

Hema K.R.

**DIALECTICS ON THE TRANSITION AND
TRANSFORMATION IN THE RITUAL ART OF
GARUDAN THOOKKAM: A STUDY ON THE
THOOKKAM OF ARAYANKAVU TEMPLE**

Abstract

The study focuses on the history of Hook Swinging and one of its popular versions in Kerala, Garudan Thookkam, and how the intervention of the forces of time led to the transition and transformation of this ritual art. This paper is divided into seven parts to discuss varied aspects of Garudan Thookkam and how this ritual art influences the lives of the local people of Arayankavu. The introductory part discusses some general features of Garudan Thookkam and its popularity among the local people. The importance of space and time (Geo-Chronology) for the ritual art is given priority in the second section of the paper, thus, the performance theory of Richard Schechner is applied here to analyze space, time and the ritual. As this festive occasion in a typical carnival tempo offers the people 'temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and the established order' Bakhtin's Carnivalesque theory is also applied. The folk and classical elements embedded in this ritual art is studied in the third section of the paper. Fourth section is on the impact of colonial modernity and the nature of transformation in this ritual art. While analyzing the complex stages in the transformation of an individual to the Garudan Thookkakkaran (the performer/artist), the theory of liminality developed by Arnold Van Gennep and Victor Turner is applied. It is the mythological and dramatic nature of the ritual that helps to enliven it in the memories of local people. Thus, the fifth section of the paper on Garudan Thookkam studies the role of myth as one of its popularizing factors. Next section gives space to discuss the artistic and aesthetic elements of the Garudan Thookkam. Concluding analysis discusses how the theories of Schechner, Bakhtin, Van Gennep and Victor Turnor is effectively applied to analyze the varied aspects of Garudan Thookkam as ritual, art and festival.

Keywords: *Hook Swinging, Ritual Art, Gramadevata, performance theory, liminality*

Introduction

Garudan Thookam is an important ritual art form of Central and South Kerala. The historical analysis of any ritual art form is incomplete without considering the time and space of the event. In this study, the location of the ritual is the Bhadrakali temple of Arayankavu a village in the Ernakulam district of Kerala. However, it is difficult to remove the ambiguity shrouded in the chronology of this ritual art.

Today there is a huge hike in the expenses of *Thookkam* performance. Sri. Rameshan who is a member of *Kshethra Bharana Samithi* (temple administration committee), Arayankavu Temple and also a staunch devotee, reported that he spent nearly one and a half lakh rupees for arranging *Thookkam* in 2018. However, the popularity of this ritual art is also increasing among the local people of Arayankavu astonishingly. Divergent reasons can be there for such a contradiction, including spiritual as well as material factors. Surely, the devotion of the people to the local deity is no doubt an important factor, but those political developments in India since the 1990s, which led to the huge wave of mass re-entry to all religious institutions, are also to be counted. Again, *Thookkam* is also a festive occasion that offers people opportunities for social gatherings, gossiping, discussing everything including politics, and thus getting recharged with refreshing memories. Surely, it is the memory of these beautiful moments, which prompt people to wait eagerly for the next *Thookkam*.

So far, the *Garudan Thookkam* as an art form has evolved much to secure an identity of its own. Its vibrant music and rhythmic dance reached their aesthetic perfection with the passage of time and the conscious and dedicated efforts taken by experts/maestros, *Therozhi* and *Puthusseri Kuruppus*, in this field has raised its status as one of the most important ritual art forms of Kerala. Now this art form displays the features of both folk and classical art which are good enough to gratify the aesthetic cravings of the people even in contemporary times also.

Thookkam is usually arranged annually by different families of the locality as an expression of gratitude to the local deity for some material gains in their lives.

Theoretical Frame work of the Study

The theoretical frame work of the study is based on Mikhail Bakhtin's Carnavalesque, the liminality theory of Van Gennep and Victor turner and

Richard Schechner's Performance theory. The carnivalesque theory is applied to discuss the festive and happy mood that people experience during festive occasion and liberate them from their day to day worries and anxieties. The carnivalesque theory is also adequate to display how the festive occasion temporarily suspends the traditional power structure and day to day societal norms. Carnivalesque theory also explains how a festive occasion like *Garudan Thookkam* helps to forget societal hierarchies and helps the interaction between people of different classes.

The theory of liminality helps to analyze the complex phases an individual undergoes to get transformed as the *Garudan Thookkakkaran*. The liminal phase is ambiguous, in-between condition, when the performer experiences a condition of neither here nor there. Performance Theory is applied to explain the mythological and dramatical elements that helps to keep this ritual art alive in the memory of the local people. It also helps to understand how *Thookkam* has adapted and interacted with the forces of modernity to retain its relevance.

Methodology of the Study

An ethnographic field study is conducted to understand varied aspect of the *Garudan Thookkam*. This approach helps to identify *Thookkam* as a living and performing ritual art and its impact on local people. The participatory observation during the performance helps to realize personally the carnival tempo during the performance and the special awesome atmosphere that it generates. This observation helps to understand the transformation process of the performer into the *Thookkakkaran*. Interviews with the performer, organizers and devotees help to understand the spirit of the performance and the deep attachment of the performer and devotees towards this ritual art. A good number of authentic literary works related to the area also help to form the historical understanding of the performance.

Literature Review

The works of L. A. Anantha Krishna Ayyar, Edgar Thurston, Nadia Ceremetakis and Rajan Gurukkal help to build a strong anthropological foundation to the study on the *Garudan Thookkam*. The works of Van Gennep, Victor Turnor, Richard Schechner help to develop a suitable theoretical frame work for the study. The Rites of passage by Van Gennep and the Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure by Victor Turnor help to analyze the phases of separation, liminality and re incorporation that an individual performer experiences as ritual progresses. Theories of performance is taken from Schechner's Ritual and Performance. The Anthropological background for the study is taken from Ceremetakis's An Introduction to Cultural Anthropolgy,

Bakhtin's Rabelais and his World, offers to the study an understanding on the world of Carnavalesque and discusses how a festive occasion like *Thookkam* offers people with temporary freedom. Basic information regarding South Indian communities, tradition, caste and belief is discussed in detail in Ethnographic Notes of South India by Iyer and Thurston. Rajan Gurukkal's works offer a local/Malayalee scholars' perspective on myth, culture and society and it is reflected in this study on the *Garudan Thookkam*. Chandler and Opert offer a clear colonial perspective on the popular ritual art form like the *Thookkam*.

The Geo-Chronology of the Ritual Art

Usually, the ritual art of *Garudan Thookkam* is celebrated in the Bhagavathy temples of Kerala. Mythologies and popular beliefs regarding some incurable diseases such as smallpox (*Vasuri*), cholera, etc. sowed fear in the minds of the people. The limitations of medicinal erudition and proficiency in earlier times compelled people to develop some alternative measures as remedy and solace, and thus started propitiating Mother Nature/ Goddess through certain ritual practices. The historical background for the evolution of *Garudan Thookkam* can be traced back to such indigenous beliefs of the people.

Arayankavu, Koottekkavu Bhagavathi temple (Amballoor), Irumpuram Devi temple near Perumbavoor, Muvattupuzha Kavu are some of the important Bhagavathi temples where *Garudan Thookkam* is performed annually in the Ernakulam district. A comparatively small structural temple with a spacious premise is generally considered an ideal space for this ritual festival. Thus, here people can gather together, spend time together, enjoy music, dance, and drama and, devotedly participate in pulling the cart carrying human *Garudas*.

In the Arayankavu Bhagavathi temple, this festival is celebrated in March/April (*Meenam/Medam*), the hottest months of the year, and in the days (*Nalu*) of *Aswathi* and *Bharani*. Another important day connected with this festival is *Pathamudyam*, which is also considered as an auspicious day as per the traditional calendar (*Panchangam*) when the sun is in its most powerful position. *Pathamudayam* is also in April, ten days after the festival *Vishu (Medasamgramam)*. Any festival in Kerala is a harvest festival also. Considering the significance of the season and the importance of feast during the festival of *Garudan Thookkam*, an observation can also be made that there is a strong bond between *Thookkam* and the agrarian practices of the locality.

Festivals help people to connect back to their roots, realize their identity, and strengthen social bonds. The preparation for *Garudan Thookkam* starts many days before the fixed date of the ritual. All the relatives of the

family who has taken the vow to make arrangements for the *Thookkam* reach the *Tharavadu* (ancestral home) for the preparation and the family arranges a grand feast for all the relatives, neighbours, and friends. The pre-fixation of the space and the time of the ritual festival ensure authenticity, certitude, and continuity to it.

Richard Schechner in his *Ritual and Performance* noted that the rituals are usually performed on a fixed schedule, at specific locations regardless of weather or attendance. To Schechner ritual sites are 'cultural places' where there is a synthesis of humanly modified landmarks with 'calendrically' marked time (Ingold 2003:620).

Mikhail Bakhtin in his work *Rabelais and His World* discusses the importance of festivals in the lives of the people. Bakhtin's concept of Carnival is different from the observance of an official holiday or 'self-serving' festivals imposed by Governments or other secular or theocratic authorities (Bakhtin 1984:13). The sanction for carnival derives not from a calendar prescribed by church or state but from a force that pre-exists priest or king (1984: 19). Popular festivals such as *Thookkam* can also be brought under the principle of carnivalesque for analysis. Considering the mass appeal of ritual festivals like *Thookkam*, not any contemporary secular or religious authority can decide the date and venue of the ritual. It is pre-fixed at some remote past by people of some unknown origin. The contemporary power institutions can intervene in these mass festivals only to make certain modifications in accordance with the changes of the time. Here, festivals help people to liberate themselves, though momentarily, from the strangle hold of power centers.

Keeping aside features such as venue and time, festivals across the world have some universal characters, such as group gatherings, specific performances, exchange of goods and ideas, sharing of food and finally ending with the dispersal of the participants. The occasion of *Thookkam* also offers the people of the locality an opportunity for social interaction, transaction of goods and ideas, cherishing the moments of entertainment with music, dance, etc., and like any other festival, people disperse to their selves after *Thookkam* festival. Thus, as Schechner observes during festivals people clad in colorful costumes, gaily move in processions, singing and dancing, telling stories, sharing food, fire burning, incensing, drumming and bell-ringing, emitting body heat all around, creating an overwhelming synaesthetic environment (2003:632).

Elements of Folk Art Embedded in *Garudan Thookkam* and its Transformation into Classical Art

The artistic elements that are embedded in the *Garudan Thookkam* has certain classical as well as folk traits in it. The organic nature of folk art does

not have any bifurcation such as ritual and art (Gurukkal 2022:600). Besides, folk art is in such a phase of evolution that there is space for experimentation, innovations, and additions. But the classical phase of any art form hints at stagnation, decay, and decline (2022:600-01) The ritual practices in the *Thookkam*, such as *Thelliyeru* (Purification process), *Malanottam* (depicting the sacrifice of Jeemootavahana), *Kappu* (an agreement with the devotee and the performer) are highly ritualistic, symbolic and folkish, and in the dance performance of *Thookkakkaran* also has a strong folk element. But the highly renowned and perfected percussion instruments which accompany *Thookkam* including *Chenda* (a cylindrical Drum), *Elathalam* (cymbal), *Chengila* (an Indian gong) etc., lead it to the status of a classical art. It is also to be noted that in the *Arayankavu Thookkam*, the *Thookkakkaran's* *Uduthukettu* (attire) is similar to that of a *Kathakali* artist, vividly displaying its classical elements. The observation here is, that the *Garudan Thookkam* is in its liminal status of transformation as it has not fully evolved into a classical art as it proudly retains some of its folk elements.

The Ritual: Rigidity, Divergences and the Colonial Gaze

Hook Swinging was a religious ritual practiced in different parts of India. Not sufficient evidence is available to discuss the exact period of its origin. However colonial writers noticed this practice, and as part of their effort to understand indigenous cultures, they studied these local practices and wrote about it. Some of the colonial writers were greatly inspired by Rousseau's call for self-reflexivity, that is, the study of one's self, through the observation and study of others. To Rousseau, it is the primary mechanism for escaping from ethnocentrism (Ceremetakis 2017:9).

Different forms of Hook-Swinging were practiced in various parts of India. These were known under different vernacular dialects such as *Charak-Puja*, *Pota- Puja*, *Khidi-Mari*, *Bhokta-Puja* etc. (Powell 1914 :147-48). J H Powel the author of the book *Hook Swinging Ceremony in India* observes that this festival is rooted in the soil of India. The colonialist writers, belonging to a 'higher grade civilization', as they claimed, tried to intervene in the practice of hook swinging. Therefore, people were very much reluctant to perform before foreigners. They gave it up altogether in some places, due to the pressure from authorities. In this ritual, devotee-performer had to perform the toughest practice of suspension and rotation on a pole. It was made possible by piercing the back of the performer through a hook (*Choondakuthal*) and tying it to the pole. People generally took it up as a ritual practice, to increase the fertility of humans as well as nature by propitiating respective local deities or *Gramadevata*. Thus, other than fighting incurable diseases, this ritual can also be counted as part of fertility cult.

Gramadevatas (local deities), also known as *Kali* or *Mariamamma*, generally preferred animal sacrifices. Therefore, devotees had to perform compulsory bloody oblations in these temples. It was in such temples that the custom of hook-swinging was practiced (Opert 1893:476-77).

For J S Chandlers the practice of hook swinging was merely a 'superstition'. Therefore, he believed that, the colonial authorities had to intervene and ban it. When the Governor of Madras Lord Napier visited Madurai Chandlers managed to secure hooks and knives used for swinging to show him. Seeing the weapons forced Governor to ban the ritual. The last report of the ceremony from the place was from the year 1891-92.

Edgar Thurston's, *Ethnographic Notes of South India* discussed in detail the intervention of administrators to prohibit this practice. The government of Madras in 1854 reported that it was not performed frequently then. It was also reported that two men were killed in the Salem district in 1852 during this ceremony as the pole from which they were suspended had broken.

Another colonial report is that in the Kistna district, the custom was revived by an old pensioned Hindu *Subedar*, whose father's sister performed *sati* some seventy or eighty years back. In commemoration of this *sati*, he decided to conduct a swinging festival annually (Thurston 1906: 488).

Certain eyewitness accounts left by European writers reveal that only the lower-class people practiced this ritual. Some specifically mentioned that it was the *Parayas* who performed this ritual. They received one to four rupees from the general fund or from an individual contributor for their sacrifice. 'The *Brahmins* do not assist at this ceremony, which they despise'. Another belief among the people was that the person who performs this task would suffer no pain if it was for some good purpose or severe pain if it was for something bad. Moreover, the consumption of intoxicants by the performer was so high that he became insensitive to all kinds of pain.

The quickness with which the wounds on the body of the performer healed was considered a miracle by the devotees.

Colonial writers viewed this entire practice scornfully and considered it as an outdated and inhuman practice and preferred the intervention of the administration to ban it. But for the people of the locality, it was practiced to propitiate the local deity which assured them with moments of piety, and devotion and offered them opportunity for joyous social gathering. Forgetting all the age-old hierarchical discriminations imposed upon their lives by caste and class, a huge crowd gathered around the swinging site clad in their most colorful attires. The air vibrated with the bangs of drums and cymbals filled them with unprecedented joy. They prayed for good rain, crops, and general

prosperity. A carnival-like mood is generated there helping people to forget all their worries and anxieties.

The man who performs this ritual pass -through phases of liminality. It is a kind of transformation from his original, submissive self to such an esteemed status of a person who is sacrificing his own life for common goodness. In earlier period, the person who was to swing was chosen by lot and the right to perform this ceremony was confined to certain families in a locality. It was considered an honor and privilege to be chosen for this duty. Only young men were chosen for this, they received abundant love and respect from the local people even after the performance of the ritual.

Even though the colonial authorities despised such native practices, until the eighteenth-century festivals were conceived of as a safety-valve mechanism by them. It was treated as a means for restoring social order by giving way to the suppressed feelings of tensions (Fournier 2019: 11).

Promotion and popularization of myths through *Garudan Thookkam*

Garuda is the chief character in the ritual art of *Garudan Thookkam*. As per indigenous mythology, he is believed to be the mount of Lord Vishnu. Therefore, certain amount of sanctity is attached for Garuda also. He is believed to be the son of Kasyapa to Vinta one of the daughters of Daksha.

In the Arayankavu temple, the *Thookkam* is performed to commemorate the victory of Goddess Bhadrakali over her foe Darika. Other ritual arts like *Mudiyettu*, also celebrates the victory of Kali over the demon Darika. The artist of *Mudiyettu* performs the battle between Kali and Darika. But, *Arayankavu Thookkam* depicts the entry of Garuda to the battlefield. He was sent by Lord Vishnu after the battle to quench the thirst of Bhethala who assisted Kali in her fight against Darika.

As per the mythical story, Darika, the son of Daruvathi, was blessed by Brahma for not to be killed by anyone except a woman who is born *Ayonija* (not born through mother), and also that thousand Darikas were to be born from single drop-let of his blood. Humans, gods, ascetics, and Apasaras (celestial nymph) were threatened by Darika. Finally, Lord Mahadeva in his anger created the fiery goddess Bhadrakali and assigned her the duty to kill Darika.

As Bhadra Kali was going for battle against Darika, she also took Bhedala from the jungles of Bhethal. As they reached battle ground Bhethala spread his tongue on the battlefield and drank each droplet of blood thus, preventing it to fall on the ground. Bhadra Kali killed Darika, but Bethala's thirst could not be quenched. Kali told Bethala that he had to be satisfied with the blood of the first person who entered the battle ground. Mahavishnu

sent Garuda and by drinking a single drop of the blood of Garuda, Bethalala's thirst was quenched. Thus, Garuda saved the world from Bethala's anger.

Arayankavu Garudan Thookkam is performed, to commemorate the arrival of Garuda on the battlefield and quenches the thirst of Bhethala. Here, the *Thookkakkaran* dresses up as Garuda and practices *Kacha Thookkam* (hanging on cloth waist band), and barring the previous practice of piercing the back with hooks, *Thookkakkaran* hangs with this *kacha* and only a few drops of blood are shown by making a scar on the back.

An important part of *Garudan Thookkam* is the '*Malanottam*'. It is connected to another mythological story of the life and great sacrifice of Jeemoothavahana who was willing to sacrifice his own life for saving the lives of the *nagas* (snakes). Due to ill will Garuda took the pledge to clear the earth off snakes by killing and eating them. Jeemoothavahana disguised himself as a *naga* and Garuda tried to eat him but could not. Pleased by the great sacrifice of Jeemoothavahana, Garuda released the *nagas* from his anger. This is the mythological scene recreated by *Thookkakkaran* through the ritual performance called '*Malanottam*'. These are the mythological components knitted in *Garudan Thookkam* which help to make it both sacred as well as popular among people.

Garudan Thookkam: The art & expression

Garudan Thookkam or *Garudan Parava* the ritual art form, is a perfect visual treat also. The *Kolppantham* (Traditional Wicks), fireworks, and the colorful attires of the artist successfully generate a kind of divine atmosphere. *Garudan Thookkam*, apart from its ritual part, is performed along with strong, vibrant music and the rhythmic dance. The *Thookkakkaran* dresses up as Garuda, with wings and beak performing to the tunes of drums, cymbals, etc. But the transformation of the *Thookkakkaran* to Garuda is never an easy affair. It demands sincere dedication and determination from the part of each performer. He has to sharpen his skill in dancing and also get trained for the correct movement of the beak, which requires training of nearly six months explains, Sri. Sumesh, the performer of *Garudan Thookkam* and also the *Velichappadu* (oracle) the Arayankavu temple. Thus, for grooming a perfect *Garudan Thookkam* artist years of hard training is required.

It is also to be noticed that there is not any principle of hereditary succession to the duty of *Thookkakkaran*. The basic requirement for initiation into this field is pure aptitude and sheer dedication to the ritual art.

The musical instruments that accompany *Garudan Thookkam* are *Uruttu Chenda* (a kind of drum), *Maddalam* (a kind of South Indian drum), *Veekan Chenda* (drum), *Ilathalam* (Cymbal), *Chengila* (Indian gong) etc. A

particular type of '*Melasampradaya*' (a special pattern of the performance of percussion instruments) is followed in *Arayankavu Garudan Thookkam*. These were perfected by the ancestors of '*Therozhi*' and '*Puthusseri*' *Kuruppus* (traditional family of Instrumentalists).

Even the makeup items of the *Thookkakkaran* including the facial colours, crown, dress, ornaments, etc., are also to be kept with all sanctity at the residence of the *Thookkakkaran*. The natural pigments for facial makeup are *Vellamannyola*, *Chayillyam*, *Chuvappu*, *Pacha*, and *Mashi*. The artist who is to take up the role of Garuda has a traditional attire to wear, which includes *Pattuval*, *Njori*, *Kacha*, *Munti*, and *Ashtimala* (garland). The *Ashtimala* is carved from the wood of the mango tree. Other fixations to the body of Garuda include a beak, *Chamaram* (false hair), *Chiraku* (wing), *Uthareeyam* (shawl), and the crown (*Iyer 1909: 166-67*). Except for the beak and wings rest of the dress has similarities with *Kathakali*, *Ottanthullal*, *Koothu*, etc., other traditional art forms of Kerala.

In the Arayankavu temple when the *Thookkakkaran* completes his *Uduthukettu* (attire) looks very much similar to a *Kathakali* artist except that of a *Chiraku* (wing) and *Chundu* (beak). These are two basic features that enhance the status of the artist to *Garuda*.

A well-trained artist effortlessly uses his beak by moving it with his tongue and teeth. The *Thookkakkaran* can receive contributions or offerings from the devotees only with his beak. Even though a spectator finds it very difficult task, for the trained artist it is not. The intense training makes them efficient enough to fulfill all the responsibilities expected from them by the devotees.

Previously thickly starched cotton clothes were laid on the ground to give comfort to the artist during performance. But now cotton clothes are replaced with plastic bags. Though this transformation is for convenience, cotton was more comfortable for the artist as it absorbed his sweat speedily but plastic does not offer that comfort.

When inquired, to the artist (Sri. Sumesh), on whether he experienced any powerful mental or psychological disturbances/trance (*urayal*) during any of the phases of his performance, he answered negatively.

Van Gennep observes that when the ritualist passes from one status to another he experiences, physically and 'magico-religiously', a special situation for certain duration of time. 'This symbolic and spatial area of transition may be found in more or less pronounced form in all the ceremonies which accompany the passage from one social and magico-religious position to another.' (Gennep 1960:18).

The artist also admitted that after the performance he received the recognition as divine *Garuda* among the people forever. Besides, once he got transformed as *Garuda* in *Garudan Thookkam*, he was also identified as *Thookkakkaran* whatever his other designations may be.

The ritual performer has to pass through a phase of liminality before getting his new status as *Thookkakkaran*. Usually, in any ritual practice the practitioner passes through rites such as 'the rites of separation from a previous world, the pre liminal rites, those executed during the transitional stage, liminal (or threshold) rites and the ceremonies of incorporation into the new world, post liminal rites' (1960: 21). Victor Turnor elaborates the process of transition in such a way that, 'the first phase of separation comprises symbolic behaviour signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a state) or from both, during the intervening "liminal" period the characteristics of the ritual subject (the passenger) are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm, the few or none of the attributes of the past or the coming state. In the third phase the (reincorporation) the passage is consummated' (Turnor 1966: 94-95).

In the context of the Arayankavu temple *Thookkam*, the performer has to strictly adhere to a seven-day *vrata*, by following mental as well as physical purity. Ananthakrishna Iyer during the early 20th century describes the preparation for *Thookkam*, 'During the morning hours the performer dresses in a garment tucked to the waistband and rubs his body with oil and is shampooed particularly on the back, a portion of the flesh in the middle is stretched for the insertion of the hook' (Iyer 1909: 323). His master instructed him to perform various movements called *Payitta* (1909: 323). Earlier, a special kind of chariot was prepared for *Garudan Thookkam*. It was a kind of vehicle resting on two axles with four wheels. In this, there is a horizontal beam resting on two vertical supports. A strong rope tied to a ring attached to the beam is connected to a hook. Over the beam, there is a small roof that is tastefully decorated and inside this, there is space for two or three persons to swing at the same time.

Previously the *Thookkakkaran* was carried to the temple from the house of the devotee through a *Chaad* (a special commutation vehicle) but now motorized vehicles are used for carrying the *Thookkakkaran* to the temple, but inside the temple premise only the traditionally decorated wooden chariot can be used thus retaining its connection with the past.

Conclusion

The ritual art of *Garudan Thookkam* or Hook Swinging should have its origin among some primitive tribes of India when their concept of

the propitiation of God meant the ultimate sacrifice of human life itself. An active dialectic process has also evolved since then, between man and nature, man and man, man and society and man and institutions. It is through these dialectical processes that transformation has set in the practice of sacrifices. As humans began to get familiar with different ideologies on the principle of ahimsa, animal and human sacrifices began to be denounced and looked down upon with aversion by a bulk of the population. In its place, milder versions of sacrifices began to get social acceptance. Therefore, in the place of human sacrifices, at one point of time in history people began to do experiments with milder but intense forms of worship. When the spirit of *bhakti* (devotion) mingled with folklore and myths which are popular among people, different worshipping patterns also began to evolve. This can be the background for the emergence of practices such as Hook Swinging and *Garudan Thookkam*. Along with this internal dialectical process of transformation external factors such as the spread of modernity through colonialism also played an important role in the transformation of this ritual form. *Garudan Thookkam* earlier demanded the piercing of the back of the *Thookkakkaran* and spilling blood to propitiate the deity, but now it simply requires spilling a few droplets of blood, even that is also not needed, depending upon the willingness of the *Thookkakkaran*.

The *Arayankavu Garudan Thookkam* is an occasion when local people get the opportunity to gather together in a fixed place and on a fixed date to take part in the festival. As Schechner through his performance theory points out, it offers the people space and occasion for economic, social, and cultural exchanges.

Three important concepts applied to explain the structural evolution of the ritual art form of *Garudan Thookkam* are that of Bakhtin's Carnavalesque, Schechner's performance theory, and the liminality of Van Gennep and Victor Turner. Originally, this was a non-Brahminical practice. Previously the role of *Thookkakkaran* in *Garudan Thookkam* of ArayanKavu temple was played by artists belonging to the *Nair* Community. L.K Anathakrishna Iyer in his 'Cochin Castes and Tribes' reports that the swinging ceremony is performed by *Nairs*, *Cammalas*, *Kuruppan*s, and *Izhuvas* in fulfillment of a vow. So, it is the festival of the ordinary section of society and during the festival time, people gather near the temple premise which is decorated with flowers, tender coconut leaves, and electric illuminations. Here during festive occasions, people enjoy their freedom. This ritual has its own customs and practices and it in a carnival tempo, presents a completely different, non-official, extra-ecclesiastical and extra political aspect of the world of man and of human relations (1984:100). So, the application of the theory of carnival is valid in explaining some major features of *Garudan Thookkam*. To understand the historical significance of the venue and date of the ritual certain principles of Schechner's Performance theory is applied. The transformation of the artist

from an ordinary human to the holy figure of *Garuda*, which involves strict *vrata*, (pre-liminal phase) on the part of the artist, before the transformation (liminal phase), and these 'liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial'.(1966:95) Thus, the theory of liminality developed by Van Gennep and Victor Turner explains well the process of the transformation of an ordinary individual to the holy figure of Garuda in *GarudanThookkam*.

References

- Bakhtin, Mikhail.
1984. *Rabelais and his world*. (tr.) by Heleneiswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Ceremetakis, Nadia.
2017. *An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*. UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Chandler, S, John.
1912. *Seventy-Five years in the Madurai Mission*. Madras: Lawrence Asylum Press.
- Fourier, Sebastian, Laurent.
2019. "Traditional Festivals: From European Ethnology to Festive Studies", *Journal of Festive Studies* 1(1). 1
- Gennep, van Arnold.
1960. *The Rites of Passage*. (tr.) by Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Gurukkal, Rajan.
2022. *Myth, Charithram, Samooham*. (Mal.) Kottayam: NBS.
- Iyer, Ananthakrishnan L.K.
1909. *Cochin Tribes and Castes: Vol. 1*. Ernakulam: Cochin Government Press.
- Opert, Gustav.
1893. *On the original inhabitants of Bharat varsha Or India-1836-1908*. Madras: Lawrence Asylum Press.
- Schechner, Richard.
2003. "Ritual and Performance", in Tim Ingold (ed.) *Companion Encyclopedia of Anthropology: Humanity, Culture and Social Life*. Routledge: Taylor & Francis e-Library.
- Thurston, Edgar.
1906. *Ethnographic Notes of South India*. Madras.
- Turnor, Victor.
1966. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.