 2.3 Population and Group Dynamics

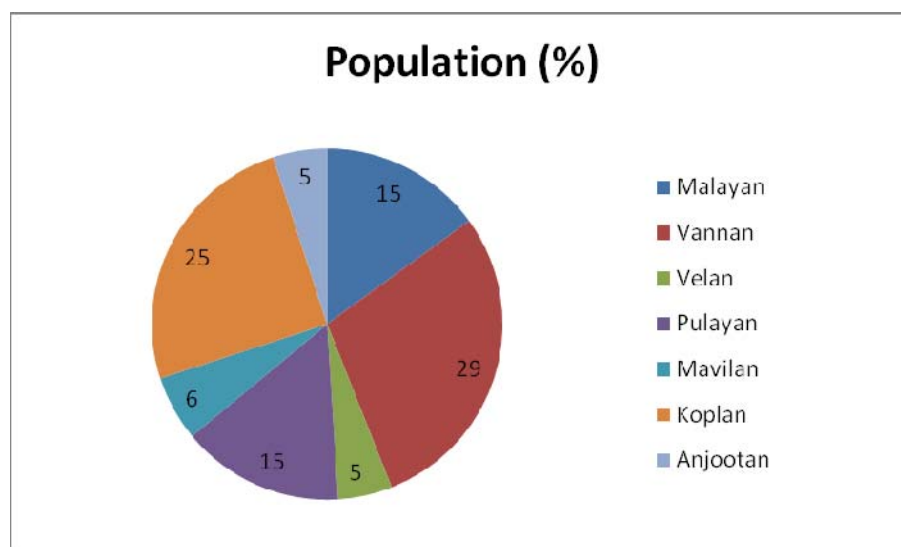
A reliable statistics about the number of Theyyam dancers is unavailable and so we have made consultations with various associations of Theyyam dancers and respondents covered under the survey. Accordingly it is estimated that the total population of Theyyam dancers in Kerala is around 1,02,860 ( Table: 2.3) Vannan is the largest in size with 29,500 people followed by Kopalan having 25,750. While Pulayan are 15,560, Malayan community constitutes 15,400 people. The smaller communities are Mavilan (5,600), Velan (5,550) and Anjootan/Muthuttan (5,500).

**Table: 2.3**  
**Current Population of Theyyam Dancers belonging to SC**

Castes	Population
Malayan	15,400
Vannan	29,500
Velan	5,550
Pulayan	15,560
Mavilan	5,600
Koplan	25,750
Anjootan/Muthuttan	5,500
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,02,860</b>

Source: Various Associations of Theyyam Dancers & Field Survey

**Fig 2.1**



All Scheduled Castes involved in the *Theyyam* dance are organized under different associations for taking collective efforts to address their common problems and meet general interests.

**Table: 2.4**  
**Associations and Group Dynamics of Theyyam Dancers**

<b>Associations</b>	<b>Castes</b>
Theyyam Anushtana Patana Gaveshana Kendram	Vannan
Kerala Folk Lore Academy	All Folk dancers
Uttara Kerala Malayan Samudaya Udharana Sangham	Malayan
Thiruvannan samudaya Sangham	Vannan

Source: Field Survey

Theyyam dancers get a platform to perform dance in the Kerala Folk Lore Academy. The Academy is a government institution set up to promote folk dances which provides a good platform for a large number of the Theyyam dancers to perform the dances. This platform enables them to come together in a common platform to discuss their common problems and general interests. As is evident from Table 2.4, dancers of Vannan community are organized under Theyyam Anushtans Patana Kendram while Malayan dancers have an association named “Uttara Kerala Malayan Samudaya Udharana Sangham”. There is a growing tendency among various sections of *Theyyam* dancers to get organized and carry out organization activities.

## **2.4 Types of Offerings**

Theyyam dances are performed mainly as religious offerings of four major categories of the people. The main and prominent category is the local community. Secondly, a joint family called Tharavadu (ancestral home) also offers *Theyyam* dances. The third category is a single family. Apart from these categories of offerings in Kerala, non-resident Keralites offer Theyyams in other parts of India and even abroad. The results of our field survey clearly shows that about 95 percent of offerings of dance were made by the local community during 2012-13. (Table 2.5). *Tharavadu* (a Malayalam word which means ancestral home) had offered just 2.5 percent dance performances. About 2 percent dance offerings were made by single families. A non-resident outside Kerala had also made offerings.

**Table 2.5**  
**Offerings of Theyyam Dance in 2012-13: Responses**

<b>Category of Offerings</b>	<b>(No)</b>	<b>(%)</b>
Community	190	95
Tharavadu (Joint Family)	5	2.5
Single Family (Private)	4	2
Non - Resident Keralites	1	0.5
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey



## **2.5 Themes of Theyyam Dances and Caste Dimensions**

In an Upper Caste dominated society, Theyyam came as a platform for a positive relationships, interactions and cooperation, between Upper Castes and Scheduled Castes. It is a custom of worship that dates back several thousand years. The words of Scheduled Caste dancers during the Theyyam performance are venerated by the Upper Castes as the Divine Will. It may be noted that Upper Castes are the predominant groups which sponsor or offer the dance. When the performance ends, the SC dancers resume their ordinary roles in the lowermost strata of society with no special distinction or recognition. In the past, Theyyam dances were tools and weapons to resist and fight back against an unjust social system as a religious revelation. The result of our field survey clearly shows that the dance influences a section of Upper Castes (21%) in their positive attitudes towards lower castes. While there are Upper Caste people who refuse to mix with or eat with lower caste, several others (52%) have started to interact with the dancers in their day-to-day life. It may be noted that, over the last 20-30 years, Theyyam artists have used Theyyam to inspire self-confidence among the members of Scheduled Castes. According to 58 percent respondents covered under the survey, Scheduled Caste people see the Upper Castes bowing down to the deities that have entered Scheduled Castes as a positive and inspiring action. Some of the new generation dancers consider this response from Upper Castes as an encouraging action.

Recently a section of new generation dancers start showing interest in the performance as Theyyam has made positive impact on their self-esteem as a Theyyam artist. The policy change of CPI (M), the dominant political party in Kannur and Kasargode districts, has also played a significant role in enhancing the level of interest in Theyyam. During 80s and 90s CPI (M) and Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishat, KSSP, two atheist organizations had discouraged their members and supporters from performing or sponsoring Theyyam dance performances. As a result, the participation of new generation had declined. But the situation has undergone a sea change now as both the organizations have found it as a good art form for the new generation. Even the members and supporters of Communist Party perform Theyyam dances as they view it as an art form. Recently there is a revival as this art form is introduced in many universities in Folklore Studies section. Now there is an increased acceptance of this dance form as people wanted to identify themselves as an artist. A segment of Multi National Companies have started to sponsor the dances as a traditional form of art. In view of these factors social acceptance of the dance has increased considerably.

**Table: 2.6**  
**Dance Performers:**  
**Reasons for Selecting the Theyyam Dance as a Profession**

Main Reasons	Responses	
	Number	Percent
Family Traditions with Religious Belief	111	55.5
Family Traditions without Religious Belief	70	35
Livelihood	18	9
Love for Art	1	0.5
Total	200	100

*Source:* Field Survey

*Note:* Religious believers and non- believers take up Theyyam dance as part of their family tradition.

We have analyzed the reasons for selecting the Theyyam dance as a profession. Multiple factors have influenced people in the selection of the Theyyam Dance as a profession. These include family traditions along with religious belief, family traditions without religious belief, livelihood and love for art. About 55.5 percent Theyyam dancers have reported family traditions with religious belief as the main reason for selecting the Theyyam dance as a profession. When family traditions without religious belief were the reason for 35 percent Theyyam dancers, Livelihood (9%) and Love for Art (0.5%) were the main reasons for selecting the Theyyam dance as a profession.

### Chapter: 3

#### Health Problems of Theyyam Dancers belonging to Scheduled Castes in a Comparative Perspective: Field Analysis

In the chapter a wide range of health problems of Theyyam dancers are discussed in a comparative perspective. The analysis of their health issues is made in comparison with Scheduled Castes who are not engaged in Theyyam and the Upper Castes.

**3.1** Theyyam dance performances have several serious occupational hazards that adversely affect the health of the performers. Health of a significant number of dance performers has deteriorated after their long involvement in the dance performance. By and large, health deterioration is directly related to the rituals followed by the dancers and their livelihood issues.

**3.1.1. Rituals related health deterioration:** A dance performer is required to follow certain strict rituals. While some rituals are common to all varieties of Theyyam a few varieties have special rituals which have serious health implications on dance performers. Certain *Theyyam* performances involve in dangerous activities. In the case of *Theechamundi*, dancers need to fall in to fire early in the morning. Some Theyyams are performed with fire bowls around the body of the performer. *Ottakolam* Theyyam performer needs to enter fire heaps hundred times or so like *Puthia Bhagavathy* and *Kandakarnan Theyyam dancers* act with the fire bowls around their body. In *Puthiya Bhagavathy*, the dancer is required to walk on hot coals repeatedly. Whereas, in *Thottunkara Bhagavathy* Theyyam, the dancer has to accept and consume animal blood from the sacrifices conducted.



*One Dancer Represents One or More than One Deity*

The physical exertion of the performer, the engagement with harmful substances such as alcohol consumption and handling fire cause stress on the mental health of the dancers. Social discrimination also cause some level of mental agony. Low self esteem of the dancer is a prospective risk factor for depression. It is also found that a small section of dancers' children have low level of self-esteem.

The *Theyyam* dancer's preparation takes a long duration of time, between 11 to 36 hours to create each costume with bamboo textile and silver decorations, etc. The face painting and preparations on the performance day needs a long time in the range of 4 to 5 hours. The headgears are of different types, some are more than 22 feet high. Rituals start in the previous evening and a rigorous fasting is required. A Theyyam can last more than 12 or even 24 hours during which he may not be able to take food or drink water, putting a strain on his body. During the season, he works continuously day and night for weeks together leading to a lot of pressure on him. Hypertension is a common phenomenon in Theyyam artistes. The eye makeup affects the eyes of the performer. Many artistes take alcohol after the dance performances, to overcome the strain, but which again has a detrimental effect on his health. As discussed earlier, consumption of alcohol is a prerequisite for a particular variety of Theyyam dance. Blood circulation gets affected due to the Theyyam frame being tied to different parts of the body. Arthritis is another common illness found in performers.

The *Theyyam* performances are a day and night activity. A Theyyam performer leads a secluded life by observing extreme purity of mind and body. On the *Theyyam* day and the days before he takes simple vegetarian foods such as simple grains, fruits and tender coconut water to keep his body steady for performing the sacred dances. The results of the field survey in respect of health problems of dancers are reported in Table 3.1.

Most of the dance performers (95%) have indicated long working hours without proper food and sleep as a serious health problem. About 62 percent dance performers covered under the survey have reported that income from the dance is quite inadequate and they are engaged to part time job to supplement their income to support the family. This has required over time work and day and night activities resulting into several types of health problems. Prevalence of hyper tension is reported by over 42 percent respondents from dance performers. It is significant to understand that eye makeup has caused eye sickness for about 32 percent of the dance performers. Alcoholic addictions (22%) and rheumatic problems (28%) are also reported by dance performers.

**Table: 3.1**  
**Theyyam Dancers: Major Occupational Hazards and Health Problems**

<b>Occupational Hazards</b>	<b>%</b>
Working Hours for Dance Performance:12 - 24 hours without any break, proper food, sleep	<b>95</b>
Along with Dance performance and Additional Livelihood Activity to support the family resulting health problems.	<b>62</b>
Hyper Tension	<b>42</b>
Eye makeup affects the eyes of the performer adversely resulting to eye sickness	<b>32</b>
Rheumatism	<b>28</b>
Arthritis	<b>33</b>
Dance performers drink alcohol on regular basis to overcome the strain: Alcoholic addiction	<b>22</b>

Source: Field Survey

It is found that about 22 percent dance performers who had consumed alcohol on regular basis to overcome the strain became alcoholic addicts. According to 28 percent respondents blood circulation gets affected due to the Theyyam frame being tied to different parts of the body. About 33 percent have reported that Arthritis is another common illness found in performers. It is quite clear that several factors take a toll on the performers' health. Although there are no clear evidences of low life expectancy, the working age of Theyyam dancers has reduced significantly. They stop working at the age of 45-50 years indicating that they burn out at an early age.

**Table 3.2**  
**Health Problems of Theyyam dancers in a Comparative Perspective (%)**

<b>Health Problems</b>	<b>Scheduled Castes Theyyam Dancers</b>	<b>Scheduled Castes other than Theyyam Dancers</b>	<b>Upper Castes</b>
Eye sickness	32	2	3.5
Hyper Tension	42	10	12
Alcoholic Addiction	12	2	4.5
Rheumatism	28	7	6
Overtime work for livelihood	62	6	3

Source: Field Survey

Performers do not have group or individual health insurance protections during their performances. Many of them do not get timely treatment for diseases. As a result chronic ill health cases are reported by several Theyyam dancers. Rheumatic disorders are reported by a large number of Theyyam dancers. As indicated earlier Theyyams are actively performed by

teenagers and when they reach middle age they will be unable to engage in the *Theyyam activities* for rheumatic disorders.

The results of the analysis of health problems of Theyyam dancers in comparison with other members of Scheduled Castes who are not engaged in dance performance and also with upper castes are presented in Table 3.2. About 32 percent Theyyam Dancers covered under the survey have reported eye sickness against 2 percent Scheduled Castes other than Theyyam Dancers and 3.5 percent Upper Castes. Similarly, about 42 percent Theyyam dancers covered under the survey have reported hypertension against 10 percent Scheduled Castes other than Theyyam dancers and 12 percent Upper Castes. In the case of other health problems such as alcoholic addiction, rheumatic problems and overtime work for livelihood Theyyam dancers covered under the survey have reported much higher level of prevalence compared to the other two categories. It is quite evident that the health problems reported by Theyyam dancers are not prevalent among other sections covered under the survey. So it can be safely concluded that performance of Theyyam dance has affected the health status of Theyyam dancers adversely.

**3.1.2 Livelihood Related Health Deterioration:** Our field experiences clearly indicate that Theyyam dancers have been undergoing a struggle for livelihood and fighting for their survival with acute poverty and poor health. While the earning from Theyyam activities remains abysmally low, they cannot afford to have a minimum standard of living. They are compelled to engage in other activities to supplement their meagre income from Theyyam. For example, some of these dancers, after spending the whole night in a dance performance continue to work in other fields during the day time. For example, a few Theyyam dancers work as private bus assistants on a daily wage basis. They do not get time to take any rest. About 89 percent dancers are the single source of income for their respective families and they need to engage in other part time jobs during day time and off season. This situation has resulted in several health related problems for Theyyam dancers. A serious concern for Theyyam dancers is the lack of coverage of any social security system, especially health insurance.

### **3.2 Marriage Practices and Genetic Problems**

We have examined the marriage practices of Theyyam dancers with a focus on the occurrence of genetic problems. It is found that their social customs are exclusive and inter caste marriages are not permitted among their different sub castes. Marriage takes place mainly

within the sub caste only. As is evident from Table 3.3, about 98 percent respondents have reported marriages with own sub caste.

**Table: 3.3**  
**Marriage Practices of Theyyam Dancers**

<b>Category</b>	<b>%</b>
Marriage within own Caste	98
Marriage outside the Caste	2
Marriage related problem for new born children	Not Reported

Source: Field Survey

However, even a single genetic problem or marriage related problem for a new born baby is not reported during the survey.



## Chapter 4

### Socio- Economic Problems of Theyyam Dancers in a Comparative Perspective

#### 4.1 Social Exclusion

We have attempted to assess the respect of Theyyam dancers in the society. Our field survey indicates that *Theyyam* performers of Scheduled Castes belonging to lower strata of society feel social discrimination even today in several parts of North Kerala. Social exclusion of lower caste communities still prevails in the society. It is a fact that the level of self-esteem of these Scheduled Castes increase when high caste Brahmins worship them and queue up to touch their feet. However, they do not get that respect and recognition after the dance performance. The results of our field survey clearly shows that their self esteem is extremely low in respect of over 15 percent of dancers covered under the survey.



*Theyyam Dancing is a Seasonal Activity*

#### 4.2 Education, Income and Occupational Pattern

Majority of the Theyyam performers have just basic education. Low level of higher education among the Theyyam dancers is a matter of concern. As is evident from Table 4.1, about 41 percent respondents have primary school education while 14 percent are illiterate. The analysis of the level of education of Theyyam dancers in a comparative perspective clearly indicates that their situation in respect of level of education is quite worrisome as compared to other scheduled Castes and Upper Castes. About 14 percent respondents under Theyyam dancers



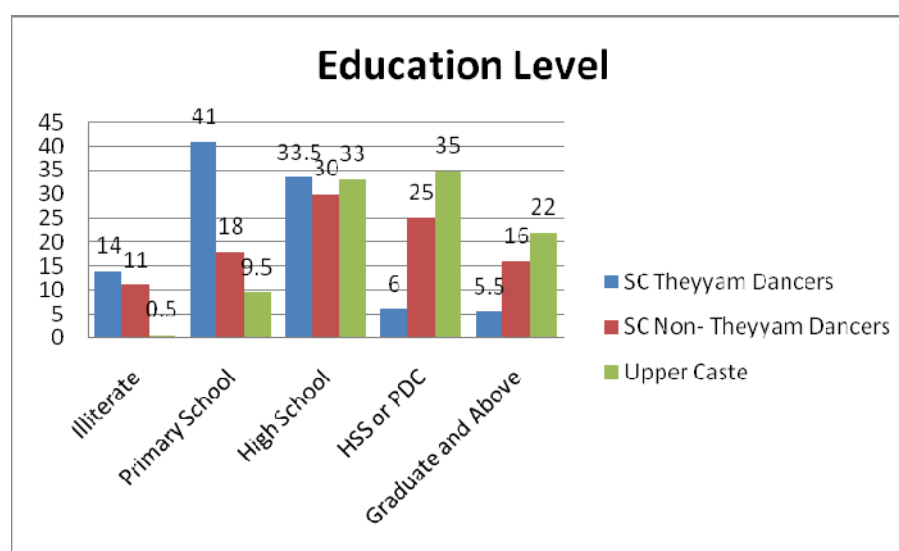
category were illiterate against 11 other Scheduled Castes and just 0.5 percent Upper Castes. While about 41 percent respondents under Theyyam dancer's category had primary school education against 18 percent under other Scheduled Castes category and 9.5 percent under Upper Castes category. Those who are having high school education are more or less same in all the three categories. Level of higher education among the Theyyam dancers is quite low. About 5.5 percent respondents under Theyyam dancer's category had graduation and above against 16 percent in the other Scheduled Castes category and 22 percent under Upper Castes category(Fig:4.1).

**Table 4.1**  
**Theyyam Dancers: Education Pattern in a Comparative Perspective**

	Category	SC Theyyam Dancers (%)	SC non Theyyam Dancers (%)	Upper Castes (%)
<b>Education</b>	Illiterate	14.0	11	0.5
	Primary School	41.0	18	9.5
	High School	33.5	30	33
	HSS or PDC	6.0	25	35
	Graduate and Above	5.5	16	22
	Total	100	100	100

Source: Household Survey

**Fig. 4.1**



Seasonality of job is reported as one of the key issues for 86 percent Theyyam dancers covered under the survey. Seasonal pattern of Theyyam dance reported by respondents is presented in

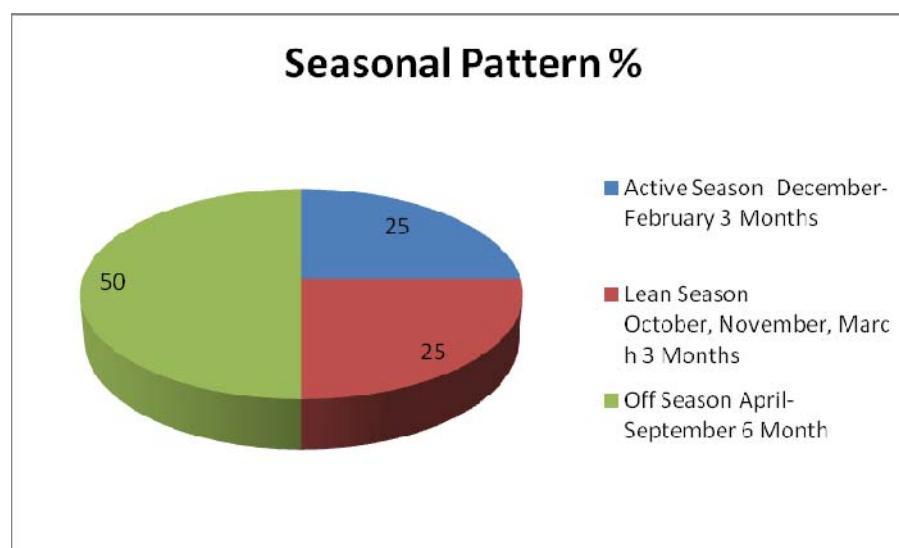
Table 4.2 and Fig 4.2. According to 98 percent respondents, December- February is the active season while October, November and March are lean seasons. The period from April to September is reported as the Off season. Theyyam dancers are not engaged in the dance performance during April- September and hence the majority is forced to engage in part time jobs. December-February is the active season and some of them give up their jobs and become Theyyam artists. For those months they become God, say 'part time God'. Their life style undergoes several changes during the active season. They never eat meat or fish and are forbidden to sleep with their wives. According to the local community they bring blessings to the village and the villagers, and eliminate evil spirits. They are of the firm belief that Theyyam dancers can show gratitude to Gods for fulfilling their desires and prayers. In March the season ends and the dancers pack away their costumes and go back to their alternate profession or livelihood. The seasonality phenomenon of Theyyam dance affects the economic condition of the performers. The dancers are forced to take up other jobs for their subsistence.

**Table: 4.2**  
**Theyyam Dancers: Seasonal Pattern**

Season	Period	Number of months	% of responses
Active Season	December-February	3 Months	98
Lean Season	October, November, March	3 Months	99
Off Season	April-September	6 Month	95

Source: Field Survey

**Fig. 4.2**



It is significant to understand that most of the part-time jobs of Theyyam dancers are quite non-remunerative and strenuous. Examples of the part time occupations include Toddy tappers,

wedding decorators, bus conductors, waiters at a restaurant or hotel. The job of a toddy tapper is to pluck coconuts and collect the fermented coconut water from the top of the coconut trees. According to about 92 percent Theyyam dancers covered under the survey it is very difficult to get gainful part time jobs in the current situation. As is evident from Table 4.3, over 65 percent dancers have taken up part time jobs. These jobs include a wider range of activities such as waiter at a restaurant or hotel, bus conductor, Toddy tapper, prison warden, open well builder, wedding decorator, etc. The average annual income from the part time job is in the range of Rs. 49,500 to 62,500. However, their living conditions are poor and pathetic. Theyyam gives only seasonal employment for a period of 60 days or so on an average per person of a Theyyam group during a Theyyam season. For the rest, they take up some part time job or are kept unemployed. Year-long employment is only a dream for Theyyam performers. It is found that average age of over 7 percent Theyyam dancers covered under the study is less than 40. However, those who have taken up part time job are in the range of 33-39 years. After the age of 40 years it is quite difficult to get part-time job or take up part-time work.

**Table: 4.3**  
**Part -Time Jobs of Theyyam Dancers During Theyyam Seasons**

Part -Time Job	%	Regularity and Nature of Job	Average Annual Income from the Job (Rs.)	Average Age of the Dancer
Waiter at Hotel / Restaurant	5	Serving food to customers/Part time job :15-17 days in a month	56,000	38
Bus Conductor	17	Issue the tickets to bus passengers and collect the payment10-12 days work for in a month.	52,500	39
Toddy Tapper	14	Pluck coconuts and collect the fermented coconut water from the top of the palm trees. Part time job :10-15 days in a month	50,500	35
Prison Warden	0.2	Support services in prison work 8-10 days in a month	51,500	34
Well-Builder	0.5	Construction of open well work 8-10 days in month	49,500	33
Wedding Decorator	0.6	Decoration of Wedding Halls work: 10-12days in month	53,500	36
Other Jobs	28.2	Work for 12 days	62,500	39
Do not have part Time job	25.4	NA	NA	NA
No Response	9.1	NA	NA	NA
Total	100	NA	NA	NA

Source: Field Study

The age, employment and income pattern of Theyyam Dancers is presented in Table 4.4. It is found that only 0.5 percent respondents under dancer's category covered under the sample survey is fully employed in other jobs. While 55 percent respondents are partly employed in other jobs with an average annual income of Rs. 60,000, about 44.5 percent *Theyyam* dancers do not have any job and earn an average annual income of Rs. 25,000

**Table 4.4**  
**Age, Employment and Income Pattern: Theyyam Dancers**

Occupation of Theyyam Dancers	Percent	Average Annual Income (Rs.)	Average Age
SC Theyyam Dancers: Fully Employed in other Jobs	0.5	2,20,000	38
SC Theyyam Dancers: Partly Employed in other Jobs	55	60, 000	37
SC Theyyam Dancers: Without any other job	44.5	25,000	39

Source: Household Survey

The employment pattern of households covered under the survey is presented in Table 4.5. Employment pattern of at least one person in a household, either Theyyam dancer, or any other member of the family, is analysed. However, employment as a Theyyam dancer is not considered here. It is found that only 5 percent members of households of SC Theyyam dancers are fully employed against 37 percent households of SC-non Theyyam dancers and 26 percent households of Upper Castes. About 47 percent households of SC Theyyam Dancers are partly employed against 35 percent households of SC-non Theyyam dancers and 44 percent households of Upper Castes. It is also reported that 48 percent households of SC Theyyam dancers are unemployed against 28 percent households of SC-non *Theyyam* dancers and 30 percent households of Upper Castes.

**Table 4.5**  
**Employment Pattern of Household in a Comparative Perspective**

Occupation of the Family members	Households of SC Theyyam Dancers (%)	Households of SC non Theyyam Dancers (%)	Households of Upper Castes (%)
Fully Employed	5	37	26
Partly Employed	47	35	44
Unemployed	48	28	30
Total	100	100	100

Note (i) Employment pattern of at least one person in a household is reported  
(ii) Employment as a Theyyam dancer is not considered here and 48 percent unemployed under category of Households of SC Theyyam Dancers include those are engaged to Theyyam dancing which is a seasonal job.

The income pattern of households covered under the survey is presented in Table 4.6. It is found that average annual household income of SC Theyyam dancers who are fully employed is Rs. 2,50,000 against Rs. 3,50,000 for households of SC-non Theyyam dancers and Rs. 5,00,000 for households of Upper Castes. The same trend is available with the household income of partly employed. The average annual household income of SC Theyyam dancers who are partly employed is Rs. 1,75,000 against Rs. 3,25,000 for households of SC-non Theyyam dancers and Rs. 3,50,000 for households of Upper Castes. The average annual household income of SC Theyyam dancers who do not have any other job is Rs. 30,000 against Rs. 40,000 for households of SC-non Theyyam dancers who are unemployed and Rs. 3,50,000 for households of Upper Castes who are unemployed.

**Table 4.6**  
**Income Pattern of Household in a Comparative Perspective**

Occupation of the Family members	Average annual household income of SC Theyyam Dancers (Rs)	Average annual household income of non Theyyam Dancers (Rs)	Average annual household income of Upper Caste (Rs)
Fully Employed	2,50,000	3,50,000	5,00,000
Partly Employed	1,75,000	325000	350000
Unemployed	30,000	40,000	50,000

The dancer gets a specific amount which needs to be shared with the team members. The income pattern of a dancer indicates that he gets approximately 10-15 dances in a year. As presented the Table 4.7, a dance performer gets Rs. 8,550 as average annual income from dance performance. The income from *Theyyam* dance is abysmally low. The earnings from the Theyyam season are insufficient to sustain his family throughout the Off-season period of up to 6 months. In earlier times, such performers were sustained by the community or by feudal clans through a portion (cash or kind) being kept aside from harvests, temple income, marriage ceremonies and such events for their use. Such patronage from the community was a practice in the past. In recent years, this situation has changed drastically and the artiste is dependent entirely on performances during the season.

#### **4.3 Sponsoring of Theyyam Dancers as Offerings**

Community of believers belonging to Upper Castes in a particular locality sponsors Theyyam dance. In exceptional cases members of Scheduled Castes who have got good jobs also sponsor the dance programmes. Single families, mainly from Upper Caste families, also sponsor the dance. The average cost of offering Theyyam Dance and Income of Theyyam Dancers is

presented in Table 4.7. It is found that the cost of sponsoring a dance for a community is estimated as Rs. 2,56,000 while for single family it is Rs. 1,21,000 and for Non-resident Keralites it is Rs. 2,52,000.

**Table: 4.7**  
**Types of Offering of Theyyam Dance and Income of Theyyam Dancers**

	Gross Income (Rs.)	Average number of Performance in an year (Nos)
Theyyam dance as Community/joint offerings ( This amount to be shared by a team of 12-15 persons)	2,56,000	10
Theyyam dance as a single family offerings	1,21,000	3
Non-Resident Keralites	2,52,000	1
Average Annual Income from Theyyam Performance per person	8,550	

Source: Field Survey

#### 4.4 Land Ownerships and Living Conditions

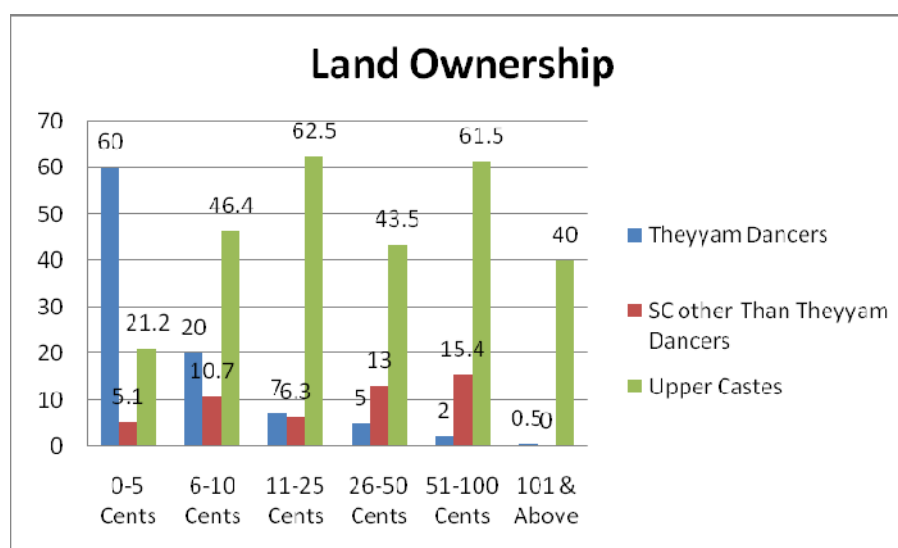
Traditionally, the Theyyam performers are not land owners and the majority of them hold less than 5 cents land in rural areas. As is evident from Table 4.8 about 60 percent households of Theyyam dancers have just 5 cents and another 22 per cent have 10 cents. The landholding pattern of dancers is compared with that of other two categories. As is presented in the Table 4.8, the Scheduled Caste household who are not engaged in dance have much better landholdings. It is needless to say that a large number of Upper Castes are land owners. Dancers cannot engage in agricultural activities as an alternative source of livelihood during the off season.

**Table: 4.8**  
**Land Ownership and Theyyam Dancers in a comparative perspective (%)**

	Land Ownership						Total
	0-5 Cents	6-10 Cents	11-25 Cents	26-50 Cents	51-100 Cents	101 & Above	
Theyyam Dancers	60	22	07	5	4	2	100
SC other Than Theyyam Dancers	21.2	26.4	19	15	14.4	4	100
Upper Castes	5.1	10.7	6.3	22	18	37.9	100

Source: Household Survey

Fig. 4.3



**Table 4.9**  
**Type of House & Consumer Durables: Theyyam Dancers in a Comparative Perspective (%)**

	SC Theyyam dancers	SC other than Theyyam dancers	Upper Castes
Household with Terrace/Concreted roof	7	14.5	87
Household with Tile roof	24	36.5	8
Household with Thatch roof	69	49	5
Electrified	94	98	100.0
Non-electrified	6	2	-
Own Houses	96	97	99.5
Rented	4	3	0.5
Car	0.9	8.1	13.3
Scooter/Motorbike	12.1	27.0	67
Generator/Inverter	-	-	6.7
LPG Gas	0.5	3	6
Television	33	82	99
Mobile Phone	73	74	96
Landline Phone	3	21	54

Source: Household Survey

#### 4.5 Social Security Programmes for Theyyam Dancers

As discussed in Chapter 3 Theyyam dancing is a risky affair as dancers of a few varieties of Theyyam dances involve in dangerous activities. It is a serious matter of concern that there is no adequate coverage of social security schemes for Theyyam dancers. In this context it is important to understand the social security schemes of Government of Kerala. Social security benefits are provided to workers in the organized sector and the benefits include provident funds paid to workers on superannuation, monthly pensions and gratuity. In the unorganized

sector a few schemes are available. For instance, social insurance facility is available to a section of workers. This scheme is to help workers to get an ex gratia payment in the event of disability or death. This also covers payment of a specific amount in the event of medical treatment. Welfare Fund is another scheme for workers in the unorganized sector covering areas of agriculture, cashew, coir, construction, fisheries, khadi, handloom, toddy tapping, etc. Kerala, over the years, has established different welfare fund boards. These were created through different labour welfare legislations. These welfare boards provide financial support for housing and education of children apart from pension, death benefits, medical care (Ex-gratia for treatment) maternity benefits, marriage of daughters and funeral assistance. It may be noted that about 85 percent of the working population in Kerala is in the unorganized (John 2011).

The comparative analysis of the availability of social security scheme is presented in Table 4.10. It is found that Theyyam dancers lag behind other two categories in respect of the availability of social security scheme. It is found that about 1.5 percent dancers covered under the survey get pension. However, the amount of the pension is not adequately attractive. Theyyam dancers get 700 while chieftains get Rs. 800 as annual pension from the state government. Chieftains must be above 50 years to receive the pension. Theyyam dancers are not considered as traditional craftsmen by the Government of Kerala for which they are denied many of the social protection benefits instituted by the Government of Kerala. There is no social protection scheme such as Community Insurance Schemes or Personal Insurance Scheme exclusively for Theyyam dancers.

**Table: 4.10**  
**Types of Social Security available Theyyam Dancers in a Comparative Perspective**

Sector	Pension %	Insurance %	Welfare Fund %
SC Theyyam Dancers	1.5	0.5	8.0
SC- Non Theyyam Dancers	<b>2.5</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>8.5</b>
Upper Castes	5.0	2.0	7

Source: Household Survey

Note: Many of these beneficiaries get more than one scheme given in the Table.

As presented in table 4.10 about 0.5 percent dancers are covered under insurance and 8 percent get the benefits of welfare fund. Among SC non Theyyam dancers about 2.5 percent gets pension, 1.2 percent gets insurance coverage while 8.5 percent get welfare fund. In fact the position of upper castes is slightly different. About 5 percent upper castes avail pension, 2 percent insurance and 7 percent welfare fund. Types of insurance converge were mainly health



insurance, accident/mortality insurance. As 6.5 percent household members were covered by health insurance 14.5 percent by accident/mortality insurance.

#### **4.6 Entry of New Generation**

About 65 percent households reported that the children are not enthusiastic to take up dance as a profession and the recent trend shows that the number of people ready for dancing among the new generation has started dwindling. It is for meeting the religious and artistic satisfaction dance performers and involves in the dance activities. It is reported that some families of Scheduled Castes dance performers who have been working in Gulf countries sponsor Theyyam dance programmes.

#### **4.7 Difficulties in Tapping Cultural and Artistic Aspects**

The demand and supply of Theyyam dance needs to be analyzed considering various factors. The results of our field survey clearly shows that there is an increasing demand for Theyyam dance performance by Keralites and art loving people in other parts of India and abroad. The demand for dance outside Kerala is met by a small section of new generation dancers. However, there is a resistance by significant section of old generation dancers in performing dances outside Kerala. Some of these old generation dancers term this as “commercialization of Theyyam Dancers”. The old generation firmly believes that the dance should be religious and artistic and cultural dimensions should be totally neglected. This conflict between the two different schools of thoughts among Theyyam dancers has become a stumbling block in the initiatives in meeting the increasing demand for *Theyyam* dance.

#### **4.8 Case Studies of Theyyam Dancers**

##### **Case Study 1: Theyyam Dancer with Serious Health Problems**

Balan Puthuran, a 57 year old Theyyam dancer, has now been suffering from an acute heart ailment. He hails from Nileshwaram Taluk of Kasargode district. In fact, he has over 40 years experience in performing Theyyam dance. He was honored by a royal family of Nileshwaram with “Pattu and Vala”.<sup>4</sup> He was also and given a traditional title “Puthuran “for his outstanding contribution in the field of Theyyam. It may be noted that there is a system of recognizing a Theyyam dancer for his outstanding contribution by a royal family in the area. . Unfortunately, at the age of 57 he is in severe financial crisis and family cannot meet the cost of his treatment.

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<sup>4</sup> Pattu is a Malayalam word which means silk fabric and “Vala” is a Malayalam word which means bangles.

Now he has approached various agencies including the state government for financial support. So far he could not get any support and continues his efforts. His experiences clearly indicate the need for a proper social security system for a Theyyam dancer.

### **Case Study 2: A Theyyam Dancer with National and International Exposure in Remaining Poverty**

Sunil Panicker, a 36 year old Theyyam dancer, has been performing Theyyam dance for the last 20 years. The dancer from Kannoore district has performed several varieties of dances in Kerala, Delhi and Germany. . He has got national and international exposures by performing dances in several places outside Kerala such as Delhi and Germany. He was honored with “Pattu” and “Vala” and given the traditional title “ Panicker” for his outstanding contribution in the field of Theyyam. Despite these performances he is still in poverty with an average annual income of around Rs.25,000. He owns just 5 cent land and a semi built small house in a rural area. He has just 10<sup>th</sup> standard school education. It may be noted that the majority of Theyyam dancers, barring new generation Theyyam dancers, do not have higher education. Considering the strain, stress, high cost of dance materials, etc., an average monthly income of Rs.4000- Rs.5000 is quite inadequate to maintain a moderate quality of life. He does not have any insurance or any other social security schemes. His case is a clear example of an outstanding dance performer remains in poverty or low income level.



*Theyyam Format is Risky and Involves Tremendous Physical Exertion and Hard Work*

### **Case Study 3: Theyyam Dancer with Successful Professional Background**

Dr. Rajesh Komath belongs to a Scheduled Caste community which has a right to perform Theyyam dance. Hailing from Kasargode district, he was fortunate to get proper education. He has completed education up to Doctorate / Ph. D. In fact, he has got the benefit of reservation in education and employment. Now he is an Associate Professor in the Department of Social Sciences at M.G. University in Kottayam, Kerala. Even at this stage he finds time to perform Theyyam dance in his native place. He transforms into a living God from October to January every year. He is a practitioner of a ritualistic art form. His case is a classic example of the commitment of a Theyyam dancer to this art form and obligation to follow traditional rituals and customs even after getting good education and reputed job.

In a nutshell, Theyyam dancers are treated as a God when they perform the dance. When they come out of the dance programme they are untouchable and less dignified. Hence they are called “part time God” with “part time respect”. Since the dance profession is a seasonal job they are compelled to engage in a part time job. Since most of them do not have proper education, they are not in a position to get a remunerative job and they are compelled to take less remunerative part time jobs with part time life. It is apt to call them part time God with part time job, part time social respect and part time life. This clearly indicates the hardships of Theyyam dancers.

In view of the unavailability of adequate welfare measures and lack of regular earnings through the year, the younger members of the community are not enthusiastic in taking up this as a profession. *Theyyam* is not considered as a sustainable livelihood at all. Some of the specialists who work back end – such as singers, and instrumentalists – are usually not recognized and rewarded well. Due to this and the seasonal nature of the work, very few people have taken up this dance as a profession.

The forgoing analysis clearly indicates certain critical issues of Theyyam dancers. The major social and economic issues can be summarized as follows:

- Season unemployment for 6 months and low income
- Absence of a proper pension insurance coverage or social protection scheme
- Difficulties in tapping the demand for dance performance for artistic purpose
- Social discrimination and Social exclusion
- Various forms of health problems of Theyyam dance

#### 4.9 FGD and Interactive Meeting with Theyyam Dancers

During various Focus Group Discussions and the interactive meeting provided Theyyam dancers presented their different health, social and economic problems. They have made several suggestions to address their problems. These meetings witnessed a conflict between the new generation and old generation members of Theyyam families in addressing their problems.



*A Theyyam Dancer Presents his Various Problems*



*Theyyam Dancers actively Participate in an Interactive Meeting*





*A Scene from Interactive Meeting with Theyyam Dancers*



*Scholars Interact with Theyyam Dancers*

## Chapter: 5

### Major Recommendations

Considering the serious health, social and economic problems of Theyyam Dancers belonging to Scheduled Castes, certain concrete measures are required to address them. Several measures are suggested to address these complex problems. In view of various cultural dimensions of the *Theyyam* dance the scope for promoting it as an art is also examined in this chapter. The special interventions required for the upliftment and welfare of Theyyam dancers through various government programmes are listed here.

#### 5.1.1 Pension and Other Welfare Schemes

At present *Theyyam* dancers are quite vulnerable to various uncertainties and no support system is available to ailing Theyyam artists during the fag end of the career. They do not get the benefit of any social security system. It is important to provide them the benefit of a regular pension scheme. Currently a meager amount of Rs.800 is being given by the state government of Kerala as financial support to Theyyam dancers. The present financial help should be converted into a regular pension scheme. A minimum of Rs. 3,000 should be given as a monthly pension to all the Theyyam dancers when they reach the age of 50 years irrespective of their financial status.

#### 5.1.2 Risk Allowance and Accident Insurance

Most of the *Theyyam dance* format is very risky and involves tremendous physical exertion and hard work. For instance, *Theyyams* like *Theechamundy* and *Pottan Theyyam* artists need to walk bare foot on a fire bed. Because of these kinds of physical exertion they become ill and the ageing process becomes very fast. Considering the high risk, a proper insurance coverage, risk allowance and medical insurance scheme should be made available to Theyyam dancers.

#### 5.1.3 Housing and Crematorium

It is found that there are a few Theyyam dancers who do not own house or land. They could not avail the benefit of centrally sponsored housing schemes or state government schemes. Steps may be taken to provide housing facilities to them. In addition, attractive housing grant schemes may be provided to *Theyyam* dancers. There is a strong need for a common crematorium or cremation ground for SC and ST and it is desirable to provide these facilities to them.

#### **5.1.4 Welfare of Children**

*Theyyam* dancers need special attention especially in respect of the education of the children. The amount of students scholarships and lump sum grant to the students should be revised periodically. A scheme for providing financial help for marriage of daughters of *Theyyam* dancers may be set up.

#### **5.1.5 Special Welfare Funds for Theyyam Artist**

A contributory welfare fund may be devised for *Theyyam* artists. Appropriate steps may be taken to create a welfare fund for *Theyyam* dancers. Accordingly, temples can set aside a specific amount of money for a welfare fund, to which the artists can also contribute after each performance. This can be used to help artists when they are forced to retire due to ill health or old age. A welfare fund can help many artists to address their financial and health problems.

### **5.2 Livelihood Support and Livelihood Projects**

As *Theyyam* dancing is quite a seasonal activity most of the artists depend on five to six month's earnings for the expenditure in the entire year. An attractive scheme may be devised to provide a livelihood support. The scheme should encompass interest free loans, training programmes, marketing support, etc. The livelihood projects can include setting up of craft centres for making jewellery and other ornaments, fabric making units for costumes, for make-up artists, etc.

### **5.3 Promotion of *Theyyam* as a Religious and Cultural Event: Need for Government Interventions**

**5.3.1 Scope for Intervention of Ministry of Culture:** The prevailing adverse health, social and economic aspects of *Theyyam* compel dancers and their children to engage in more economically viable and less strenuous livelihood and career. As a result the new generation is not enthusiastic in joining the profession. This leads to diminished number of artists and ultimately the loss of a unique cultural phenomenon that is a part of the heritage of a particular community as well as India as a country. Theyyam is not in the professional art list though it has several unique features. The new generation should be encouraged to learn and perform the art. Though many people in the field have begun to create awareness among the youth the new generation from the household of the dancer's family is not much attracted to this art form. There is a need to recognize the value of our own tradition. The cultural dimensions of the *Theyyam* dance should get adequate significance and there is a need for promoting *Theyyam*

dance as a traditional dance. In this context, it is important to provide necessary support by the Ministry of Culture to promote Theyyam dance as a cultural programme.

**5.3.2 Scope for Intervention of the Ministry of Tourism:** Ministry of Tourism, Government of India and Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala can take certain measures to promote *Theyyam* dance. It is important to promote it under the category of religious tourism.

**5.3.3 Popularisation of Art and Honoring Theyyam Artists:** At present, conflict of interest exists between the new and the old generation dancers as there is a divide between the old school of thoughts and new school of thoughts. There are new developments in this art form like introduction of Mudras for more acceptances which has influenced a fraction of the dancers. Modernization and commercialization of art form has started among the new educated artists. The new generation is educated and they have a view that the art-form should be taken out from the current confined enactment to a wide panorama as it will create more opportunity for the artists and popularize the art. But this view is opposed by the orthodox people who are in the age group of 60 and above, as they do not want to move away from the traditional set up. Appropriate promotional activities, with the support of relevant ministries and departments, can address these issues. Promotional activities especially measures such as honoring *Theyyam* Artists like any other art forms, can attract new generation of the Theyyam families.

**5.3.4 Training and Documentation:** There is no written document for training new artists and currently the training is dependent mainly on the knowledge that is transferred from generations to the head of the families. Documentation of the rituals and customs of the training methodology is very important. Various aspects of dances especially the songs and stories have to be recorded in a form that enables the dancers to share it with the new generations. The proper orientation needs to be provided to dancers in order to reduce their work pressure and exhaustion. Steps may be taken to organize programmes for interested people of Scheduled Castes on different dimensions of Theyyam Dance. This will help them in acquiring the skill and enable them to become dance professionals.



## Chapter: 6

### **Theyyam Dance and Empowerment of Scheduled Castes: Lessons for Indian States**

6.1 The present study on Scheduled Castes who performs Theyyam dance has added a new dimension to the established perspectives in relation to castes and class. Theyyam is not just a dance but a practice with twin elements of art and religious devotion. The unique feature of this dance system is its close relationship with the social systems and caste structure in Kerala. Theyyam dancing is not an occupation that can be adopted at will as the rights of performing the Theyyam are acquired by virtue of birth. The rights of representation of deities through Theyyam dances are strictly regulated and divided between the Castes and communities.

6.2 A vast majority of Indian Scheduled Castes continue to face old and new several challenges and in this context, it is important to share the experience of Scheduled Castes who performs Theyyam dance in northern Kerala, with various Indian States. This is a unique experience which can be replicated in other states as a tool to address diverse problems of Scheduled Castes in different States. Some of the aspects of replicability in relation to effectiveness of similar artistic forms or cultural programmes of Scheduled Castes in addressing a wide set of issues around them are discussed in the following paragraphs.

#### **6.2.1. Artistic or Cultural Performance of Scheduled Castes: A Strong Medium of Spreading Message against Social Inequality**

A medium of artistic or cultural performance can be effectively used as a tool reduce or remove the suppression of the Scheduled Castes in a society. The worship of a Theyyam deity results in unifying society rather than dividing it. Theyyam dance performance is the mixture of playfulness and seriousness. For example, in 'PottanTheyyam' the performer abuses, reviles and even physically mistreat the highest authority with unusual anger. Theyyam-performer, in trance, speaks out the frustration and resentment of his community. Sometimes the performer speaks out nonsensical things or cracks jokes which would make the devotees laugh. The performer can try to make people laugh even when play with fire. At the same time he will make criticism which will be taken seriously. In certain stage of the dance he enacts the collective wish of the community he represents. In all forms of Theyyam dance the words of Scheduled Caste dancers during the performance are venerated by the Upper Castes as the Divine Will. Through the medium of trance, the dancer who represents deity of the respective Theyyam acquired a voice and are able to speak directly to the Upper Castes against social

injustices. It is quite evident that Theyyam dance has become a strong medium for spreading the message of social equity and social harmony in Kerala. Theyyam has become a platform for a positive relationships, interactions and cooperation, between Upper Castes and Scheduled Castes. Recently a section of new generation dancers has started to show interest in the performance as Theyyam has made positive impact on their self-esteem as a Theyyam artist. Theyyam dances are now effective tools and weapons to resist and fight back against an unjust social system as a religious revelation during a particular dance performance influences a considerable section of Upper Castes in their positive attitudes towards lower castes.

#### **6.2.2. Empowerment of a Weaker Community through Identification and Promotion of Cultural Heritage**

If the roadmap sketched in the previous chapter is implemented quickly with all seriousness, Scheduled Castes who perform Theyyam dance in Kerala can reap benefits in terms of social and economic empowerment. A model of upliftment and welfare of Theyyam dancers belonging to Scheduled Castes through various government programmes can be a lesson for them. In every state there may be similar artistic or cultural performance of Scheduled Caste community which may identified and promoted in an effective way. State governments with the support of local government institutions and civil society organizations can identify traditional art forms or cultural heritage of Scheduled Castes.

#### **6.2.3. Empowerment of a Scheduled Castes with the support of schemes through inter-ministerial coordination and convergence of programmes**

Theyyam a traditional dance of Scheduled Castes of northern Kerala can be upgraded as professional art form with support of the Ministry of Culture. Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment may take up this issue with Ministry of Culture. This can be considered as an innovative intervention. In India, there is a good scope for using non- traditional innovative approaches in addressing a wide range of issues of Scheduled Castes . A single ministry or department may not be able to formulate and execute such programmes. It will be quite effective when central ministries such as Ministry of Social Justice and Ministry of Culture or even corresponding departments of the respective State can come together through convergence of programmes in addressing various issues of Scheduled Castes.

#### **6.2.4. Value Addition, Skill Development and Conservation of Traditional Knowledge**

Employment can be generated for young generation members of Scheduled Castes in Kerala if support is given to Theyyam dancer in upgrading their skills using modern techniques. However, these interventions should be made without diminishing the traditional heritage and value system. It may be noted that this is an employment which does not demand higher educational qualifications. Training and documentation is required to upgrade the dance system as a profession. Currently there is no written document for training new artists who are dependent mainly on the knowledge that is transferred from generations to the head of the families. Documentation of the rituals and customs of the training methodology can be a good value addition. The recording of various aspects of dances such as the songs and stories can enable the dancers to share it with the new generations. By acquiring the skill, the new generation Theyyam performers can become dance professionals. Similar interventions can be introduced to promote artistic and cultural performance of Scheduled Castes in other States also. It can be a new field of employment for youth belonging to Scheduled Caste

#### **6.2.5. Empowerment of Scheduled Castes by addressing Conflicts between Old and New Generation**

In every sphere of life are conflicts between old and new generation and it is quite natural to see such conflicts among Scheduled Castes in several states. There is a little realization of the causes of such conflicts. The new generation is not enthusiastic in joining the traditional artistic or cultural activities due to diverse reasons. There is an increasing tendency of the old generation to resist the introduction of required changes in line with the needs and aspirations of young generation. This leads to diminished number of artists and ultimately the loss of a unique cultural phenomenon that is a part of the heritage of a particular community. The new generation should be encouraged to learn and perform the art through a package of motivations. There is a need for promoting interventions of government and non-government organizations in bridging the gap between old and new generations

The foregoing analysis clearly indicates that experiences of Theyyam dance in the northern part of Kerala deserve to be shared with other Indian States. Even the present form of Theyyam dance system have certain positive features which can be shared with Indian States. However, certain steps are required to be taken to upgrade the present form of Theyyam dance to a professional dance. The details are given in Table 6.1

**Table 6.1**  
**Theyyam Dance or other Artistic or Cultural Performance of Scheduled Castes and**  
**Empowerment of Scheduled Castes : Lessons for Indian States**

<b>Current Feature of Theyyam Dance</b>	<b>Interventions Required</b>	<b>Impact Made / Possible Impact after the intervention</b>	<b>Replicability/ Lessons for other Indian States</b>
Theyyam dance of SC is a strong medium of spreading message against social inequality	Not required	Social harmony and social equality is improved substantially in Kerala	Artistic and cultural heritages of SC can be promoted for achieving social harmony and social equality.
Theyyam, a traditional dance performance of Scheduled Castes is not a professional art form .	Ministry of Culture can provide necessary support to upgrade the Theyyam dance as a professional art form.	Employment creation for new generation belonging to SC.	Promotion of artistic and cultural performance of Scheduled Castes . It can be a new field of employment.
Empowerment of with inter-ministerial coordination and convergence of programmes	Theyyam a traditional dance being performed by SC of northern Kerala can be upgraded as professional art form with support of the Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.	Employment creation for new generation belonging to SC.	Inter-ministerial and inter-departmental coordination and convergence of programmes in addressing various issues of SC
Value addition, skill development and conservation of traditional knowledge	Documentation of the rituals and customs of the training methodology can be a good value addition.	By acquiring the skill the new generation Theyyam performers can become dance professionals	Similar interventions can be introduced in other States also. It can be a new field of employment for new generation belonging to SC

A significant number of SC communities across Indian states are still striving to fulfill their basic needs without getting better opportunities to a dignified life. Most of the major states such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat have reported increasing number of atrocities against SC and ST during 2001-2012 (RTI Foundation of India, 2014). It indicates that serious and strong measures taken by different State and national governments could not prevent the growing atrocities against SC and ST and to enhance their welfare. Since many of these measures are not adequately effective, strong innovative measures are required. In the modern world using artistic and cultural heritage of local community can be an effective technique. Increasing atrocities and discrimination against people belonging to Scheduled Caste in several states, especially backward states can be reduced or even removed by popularizing traditional artistic and cultural performance.

In nutshell, expression of reaction and responses of Scheduled Castes and the spreading of message of social harmony and social equality can be made in a professional manner through traditional artistic and cultural performance of Scheduled Caste communities like Theyyam dance.

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