



# The Role of Sanskrit Puranic Narratives in Shaping KaLamezhuttum Pāṭṭu Rituals of Kerala

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## Introduction

The Sanskrit language is full of mythological stories and epics, and the Sanskrit language has a vast tradition system beginning with the Vedas. The primordial epic Ramāyana of Vālmiki and the Mahābhārata of Veda Vyāsa, weave stories like this. There are 108 Purāṇas that form the basis of the Hindu faith. It is also doubtful whether one human birth is sufficient to comprehend the entire ocean of stories depicted in the Purāṇas.

Purāṇas are very useful for emphasizing salvation through the path of Bhakti. Devotionals and related stories in Viṣṇu Purāṇa, Agni Purāṇa, Śiva Purāṇa, Bhagavata Purāṇa reinforce Hindu beliefs.

A great tradition of Dravidian culture has also blended into the belief of the people of Kerala, while the mythological characters of God have become part

## Abstract

The Purāṇas are one of the greatest sources of Indian culture. The subjects, branches of knowledge, and wisdom contained in these Purāṇas have deeply influenced the people of India. KaLamezhuttum pāṭṭu is a unique ritual tradition of the people of Kerala. The Hindu beliefs, stories, and descriptions narrated in the Purāṇas have significantly influenced this practice in many ways. The main purpose of this essay is to discuss the extent to which the Purāṇas have contributed to the formation and development of the cultural practice of, KaLamezhuttum pāṭṭu.

**Keywords:** Purāṇa, Sanskrit, Kerala, kaLamezhuttum pāṭṭu, tradition.

of the faith. KaLamezhuttum pāṭṭu is a very special ritual practice of the Kerala people. Various types of KaLamezhuttum pāṭṭu can be found in Kerala. This work is an attempt to understand the extent of the influence of mythology and epic stories in KaLamezhuttum pāṭṭu, which is a ritualistic art of Kerala.

## KaLamezhuttum pāṭṭu

KaLamezhuttum pāṭṭu is a ritual performed in connection with various temples of Kerala. Depending on the deity in the temple, we can see different types of KaLamezhuttum pāṭṭu. According to the regional difference, the name can also be different. According to the differences in the appearance of the deity in the temple, there are differences in the rituals and songs. According to



Kerala belief, the Kałamezhuttum pāṭṭu is a ritual performed mainly in Bhadrakāli temples. Apart from Bhadrakāli temples, different types of Kałamezhuttum and pāṭṭu is performed in Vettakkorumakan, Nāga, Gandharva, Ayyappan, , Khandākarnan, and Yakṣi temples.

The term kałam denotes the drawings or paintings done on the floor. Differences are evident in the content, execution, scale, duration, and purpose of the performances. In some cases, it is performed as a part of another ritual—for example, Mudiyyettu (an art form performed in southern Kerala).

In different parts of Kerala, one can see the Kałam fields of different idols. In ancient temples and related households, the Kałamezhuttum pāṭṭu is performed with great festivity. Kałam and song change form according to the dedication of the idol. This ritual is performed by people belonging to specific communities. Kałamezhuttum pāṭṭu is done by various communities such as Kaṇiyan, Vaṇṇan, Puluvar, Malayan, Pulayar, Parayan, Paṇiyan, Āviyar, Velan, Maṇṇan, Kuravar, Theeyaaṭṭunni, Kallaṭṭu Kuruppanmar, Puthuṣeri Kuruppanmar, Mārar and so on. Kallaṭṭu Kuruppanmar are famous among Kałamezhuttum pāṭṭu. Apart from them, the Pulluvas are considered to have mastered Nagakalams and the Kaniyas Gandharvakalams.

Each Kałam field is different. Pooja, Kałamezhuttu and pāṭṭu are all done differently. The place chosen for drawing the Kałam is cleaned and the pandals are tied and decorated with kurutholās (young coconut leaves), māvilas (mango tree leaves) and flower garlands. Depending on the importance and power of the deity, there will be a change in the number and days of Kałam. Generally Gandharva and Naga Kałam are conducted in three Kałams and Devi Kałam is seen as one.

The beauty of Kalamezhuttu is enhanced by five coloured powders. Panja means five, varna means colours. Panchavarna means five types of colors. The deity is drawn on the floor using five colours made from natural materials. These are white (rice powder), black (burnt paddy husk), green (air-dried leaves of henna, cassia, etc.), yellow (turmeric

powder), and red (a mix of turmeric powder and lime water). Also the colours represent the Panca Bhūta (five natural elements). Keeping in mind the deity, the artist begins to draw the form of the murti on the ground with five-coloured powders.

Kałamezhuttu begins with a straight line. A boundary is set for the field and the shape is drawn with black powder as a border. Bhadrakāli kałams are mainly drawn with the deity having four hands, eight hands or sixteen hands. After completing the kałam, the main ācharya invites the deity to the kałam (āvāhana). After that the pujas in the kałam begins. The pujas in the kałam are organized in a different way according to the puja systems in the temple. After the puja rituals, artistes start singing devotional songs like toṭṭam. Mythical stories and praises of the Goddess are the main themes of the kałam song. A variety of instruments are used to set the rhythm for Kałamezhuttum pāṭṭu, Important among them are Uduk and Nanthuṇi. The songs are composed in a unique Kerala style. Many songs have been passed down by mouth from the Guru. It is surprising that written documents or authentic texts are not to be found in the field of song.

It is believed that the deities, who are satisfied with the songs, perform a dance of pleasure. The Kałamezhuttum pāṭṭu will end by erasing the Kałam. Here we can see the Devadaprati Puruṣa who the appearance of a goddess has called Velichappādu. He is the one who clears the field. Kałam songs that are mainly found in Kerala are as follows.

### **Bhadrakāli kałampāṭṭu**

Kallaṭṭu Kuruppanmar are famous in conducting Bhadrakāli Kałamezhuttum pāṭṭu. Bhadrakāli's portrait is drawn on the kałam in various forms, fierce and gentle. Sanskrit mythological stories, epic stories and Devi Bhāgavata stories all form the part of Kalamezhuttum pāṭṭu. According to Hindu mythology, Bhadrakāli is the fierce form of Pārvati. References to Bhadrakāli can be found in the Skanda Purāṇa and the Agni Purāṇa.

Bhadrakāli birth and Dārikavadha are the main content of Bhadrakāli song. It is possible to see kannaki charitam along with some cilapatikāra



stories in the song. In The Bhadrakāli Kaṭam pāṭṭu, Devi Bhāgavata Purāṇa influence is unique. In Devi Bhagavata Purana, the birth of Bhagavati as the daughter of Lord Śiva, her fight with Dārika, and the killing of Dārika are beautifully described. The stories of Devi Māhātmyam from the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa, along with the references to the Goddess in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa and the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, are transformed here into the verses of Kaṭamezhuttum pāṭṭu

### **Vetṭakorumakan kaṭampāṭṭu**

Vetṭakorumakan is the next important deity in the Kaṭamezhuttum pāṭṭu system. Kaṭamezhuttum pāṭṭu is the main offering in temples of Veṭṭakorumakan. Veṭṭakorumakan is also known as Kirātasūnu. The concept of Veṭṭakorumakan is associated with mythology and epic stories. According to the Mahābārata story, Arjuna, one of the Pāndavas who came down during the exile period, performs penance on Lord Mahādev to obtain pāśupatāstra. Lord Mahādev consorts with Goddess Pārvati and tempts Arjuna in the disguise of hunters. Veṭṭakorumakan born to Mahādev and Sripārvati, who comes in the form of Kirata.

Veṭṭakorumakan is worshiped in the śaiva concept. In order to teach a lesson to Arjuna, who had become too proud of his abilities, Śiva and Pārvati went in disguise as tribal hunters to where he was doing penance (Tapas). A boy was born to the couple during the hunting trip. The boy becomes extremely naughty and disturbs the peace of the people including saints. Based on their request, Maha viṣṇu also disguises as a hunter and humbles the boy, gives him a dagger (curika) and, when eventually pleased, and blessed him. The penance performed by Arjuna in order to obtain pāśupatāstra, the coming of Śiva as Kirata, the battle between them, the love of Pārvati and Śiva, and the story of the birth of a son Vetṭakorumakan, all form the content of the Veṭṭakorumakan Kaṭam pāṭṭu. Veṭṭakorumakan Kaṭam is characterized by more than a thousand coconuts throwing by veṭṭichapadu.

### **Nāgakalām**

Sarppam Thullal or Nāgakalam pāṭṭu, is a unique form of mystical ritual associated generally with ancestral temples or tharavādus predominantly in the state of Kerala. From ancient times many family houses in Kerala have special snake shrines called Kāvu or Pambin Kāvu where this exotic and spectacular ritual performance is associated to, it is generally conducted to appease the snake gods and thereby to bring prosperity to the family. Pulluvan and Pulluvathy and their assistants who hold the skills and responsibility of creating the aesthetic requirements for the Sarppam Thullal. Nagakalamezhuttum pāṭṭu is performed at Maṇipanthal. This art form is done by drawing the kaṭam of the serpent in the middle of this maṇipantal decorated with kurutola. With the song of the Pulluva couple and the instrumental music, the serpent deity is believed to enter the bodies of the family members who are in attendance and they move around the field.

Most of the songs are based on stories from Mahābārata, Bāgavata and other Purāṇas related to Nāgas, Serpent Genesis. Such stories like Garudolpati, Kāliyadamanam, Viṣaparikṣa, Nāgolsavam, Pālāzhi Mathanam, Pulluva caritam are the themes of the popular songs that have survived. In addition to such songs, a ritual of nāvuru singing by small children is also considered a right of the Pulluvans. Salutations to Lord Ganesha followed by a song invoking the Aṣṭanāgas are sung here. The Aṣṭanāgas are Ananta, Vāsuki, Takshaka, Karkodaka, Shankupala, Mahāpadman, Padman and Kāliyan. The maidens dance to the rhythm of the song, shaking coconut flowers or arecunt flowers. The dance gradually becomes faster, imitating the movements of snakes. The field will be cleared after the toss.

### **Other famous kaṭams**

Kaṭamezhuttum pāṭṭu are also performed for the gods likes Khandākarnan, Gandharvan, Śāstā or Ayyappan etc. Mythology is the plot of all the songs. Khandākarna is mentioned in the 59<sup>th</sup> chapter of Agni Purāṇa. It is mentioned in Agni Purāṇa how the



dedication and puja systems of Khandākarnan. According to the Devi Bhagavata Purāṇa, Khandākarnan is considered as the brother of Bhadrakāli. Another distinctive tradition within the cultural practice of Kaṭamezhuttum pāṭṭu is the Ayyappan Kaṭam. The deity is worshipped under various names, beginning with Śāstā (Ayyappan). References to the union of Mohini and Śiva, as well as the story of the Churning of the Ocean (Pālāzhi Mathana), as narrated in the Skanda Purāṇa, are often found here.

### Conclusion

Faith is one of the factors that motivate a nation to move forward. Kerala is a land of many customs and rituals. Indian epics and Purāṇas have greatly influenced the customs and beliefs of the Kerala people. People in Kerala worship the gods and goddesses mentioned in the Purāṇas. The Kaṭamezhuttum pāṭṭu is one of the most important rituals in Kerala. Kaṭamezhuttum pāṭṭu is also a ritual art form. This is the practice of appeasing the deities by painting pictures of them with five coloured powders and singing songs in praise of them. When

we understand more about Kaṭamezhuttum pāṭṭu system, we can understand that all the songs are based on mythological and epic stories. Among the Purāṇas, mainly Agni Purāṇa, Skanda Purāṇa, Devi Bhagavata Purāṇa and epic texts like Ramayana and Mahabharata have greatly influenced the Kaṭam pāṭṭu system. It can be understood that the Sanskrit language, Sanskrit literature, Sanskrit authentic texts directly or indirectly influences Kerala beliefs, rituals and arts.

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