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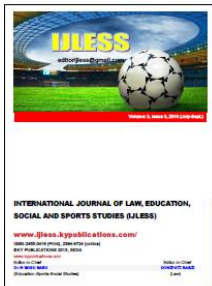
(Law)

In Step with The Divine: The Ritual Art of Padayani

REVIEW ARTICLE

Smitha Sara Padiyara

Assistant Professor, Department of History, Catholicate College, Pathanamthitta.



ABSTRACT

Padayani stands as a vibrant testament to the cultural richness and spiritual depth of Kerala's Bhadrakali temples, particularly in the Central Travancore region. This annual ritualistic festival, celebrated predominantly during the months of February through April, intertwines music, dance, painting, and satire into a mesmerizing tapestry of traditions. In essence, Padayani is more than a festival; it is a living heritage that celebrates spirituality, community, and artistic expression—a testament to Kerala's cultural tapestry and its deep-rooted connection to ancient traditions and beliefs.

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Introduction

Padayani is an annual ritualistic festival celebrated in Bhadrakali temples of Central Travancore region. It shows the remains of ancient Dravidian concept of God.¹ It is the combination of music, dance, painting and satire. Padayani is usually celebrated in the months of Kumbham, Meenam and Medam (February, March, April). Kolamezhuthu, Kolappattu, Kolamthullal, Thappumelam and Vinodam are the essential parts of Padayani. Kolams are folk deities drawn with natural colours. Kolappattu includes prayers to the deities. Thappu is an asuravadyam (musical instrument) made with jackfruit tree. Kolamthullal is a rhythmic dance in tune with thappumelam. Vinodam includes satire and protest against social evils.²

Objectives

1. To explore the origins and history of Padayani: Examine the mythological and cultural roots of this traditional art form in Kerala, India.
2. To analyze the key elements and characteristics of Padayani: Discuss the unique features of Padayani, including its music, dance, costumes, and themes.
3. To evaluate the significance of Padayani in Kerala's cultural heritage: Assess the importance of Padayani in preserving Kerala's traditions, folklore, and cultural identity.
4. To discuss the efforts to preserve and promote Padayani: Highlight initiatives by the government, cultural organizations, and artists to safeguard and popularize this traditional art form.

Hypothesis

1. Padayani is a unique and integral part of Kerala's cultural heritage, reflecting the state's rich traditions and folklore.
2. The art form of Padayani has played a significant role in preserving Kerala's cultural identity and promoting social cohesion.
3. Padayani continues to be an essential part of Kerala's festival culture

¹B. Ravikumar, Study of Padayani, Rainbow Publishers, Kochi, 1995, p.35

² Kadammanitta Vasudevan Pillai, Padeni (Mal.), The State Institute of Languages, Thiruvananthapuram, 1993, p.34.

Methodology

This essay will employ a qualitative research design, incorporating a combination of historical, cultural, and analytical approaches to examine the art form of Padayani.

Literature Review

- B. Ravikumar, Study of Padayani
- Kadammanitta Vasudevan Pillai, Padeni (Mal.)
- K.P.Padmanabha Menon, History of Kerala
- A.Sreedhara Menon, Keralasamskaram (Mal.)

Ritualistic Splendour of Padayani

The Padayani is dedicated to goddess Bhadrakali. Kadammanitta Devi temple, Othara Devi temple, Kottangal Devi temple etc. are famous for annual Padayani performances. Padayani reflects ancient socialist society and villagers take active part without racial discriminations. In Kollam, Pathanamthitta and Alappuzha districts of Kerala, the Nair folk became the performers but the design and making of costumes are vested with Kaniyar people.³ Central to Padayani are its diverse components: Kolamezhuthu, Kolappattu, Kolamthullal, Thappumelam, and Vinodam. Kolams, depicted as folk deities using natural colors like charcoal and turmeric, adorn the festivities. Kolappattu offers prayers to these deities, amplifying the spiritual ambiance. Thappumelam, resonating with the beats of the Thappu, a musical instrument crafted from jackfruit wood, complements Kolamthullal—a rhythmic dance that harmonizes with the music. Kolamthullal is a classical folk dance also.⁴

Vinodam injects elements of satire and social critique, challenging societal norms and evils, thereby enriching Padayani's cultural significance. This unique amalgamation entertains and educates, making it a profound expression of communal spirit and ancient wisdom.

At its heart, Padayani venerates Goddess Bhadrakali, serving as a fervent devotion to appease her fury. The story behind Padayani is that after killing Darika, an asura, goddess Kali was in anger. The bhoothagana, servants of Lord Siva, danced in front of her, in order to reduce her anger which might destroy the whole world.

In memory of this incident, the participants wear masks made of lathes of areca tree. The colours used to make kolam are purely natural. They are made of charcoal, turmeric etc. Kaalankolam is a major attraction of Padayani. This is about a child called Markandeya who is begging his life to Lord Siva while Kaalan, the god of death tries to take away his life.

Bhairavikolam is the dance to worship goddess Kaali. It is the biggest kolam and uses many lathes of areca tree. More than one person heads the kolam due to its heavy weight. After the Kolamthullal, there comes the ritual called Pooppada which is the end of the Padayani festival. Kolams of Fairavi, Nina Bhairavi, Kanjiramala, Kaalayakshi etc. are made of fifty one, hundred and one and thousand and one areca leaf sheets.

Padayani is performed to cool down the furious Kali. It aims at the complete purification of the village. There is cleaning of air, water, sky, earth and humans. It is also an agrarian festival conducted after harvest. There is a process of awakening Mother Earth to receive seeds for next harvest. The influence of Padayani can be seen in the famous dance drama of Kerala, the Kathakali. Padayani extends beyond mere celebration; it embodies the ethos of ancient socialist communities, transcending racial barriers. Villagers actively participate, underscoring unity and cultural pride.

Conclusion

Padayani also marks an agrarian festival post-harvest, symbolizing purification of the environment and human spirit. The ritual of Pooppada signifies the festival's culmination, ensuring blessings for fertility and prosperity in the coming agricultural cycle. Notably, Padayani's influence echoes in Kerala's renowned Kathakali dance drama, showcasing its enduring impact on the region's artistic traditions.

³ K.P.Padmanabha Menon, History of Kerala, Ajith Publication, Thiruvananthapuram, 1983, p.231.

⁴ A.Sreedhara Menon, Keralasamskaram (Mal.), D.C. Books, Kottayam, 1992, p.46.