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## Venerating Vēṭṭaykkorumakan (Son of Śiva and Pārvatī) through Ritual Arts\*

*udikkavēn kiḷakkan dikkil  
arikkann nudiccapōle  
karattināl kulaccavilluṃ kanamoṣu curikayuṃ tān  
dharitta vēṭṭaykkorumakanīśvaran  
tuṇakkaṇam namukke<sup>1</sup>*

May the God Vēṭṭaykkorumakan succour us,  
who holds in his hands the bow and arrow and a dagger  
and who appears as the rising sun in the east.

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The descriptions of the Kaḷameḷuttuṃ Pāṭṭuṃ ritual that are recorded in this article are from my experience of attending this ritual in the Vēṭṭaykkorumakan temple of West Fort area, Trivandrum, Kerala. Though I had seen this ritual several times during my childhood, in the year 2009 I had the occasion to observe its distinct ritual phases more carefully. The detailed description of the Teyyam rituals recorded here are collected from the interviews I had with Dr. Karipath.

<sup>1</sup> cf. Karipath forthcoming A: 15. According to Karipath this verse belongs to the Torraṃpāṭṭu of Vēṭṭaykkorumakan.

SUMMARY: Vēṭṭaykkorumakan is considered to be the son of Śiva and Pārvaṭī, born when they had assumed the form of a hunter and huntress. Although Vēṭṭaykkorumakan is considered as an incarnation, according to the narratives that are written in the local vernacular Malayalam, and known in the Malabar area of Kerala, he is considered to be only a hero too. Beside the tantric rituals that are usually performed for the deities, Vēṭṭaykkorumakan is venerated through two distinct rituals in Kerala, namely the Kaḷameḷuttuṃ Pāṭṭuṃ ritual in the southern part of Kerala, and the Teyyam ritual in northern Kerala. This article will discuss these two rituals in detail to examine how they are closely linked with theatre. Traces of the story of Śiva and Pārvaṭī assuming the form of a hunter and huntress in the *Mahābhārata*, and its influence in Sanskrit Literature and on other art forms, are briefly discussed also.

KEYWORDS: Kerala, Malabar, Vēṭṭaykkorumakan, Kaḷameḷuttuṃ Pāṭṭuṃ, Teyyam

## Introduction

Vēṭṭaykkorumakan is a minor deity worshipped in Kerala and considered to be the son of Śiva and Pārvaṭī, conceived when they had assumed the form of a hunter and huntress to test the valour of Arjuna, before passing on to him the *pāśupata* weapon. Though the episode that depicts the Pāṇḍava hero Arjuna's dramatic encounter with Śiva during the forest exile of the five Pāṇḍava princes and their wife Draupadī is widespread, the story of Śiva and Pārvaṭī conceiving a son during this episode is not well known. While in the *Mahābhārata* this episode ends with the giving of the *pāśupatāstra* to Arjuna, the Kerala narratives take the story further and tell of a son being born to Śiva and Pārvaṭī and named 'Vēṭṭaykkorumakan'. Apart from the usual tantric rituals that are followed in Kerala for Vēṭṭaykkorumakan, that are equivalent to the tantric rituals practised in general in Kerala temples, two additional types of ritual take place as well: while in the southern part of Kerala it is the Kaḷameḷuttuṃ Pāṭṭuṃ ritual, the Teyyam ritual for Vēṭṭaykkorumakan is performed in the northern part of Kerala. This paper will discuss in detail these two ritual forms that are closely related to theatrical performances, and which are similar to the rituals especially performed for Bhadrakālī and also for some other minor deities. Before we go into the details of these rituals and consider

the birth of Vēṭṭaykkorumakan, let us look at the story of Arjuna's dramatic encounter with Śiva in the *Mahābhārata*.

### **The story of Arjuna's dramatic encounter with Śiva in the *Mahābhārata***

The giving of the *pāśupata* to Arjuna has been a popular theme in the literature and arts of South India and the Indianized classical traditions of Southeast Asia. This story is depicted in the *Kairāta* episode in the *Mahābhārata* (3.39–42), in one hundred and fifty-nine verses distributed over four chapters. The episode depicts the Pāṇḍava hero Arjuna's dramatic encounter with Śiva during the former's forest exile. Arjuna is performing penance in a Himalayan forest in order to propitiate the gods and win from them the celestial weapons necessary to gain the victory over the Kauravas and to reclaim the kingdom that has been unjustly taken away from them. Appearing in the guise of a tribal hunter (*kirāta*), Śiva quarrels with Arjuna over the shooting of a boar and tests his courage in various ways. The God ultimately reveals himself and grants Arjuna the boon of an invincible divine weapon, the *pāśupata* (*pāśupatāstra*)<sup>2</sup>.

In the *Mahābhārata*, at the beginning of the *Kairāta* episode, Janamejaya asks Vaiśaṃpāyana to tell the story of Śiva's presenting the *pāśupata* to Arjuna:

*Janamejaya uvāca*  
*bhagavañ śrotum icchāmi pārthasyākliṣṭakarmanāḥ*  
*vistareṇa kathāṃ etāṃ yathāstrāṇy upalabdhavān*  
*kathāṃ sa puruṣavyāghro dīrghabāhur dhanan̄jayaḥ*  
*vanaṃ praviṣṭas tejasvī nirmanuṣyam abhītavat (Mahābhārata 3.39.1–2)*

Janamejaya said, "O illustrious one, I desire to hear in detail the history of the acquisition of weapons by Arjuna of spotless deeds. O tell me how that tiger among men, Dhananjaya, of mighty arms and possessed of great energy, entered that solitary forest without fear." (Ganguly 3.39.1–2)

<sup>2</sup> Pāśupata "embodies the cosmic energies of Śiva as Paśupati, Lord of the Animals, who receives the sacrificial victim, and as Rudra the Destroyer of the triple cities; as well as of Brahmā the Creator, who is Śiva's charioteer in the Tripura myth" (Peterson 2003: 145).

We see that in chapter forty of the *Kairātaparva*, Śiva enters the forest along with Umā and his *gaṇas*<sup>3</sup> and in chapter forty-one, Śiva gives the *pāśupatāstra* to Arjuna.<sup>4</sup>

Bhāravi, who was the first poet to write a court epic, wrote the *Kirātārjunīya*<sup>5</sup> on the above episode described in the *Mahābhārata*.

<sup>3</sup> *gateṣu teṣu sarveṣu tapasviṣu mahātmasu  
pinākapāṇir bhagavān sarvapāpaharo haraḥ  
kairātaṃ veṣam āsthāya kāñcanadrumasannibham  
vibhrājamaṇo vapuṣā girir merur ivāparaḥ  
śrīmad dhanur upādāya śarāṃś cāśviṣopamān  
niṣpapāta mahārciṣmān dahan kakṣam ivānalaḥ  
devyā sahomayā śrīmān samānavrataveṣayā  
nānāveṣadharair hr̥ṣṭair bhūtair anugatas tadā  
kirātaveṣapracchannaḥ strībhiś cānu sahasraśaḥ  
aśobhata tadā rājan sa devo 'īva bhārata  
(Mahābhārata, 3:40.1–5)*

<sup>4</sup> *dadāni te 'straṃ dayitam ahaṃ pāśupataṃ mahat  
samartho dhāraṇe mokṣe saṃhāre cāpi pāṇḍava  
naitad veda mahendro 'pi na yamo na ca yakṣarāt  
varuṇo vātha vā vāyuh kuto vetsyanti mānavāḥ  
na tv etat sahasā pārtha muktavyaṃ puruṣe kva cit  
jagad vinirdahet sarvam alpatejasi pātitam  
avadhyo nāma nāsty asya trailokye sacarācare  
manasā cakṣuṣā vācā dhanuṣā ca nipātyate  
(Mahābhārata, 3:41.13–16)*

<sup>5</sup> Apart from the *Kirātārjunīya*, the following works also contain noteworthy versions of the episode of Kirāta-Arjuna: the *Vikramārjunavijaya* written by the Jain poet Pampa (10<sup>th</sup> century)—a retelling of several episodes in the *Mahābhārata* with a focus on Arjuna—and the *Arjunawiwāha* (*The Celebration of Arjuna*), an old Javanese court poem (*kakāwin*) written by Mpu Kanwa between 1028 and 1035 A.D. The *Arjunawiwāha* also inspired many treatments of the Kirāta story in temple sculpture and painting in Java, Bali, and elsewhere in Southeast Asia. In the sculptures on the Kailāsanātha temple (Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu) and also in the Mukteśvara temple (Trichy, Tamil Nadu) one may see the echoes of the Kirāta-Arjuna episode.

We also see references to Śiva in the form of a *kirāta* in Śaiva Āgamas as well as Sanskrit literature. In the *Uttarakāraṇa*,<sup>6</sup> we find Śiva described in the form of a hunter (*kirāta*), when the text describes the installation of the Kirātaśiva, and in the *Pūrvakāraṇa* we find reference to Kirātaśiva in the description of the *mṛgayātrā* or hunting procession.<sup>7</sup> In the Tamil Bhakti literature of the *Tēvāram*<sup>8</sup> too, we find mention of Śiva in the form of a hunter. It seems that this episode also influenced the Cambodian rulers, as may be seen in a Cambodian 10<sup>th</sup>-century inscription (K528) that refers to the Kirāta-Arjuna episode:

*na svīcikīrṣur yyudhi cakricakraṃ bajaṛaṅ ca no bajrabhr̥to 'pi viṣṇuḥ  
yaś śaktiyokto nu maheśvarāstraṃ sudussahaṃ prāpya jitārivarggaḥ*

<sup>6</sup> *athātas sampravakṣyāmi kirātarūpadhāriṇam  
piñchenaiva śikhāṃ badhvā carmavastreṇa veṣṭitam  
jvālākuṇḍodaraṅ caiva pārśvayōr ubhayōḥ sthitam  
kṛṣṇavarṇasamāyuktaṃ sarvāvayavasundaram  
śārṅgaṃ vāmakarābje ca bāṇaṃ savyakarābjake  
tadagre cārjunaṃ rūpaṃ adhomukhanipātitam  
devāstraṃ vāmapārśve tu umādevīsthitāṃ parām  
savye kamaṅḍaludharaṃ dakṣiṇe tu namaskṛtam  
kirātarūpaṃ ākhyātaṃ sthapati sthāpake dvayoḥ  
(Uttarakāraṇa 79:1–4)*

<sup>7</sup> *ratham āropayed rātrau kuryāt grāmapradakṣiṇaṃ  
punaḥsthāpanaṃ kartavyaṃ snāpanaṃ kārayet dvija  
prabhūtahaviṣaṇ datvā sthāpayed deśikottamaḥ  
tīrtthāhāt pūrvadivase mṛgayātrāṃ samārabhet  
kirātārjunarūpaṃ vā tripurāntakam eva vā  
kirātarūpavat sarvān viśeṣān veśadhārayet  
kecid vāyusamārūḍhāḥ kecid āyudhavāhanāḥ  
(Pūrvakāraṇa 141:191–194);*

We also find reference to Kirātaśiva in the *Īśānagurudevapaddhati* (1.22:1), when the text refers to the rituals of *tvaritā*:

*śaṅkareṇa vijayasya tapobhis toṣitena varadena vanānte  
yā kirātavapuṣā saha gaurī svāgatā jayati sā tvaritākhyā*

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Tēvāram*, 3.86:6. (*Talam: Uṭaiyār kōyil, Ṇṇacampantar*).

[Naturally] prone to victory/ a [veritable] Arjuna (*jīṣnuḥ*) in battle, he did not desire to appropriate the discus of Viṣṇu (*cakricakram*), nor the thunderbolt (*bajram*) of Indra (*bajrabhṛtaḥ*), for equipped with his spear (*śaktiyuktaḥ*), [Arjuna] attained the invincible weapon of the Lord and conquered his enemies (*jitārivargah*). For Rājendravarman (*yaḥ*), filled with [the divine] power [that is initiation] (*śaktiyuktaḥ*), attained the invincible weapon[-*mantra*] of the Lord [as *mantra* for his *sādhana*] and conquered the group of [six internal] enemies [that are the passions].<sup>9</sup> (Goodall forthcoming: verse 59)

We also see that the Kirāta-Arjuna episode not only became a source for many literary works, but also influenced several theatrical forms, such as the Terukkūttu theatre of Tamil Nadu and the Kathakali theatre of Kerala. But in the literary works as well as in these theatrical forms, we do not hear of a son born to Śiva and Pārvatī while in the guise of hunters.

### Birth of Vēṭṭakkorumakan as recounted in the Kerala narratives

In the *Mahābhārata*, the *kairāta* episode ends by stating that after passing the *pāśupatāstra* on to Arjuna, Śiva and Pārvatī in the form of hunters go back to the mountains:

*tataḥ śubhaṃ girivaram īśvaras tadā  
sahomayā sitataṭasānukandaram  
vihāya taṃ patagamaharṣisevitam  
jagāma khaṃ puruṣavarasya paśyataḥ* (*Mahābhārata* 3.41.26)

And the god of gods, then leaving that blessed mountain with snowy plateaus and vales and caves, favourite resort of sky-ranging great Rishis, went up, accompanied by Umā into the skies, as the great man was seeing. (Ganguly 3.41.26)

In the narratives that are known in Kerala (especially among the performers of the rituals of Vēṭṭaykkorumakan), there is, however, a development

<sup>9</sup> Based on this inscription, some scholars (cf. Peterson 2003: 177) observe that in this episode Arjuna undergoes a process of Śaiva initiation (*dīkṣā*). Finot, who edited this (K528) inscription, did not, however, interpret it as an initiation (Finot 1925: 337).

in the story according to which, while Śiva and Pārvatī were in the form of hunter and huntress, they were blessed with a son who is known as Vēṭṭaykkorumakan.

This story is sung in the *Vēṭṭaykkorumakan Pāṭṭu*<sup>10</sup> or ‘Songs of Vēṭṭaykkorumakan’ that are sung during the Kaḷameḷuttuṃ Pāṭṭuṃ ritual<sup>11</sup> usually performed in the southern part of Kerala and also in the *Tōṛṛṃ-pāṭṭu*, sung during the Teyyam ritual to Vēṭṭaykkorumakan, performed in the northern part of Kerala. Dr. Kaprippath, in his detailed article in Malayalam on the stories of Vēṭṭaykkorumakan, describes the birth of Vēṭṭaykkorumakan as it is described in the *Torrampāṭṭu* songs written in Malayalam, that are to be sung during the Teyyam ritual. The story begins:

*bhāratayuddham jayikkān vaḷiyentenu ārāṅja arjunanoṭu śivanil ninnu  
pāsupataṃ vāṅṅi varika ennu śrīkr̥ṣṇan upadeśikkunnu. ...*

Arjuna asks Kṛṣṇa the way to conquer the war and Kṛṣṇa advises him to obtain the *pāsupata* ...

The story goes on to recount that Arjuna starts his penance and, as the days go on, one of the servants of Śiva comes to the forest to collect flowers for Śiva and to see the tremendous penance of Arjuna; he tells Śiva and Pārvatī about this penance. Śiva and Pārvatī are interested in seeing the penance of Arjuna and go to the forest in the guise of hunters along with Śiva’s servants (*gaṇas*), who take the form of ‘small hunters’ (*ceṛuvēṭar*). When the Mūkāsura in the form of a wild

<sup>10</sup> *cittamottuṭane maṅkayum tānuṃ vanattil  
ceṅcammē kuruveṭasutanāy piṛannu  
uttamapatniyāṃ pārvatipeṛra makane  
ūkkum nin balavum vīriyavum ṅānarivē  
ittarameḷunneḷḷum balattinmēl kaḷamvāḷum  
vīranvirīyan vēṭṭaykkorumakan tuṅakka* (Babu 2002: 134)

<sup>11</sup> According to Manikandan Kallat, one of the performers of the Kaḷameḷuttuṃ Pāṭṭuṃ ritual, the songs that describe the birth of Vēṭṭaykkorumakan are not originally part of the songs written for Kaḷameḷuttuṃ Pāṭṭuṃ ritual, but they were introduced among the ritually sung compositions, as these were passed on down through generations of performers.

boar appears in front of them, Śiva shoots an arrow and the wild boar falls in front of Arjuna. Śiva and Arjuna both claim it and fight each other. Then the story goes on:

*pratiyogi mahādevanenu tiriccariṅja arjunan ā pādāravindaññalil namas-  
kariccu. Saṃprītanāya śivan divyamāya pāśupatāstraṃ pārthanu sam-  
māniccu. Madakaramāya veṭattiveṣaṃ pūṇḍa pārvaṭī dēviye paramaśivan  
pulkiyappōḷ avarkkoru tirumakan pirannu---Vēṭṭaykkorumakan*

When Arjuna realised that it is Mahādeva who has fought with him, he prostrates at his lotus feet. Śiva, pleased with Arjuna bestows on him the invincible weapon, the Pāśupatāstra. [At this moment] when Paramaśiva is embracing the excited Pārvaṭī, who is in the form of a huntress, the son Vēṭṭaykkorumakan takes birth.

Thus Vēṭṭaykkorumakan, son of Śiva and Parvati, became a deity who appears to be known and worshipped only in Kerala. He is also extolled as the son of Śiva and Pārvaṭī in the *Kirātāṣṭaka*, a *stotra*<sup>12</sup> venerating him.

### Tantric rituals of Vēṭṭaykkorumakan

Vēṭṭaykkorumakan is also known as ‘*kirātamūrti*’ in Sanskrit and there are several temples in Kerala that are dedicated to this deity; the usual rituals that are performed in other temples—such as the daily rituals, annual festivals etc.—are performed in these temples of Vēṭṭaykkorumakan too. Usually, the rituals in the temples of Vēṭṭaykkorumakan are based on the *Tantrasamuccaya*,<sup>13</sup> a 14<sup>th</sup>-century ritual manual of Kerala, and are performed by brahmins. Though the *Tantrasamuccaya* does not include any specific ritual for Vēṭṭaykkorumakan, the rituals that are followed for Śiva as set out in this manual, with necessary changes—such as

<sup>12</sup> The second verse of the eight verses (*aṣṭaka*) that praise Vēṭṭaykkorumakan reads:

*ākheṭāya vanecarasya girijāsaktasya śambhoḥ sutah  
trātuṃ yo bhuvanāṃ purā samājani khyātaḥ kirātākṛtiḥ  
kodaṇḍaḥ churikādharo ghanaruciḥ piñchāvataṃsojvalaḥ  
sa tvaṃ māmava sarvadā ripugaṇa trastaṃ dayāvāridhe  
(cf. Venkitasubramonia Iyer 1977: 40)*

<sup>13</sup> For a detailed study on the ritual manuals of Kerala, see Sarma 2009.



the recitation of visualisation verses (*dhyānaśloka*) while invoking the deity, seed-mantras (*mūlamantra*) etc.—are followed for Vēṭṭaykkorumakan. The visualisation verses (*dhyānaślokas*) that are recited during the ritual describe the form of Vēṭṭaykkorumakan:<sup>14</sup>

*ugrāsidenukam udagraśarāsanāgra-  
vyagrāgrahastamuḍurājakaḷāvataṃsam  
udyatkṛpālasadapāṅgamumāṅgajātam  
tejaḥ paraṃ śabaraveśadharaṃ namāmi*

I salute the effulgent son of Umā, [in the form of] a hunter, holding a fierce dagger and bow, with the tip of the hand resting on the top of the fierce bow, wearing the crescent moon on the head, with swelling compassion in the eyes.

In the *kirātāṣṭaka*, a group of eight verses praising the god Vēṭṭaykkorumakan, there is a verse that describes him:

*pratyarthivrātavakṣaḥsthalarudhiraśurāpānamattaṃ pṛṣatkaṃ  
cāpe sandhāya tiṣṭhan hrdayasarasije māmake tāpahantā  
picchottaṃsaḥ śaraṇyaḥ paśupatiṇayo nīradābhāḥ prasanno  
devaḥ pāyādapāyāt śabaravapurasaḥ sāvadhānaḥ sadā mām*

May the God, the great son of Śiva,  
The charming hunter dark like the cloud,  
Wearing a crown of peacock feathers,  
Holding in the hand the bow with arrow  
That longs to drink the enemy's blood,  
Rest in my mind ever and anon,  
Crush the ills that torment me  
And save me from perils of every kind. (Venkitasubramonia Iyer 1977: 40)

<sup>14</sup> There is one more verse known (cf. Venkitasubramonia Iyer 1977: 40) that praises Vēṭṭaykkorumakan:

*dhārādharmaśyāmalāṅgaṃ kṣurikācāpadhāriṇam  
kirātavapuṣaṃ vande paramānandam īśvaram*

I bow to the god in hunter's form,  
Dark in hue like the raining cloud,  
Holding the sword [dagger] and bow in the hands,  
The source of all beatitude. (Venkitasubramonia Iyer 1977: 40)

Thus, the visualisation verses as well as the *stotras* describe him as a two-armed deity, a hunter in appearance, dark like a cloud, and bearing a bow and arrow in one hand and a dagger in the other; there is a crown on his head adorned with peacock feathers and crescent moon; the eyes are ruddy and there is a prominent moustache; he wears a blue garment and has the horse as his vehicle. In most of the temples of Vēṭṭaykkorumakan, the idols usually conform to this description. The offerings and festivals in the temples of Vēṭṭaykkorumakan follow the same system as in the other temples but, as we discussed earlier, there are two specific rituals performed for Vēṭṭaykkorumakan that have a strong theatrical background, which I will discuss next.

### **Kaḷameluttuṃ Pāṭṭuṃ**

The ritual Kaḷameluttuṃ Pāṭṭuṃ,<sup>15</sup> though performed for other deities too, such as Bhadrakālī, Ayyappan, Tripurāntakan etc.,<sup>16</sup> in the form venerating Vēṭṭaykkorumakan is very famous in Kerala, especially in the southern regions, and takes place in the temples devoted to Vēṭṭaykkorumakan as well as in noble households of Nampūṭiri Brahmins and Nairs of Kerala. In this ritual the image of Vēṭṭaykkorumakan is drawn on the floor with coloured powders and, after the necessary rituals have been performed to the accompaniment of musical instruments and songs, the drawn image is erased by the performer of the ritual. Performing the Kaḷameluttuṃ Pāṭṭuṃ ritual as well as preparing the images of the Vēṭṭaykkorumakan for this ritual is usually done by a community known as Kurupp.<sup>17</sup> Several families

<sup>15</sup> This ritual is generally known as Kaḷameluttuṃ Pāṭṭuṃ, but also as Kaḷampāṭṭu or Kaḷameluttupāṭṭu.

<sup>16</sup> The other minor deities for whom this ritual is performed include Ārinampi, Karumakan, Eraññipurān, Parēṇan, Antimalayār, Antimahākālan, Brahmarākṣasan, Nīlavattāri, Kurutirāman, Rudhiramahākālī, Asura-Mahākālan, Kṣetrapālan, Gandharvan, Vīrabhadran and Nāgam. For descriptions of the features of these rituals, see Babu 2002: 58–65.

<sup>17</sup> Kurupp is one of the castes that form the Nair community, one of the largest communities in Kerala. Kurupps are related with certain occupational

of this Kurupp community are engaged in this ritual, but among them the family of Kallār<sub>ra</sub><sup>18</sup> is famous for their drawings, especially of Vēṭṭaykkorumakan. Let us look at the procedure of this ritual in detail.

On the day of the Kaḷameḷuttuṃ Pāṭṭuṃ, in the front yard of the temple or in the location where the ritual will be performed, a multicoloured image of Vēṭṭaykkorumakan is made.<sup>19</sup> The area where the kaḷam or drawing is made is called ‘pāṭṭaraṅṅ’ or ‘the stage for performing songs’. This drawing—the image of the deity—will be rectangular, measuring about 20”x12”. On the day of the ritual, around noon, in the middle of the *pāṭṭaraṅṅ* area, grain and rice will be put in place and, a little above them, a seat (*pīṭha*) will be placed as well as a mirror. Betel leaves and areca nuts will also be kept there for offerings. Once these are ready, the ritual performer receives a piece of silk cloth (*paṭṭu*) from the sponsor of the ritual (*yajamāna*) to be used as a canopy (*kūra*) and obtains permission to begin the ritual from the sponsor with other devotees assembled there. Once permission is obtained to begin the ritual, the conch will be sounded three

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functions such as martial arts, funeral rites etc. They are also the caste who usually performs the Kaḷameḷuttuṃ Pāṭṭuṃ ritual; The Teyyampāṭi Nambyār community is also known for performing Kaḷameḷuttuṃ Pāṭṭuṃ ritual for Vēṭṭaykkorumakan. There are some other communities known for preparing the images of deities, which include Tīyāṭṭuṅṅi, Tīyāṭi Nambyār etc.

<sup>18</sup> For a detailed study of this family and their ritual system, see Babu 2002. *Ibid.*: 75–76 provides a list of twenty-eight Vēṭṭaykkorumakan temples where the Kallār<sub>ra</sub> family performs the Kaḷameḷuttuṃ Pāṭṭuṃ ritual.

<sup>19</sup> In Kerala, in the rituals that are performed by Brahmins, *maṅḍalas* are usually drawn with coloured powders. This is known in Kerala as ‘*padmam*’, and the drawings are considered to be representations of the divinity and thus worshipped. Usually, these *padmams* do not have images, but will be drawn with abstract motives: lines, circles, triangles and squares. Some of the most often drawn *padmams* are named *svastika*, *navaka*, *catuśśuddhi*, *aṣṭadala*, etc. Usually, they are drawn for the rituals related to temples and also during the performance of rituals, such as *vāstubali*, *sarpabali*, etc.; see also Babu 2002: 26–27.

times and the ‘song of the noon’ ritual (Uccappāṭṭu) begins. In some temples the ‘song of the noon’ ritual is not performed separately but along with the main ritual in the evening. Before the commencement of the singing of the ‘noon song’, the brahmin chief-priest of the temple performs a *pūjā* for Gaṇeśa and this is followed by the beating of the drum (*ceṇḍa*). Then the performer along with his team sings songs<sup>20</sup> venerating Gaṇapati, Sarasvati, Śrīkr̥ṣṇa and Śiva with the support of a stringed instrument (*nantuṇi*)<sup>21</sup> and cymbals (*tālam*). Once this is done, *stuti* or songs of praise for Vēṭṭaykkorumakan are performed.

In the evening, after the area where the image of Vēṭṭaykkorumakan will be drawn is purified and decorated with a canopy of silk cloth and also of tender coconut leaves cut to suitable size, *areca spadices*, mango twigs, betel leaves, areca nuts and lime fruits are also hung along the edge of the canopy on all sides.

Then, on the south-eastern side of the *pāṭṭaranṇu*, a hexagonal diagram (*ṣaḍkoṇacakra*) is drawn for venerating Gaṇapati and, as an offering to him, jaggery and fruits are placed on a plantain leaf. Once this is done, the preparation<sup>22</sup> of the image will begin and it will take

<sup>20</sup> For a list of songs that are sung during this ritual, see Babu 2002: 131–135.

<sup>21</sup> The South Indian Musicians Lalitha and Nandini (“The Hindu, Friday Review”, 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2017, p. 5) provide a technical description of this stringed instrument: *nantuṇi* has a “a rectangular hollow body, which is primarily made from the wood of the jackfruit tree. About five feet long and six inches wide, it has a projecting tail. Two strings pass over its body through the bridge and are tied to an iron hook at the top end. This is tightened to the two pegs at the bottom. The strings are usually made of palm fibre or sisal. Of the two strings, the thicker one is used as drone and the thinner is used to produce different notes by pressing the strings on the frets, which are tuned to ‘sa’ and ‘pa’. It also has a 14-inch resonator, on which the frets, numbering three to five are fixed. The strings are strummed by a plectrum made from buffalo horn. It is usually placed on the lap and held in a vertical position, with the pegs on top. The left fingers press the frets, as the artiste strums with the right hand.”

<sup>22</sup> Babu 2002: 50–55 compares the process of preparing the image with the process of consecrating a temple: ex. *bhūparigraha*—obtaining the area

around four to five hours to draw the image of Vēṭṭaykkorumakan, who will be depicted in a standing posture.<sup>23</sup> Usually, five colours are used to make the image, all of them obtained with natural substances: white with rice powder, black with charcoal powder, yellow with turmeric powder, green made by powdering certain green leaves that are dried in shade and red made by mixing turmeric powder and lime.

Once the drawing is completed, an offering for the seven mothers (*saptamātrs*), on seven plantain leaves with a small heap of rice grains (*vellari*) and a coconut will be placed on the northern and southern sides (three each) and also on the western side (one) of the drawing. Oil lamps are also placed on the four corners of the drawing. On the top of the drawing, on the head side, a silk cloth will be spread on an ornamented wooden stool and, on the top of that, a cloth, a mirror, a sword and a garland will be placed. Once this preparation is ready, around dawn, an orchestra consisting of two traditional indigenous drums (*ceṇḍa*) and a pipe called *kulal* will play to propitiate the deity Vēṭṭaykkorumakan. Then, not far from the ritual area, usually under a tree,<sup>24</sup> another ritual known as Mullakkalpāṭṭu<sup>25</sup> is performed. In this ritual, the sword, representing Vēṭṭaykkorumakan, that is placed on the wooden stool will be taken in procession, usually on an elephant and, once it reaches the location that is fixed for the Mullakkalpāṭṭu, the sword will be worshipped. Songs

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for preparing the drawing; *iṣṭakānyāsa*—placing the wooden stool (*pīṭha*) in the middle of the area where the drawing will be made; *prāsāda*, the temple complex and *bimba*, the statue—the *kaḷam* or the drawing; *netronmīlana*—opening of the eyes of the image with the help of a mirror; *bali*—offering of rice and flowers of coconut palm etc. for the seven mothers around the *kaḷam* or drawing.

<sup>23</sup> Usually, these drawings are prepared following the description of the deity provided in the verses of visualisation (*dhyānaśloka*).

<sup>24</sup> Often an area not far from the ritual place and next to a river or tank is selected for this Mullakkalpāṭṭu ritual.

<sup>25</sup> For a description of this ritual, see Babu 2002: 41; the name Mullakkalpāṭṭu may come from the name of the Goddess Mullakkal, who is worshipped in Kerala.

known as *niraṃ*<sup>26</sup> (describing the form of the deity) and *stuti* (praises) will be sung during this ritual. The Kurupp or Karuvan Nāyar, who performs the Kaḷameḷuttuṃ Pāṭṭuṃ ritual, assumes the role of ‘Veḷiccapāṭ’ or oracle in this ritual and he represents Vēṭṭaykkorumakan.<sup>27</sup> The ritual performer of the Mullakkalpāṭṭu wears a pleated white cloth covered by a piece of red silk round the waist and a garland of red flowers (usually in red ixora). Holding a sword in his right hand, he joins the procession and leads it back to the main ritual area (or to the temple where the ritual takes place), accompanied by numerous torchbearers, and the playing of an orchestra with drums and pipes. In front of the temple the oracle executes the ‘Īṭuṃ Kūruṃ’<sup>28</sup>, a particular kind of dance, and at the end of this the sword carried in the procession will be taken back to the temple. Then the oracle reaches the *kaḷam* (drawing) and dances around it nine times; this is known as *kaḷapradakṣiṇa*. In it, the oracle dances at a slow pace for the first three rounds, the next three at medium pace and the last three at a fast pace to the music of the orchestra. Thereafter, he places the sword he has carried near the wooden stool and retires. Then a brahmin priest performs *pūjā* for the *kaḷam* and once this *pūjā* is over, the oracle appears again; he circumambulates thrice around the *kaḷam* holding the sword downwards and shaking it, before he retires again. At this point, two other members of the team who perform the ritual, (usually also joining in the preparation of the *kaḷam*) sing the *kaḷampāṭṭu*, which is the prayer invoking the blessings of Vēṭṭaykkorumakan and evoking his journey to the human world; the temples that are devoted to him will be praised in this song. While this is happening, one of

<sup>26</sup> *Niraṃ* are songs in praise of the deities for whom the ritual is performed, describing their physical appearance.

<sup>27</sup> In most of the ritual arts of Kerala involving possession, the ritual performer who gets possessed is known as Veḷiccapāṭ or oracle.

<sup>28</sup> This is also known as *khaḍganṛtta* (‘the sword-dance’), in which the artist holds a sword while performing the dance, based on the rhythms that are played. See Babu 2002: 41.

the two singers will play a simple stringed instrument called *nantuṇi* and the other one will use the cymbals to keep the rhythm of the singing steady. Once the singing is over, the silk cloth that is spread on the wooden stool will be removed and the stool will be placed in the middle of the *kaḷam*. The oracle then collects some of the coconut leaves hung up on the sides of the canopy in his arms and, while standing in the middle of the *kaḷam*, throws them reverentially onto the face of the image; thus begins the ritual called ‘Kaḷampoli’ or rubbing of the *kaḷam*. Next, the oracle offers incense in the eight directions (connected to the guardians of the directions) while reciting specific *mantras*<sup>29</sup> in praise of Gaṇapati, Sarasvatī, and the seven Mothers. This is followed by the ritual Tiriyuḷccal or waving of wicks (*tiri*). In it, the oracle places rice, a flower garland, nine wicks, and a coconut, which has been broken into two pieces (*nāḷikeramuṇi*), on a plate; he lights the wicks and places them on the *kaḷam*, as well as at the feet of the image and offers the lights to the deity. He circumambulates the *kaḷam* once, takes one of the lighted wicks, and places it on the *kaḷam*. Next, while circumambulating the *kaḷam* for a second time, the oracle drops (*tūval*) rice and places it, together with flowers, on the top (head) side of the *kaḷam*, he touches the heart of the image and then rubs the face of the image using the inflorescence of the coconut palm (*pūkkula*). He offers flowers at the feet of the image and rubs its feet. Wearing the silk cloth and the flower garland that was earlier placed on the wooden stool, and holding the two swords one in each hand (that which was placed on the stool and the one he carried earlier for the dancing), he dances over different parts of the *kaḷam*, effacing [or erasing] its image, his feet following the rhythm of the drums. He then cuts down the remaining coconut leaves that were placed around the canopy and while doing so he stretches his feet everywhere on the *kaḷam*, completing in this way the effacement of the image. Then the oracle distributes the coloured powder spread around as

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<sup>29</sup> For the *mantras* (in Malayalam) that are recited during this ritual, see Babu 2002: 42–44.

‘remains of the worship’ (*prasādam*), to the devotees assembled there. The oracle again places the sword on the wooden stool, while brief singing takes place. Finally, the canopy is pulled down and by that the ritual related to the *kaḷam* comes to an end.

After the rituals performed on the *kaḷam*, one more ritual is performed in the *Kaḷameḷuttuṃ Pāṭṭuṃ* of *Vēṭṭaykkorumakan*. This is known as ‘*Teṅṅāyericcal*’<sup>30</sup> or ‘*Nālikēramēṟu*’ or ‘the throwing of coconuts’, in which many coconuts, numbering from three hundred to twelve thousand and eight,<sup>31</sup> will be broken by the oracle. Before the beginning of this ritual, the oracle stands before the primary icon (if the ritual takes place in a temple) and receives sacred water (*tīrtha*), sandal and flowers (*prasāda*) from the priest. He offers a number of unbroken coconuts to the deity, places them on the steps (*sopāna*) of the *sanctum sanctorum*, and then distributes some of them to the devotees around. He then moves towards the location where the coconuts are kept ready for breaking, between three hundred to twelve thousand in number. While sitting on a plank, the oracle breaks them all one by one on a stone, using each hand alternatively, following the rhythm of the drums (*ceṇḍa*) and pipes (*kulal*) that are played successively in a slow, medium and finally a fast tempo. When this is over,<sup>32</sup> some more songs are sung in the area where the drawing (*kaḷam*) was worshipped and the ritual of ‘the throwing of coconuts’ comes to an end.

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<sup>30</sup> In some temples, this ritual is carried out for twelve days continuously. In the *Vēṭṭaykkorumakan* temple of Fort (Trivandrum, Kerala) this ritual is conducted for twelve days during the Malayalam month of *vṛścikam* (November-December) every year and during these days, a thousand coconuts will be broken as part of the ritual.

<sup>31</sup> According to Karippath forthcoming a: 14, the number twelve thousand and eight denotes the twelve thousand names of the gods and the eight names of the guardians of the directions.

<sup>32</sup> The throwing of coconuts is carried out rather fast and takes less than an hour for 1000 coconuts. A well experienced oracle, such as the Karakkur Mathom Ramachandran, broke 12008 coconuts in less than 2h 30 in 2016 at the Ayyappan Kavu Temple, Cochin, Kerala,



There is a myth related to this ‘throwing of coconuts’ ritual, which is related in the songs that are sung during the various rituals of Vēṭṭaykkorumakan.<sup>33</sup> According to it, after the birth of Vēṭṭaykkorumakan, the boy, who had extraordinary effulgence, was aiming his arrows at anyone he happened to see. The Gods (*devas*) in heaven became worried and called Viṣṇu. Viṣṇu approached the boy and gave him several weapons, including a dagger (*curika*) and sent him to earth<sup>34</sup> for the protection of humans. The boy crossed the North, Kaliṅga, Tiruppati,

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<sup>33</sup> For a detailed description of this story, written in prose and based on the songs that are sung during the Teyyam ritual, see Karipath forthcoming a: 10–14. Kurup 1973: 50–51 puts this story in the context of its historical background thus: “The origin of the story is traced to the period of the ruling of the feudal chieftains and their constant struggling for authority over one another. The fort at Balussery, in the southern territory of Kolathunad belonged to one Nair Chieftain. The ruler of the principality known Kurumbrathiri or Kurumbranad Vazunnavar, kept this fort under his custody after throwing away the previous master, Balussery Nair. The displaced Nair was awaiting a chance for revenge. Then a hero, who came from a distant place promised to help him. The hero approached the Vazunnavar to request him to restore the fort in favour of its previous master. The Vazunnavar agreed that he would restore the fort, if the hero could throw and crack 21,600 coconuts within a short time at the fort. The gauntlet thrown by the Vazunnavar was accepted by the hero. On the day fixed for the performance the hero started to the fort accompanied by a small boy of Balussery Nair. Seeing the gate of the fort closed before him, he took the boy on his shoulder and jumped inside the fort. Then he asked the boy to throw and crack the heap of coconuts arranged in the fort. The hero infused his divine power. So the boy was able to crack all coconuts. ... The Vazunnavar restored the fort in favour of the boy. The hero addressed the boy as Kidavu (a pet name for boy) and gave him the royal title of Karakuru Swarupam. Significance: A hero who had assisted a small ruling chieftain to restore his lost authority was later considered as a divine deity for his super ability. He is worshipped in temples also with Brahminical rituals along with the regular teyyattams in Stanams.”

<sup>34</sup> “*Tammappan tirumakan kaiyyilāyiraṃ āyudhañṅal nalki, śritajana-paripālanattināyi bhūmiyilēkkayaccu*” lines from *Torṅampāṭṭ* quoted by

Kāñcīpuram, Kumbakoṇam, Rāmeśvaram, Tiruvanantapuram, Trichur and reached Kozhikode, where he changed his aspect into a member of the Nāyar community there. He married a Nāyar lady from the family of Kāṛakūranāyar, and they begot a son named Kaṇṇan. Due to the lack of male members, a fort that belonged to the Kāṛakūranāyar family had been taken over by another family named Kuṛumprātiri. Vēṭṭaykkorumakan demanded that fort back. But the Kuṛumprātiri family was not willing to comply and asked Vēṭṭaykkorumakan to face some challenges. Twenty-one thousand and six hundred coconuts were piled up, blocking the entrance, while the fort itself was blocked by a palisade of sharp-edged fences. Kuṛumprātiri agreed to return the fort if Vēṭṭaykkorumakan managed to enter it, clearing these obstacles and demanding the fort in person. Vēṭṭaykkorumakan, along with his son Kaṇṇan, flew over the fences without difficulty and reached the interior of the fort. Within minutes (“*cimmiya kaṇṇ mīkkum mumpe*”—the time that is required for a blink of the eye) Kaṇṇan broke all the coconuts piled up there and took control of the fort.

The ritual of the breaking of the coconuts is reminiscent of the story<sup>35</sup> described above, and its function is to remind devotees of the heroism

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Karipath forthcoming a: 11—“His father gave thousands of weapons to his dear son and send him to the earth for the protection of those who take refuge”.

<sup>35</sup> *kunnalakkōṇō nīyyatamunnile*  
*kunnoḷaṃ teṇṇa kiṭannatellām*  
*onnoḷiyāte takartta ninnoḷ*  
*onnuṇṭuṇarttunnen tampurāne.*  
*ennil varunnallalakaruṃ vaṇṇame*  
*ennuṃ ninakkitā kaitoḷunnen*  
*mannil pukaḷ cēruṃ vāluśseri*  
*kōṭṭayil vēṭṭaykkorumakane...*

In these verses that are sung during the Kaḷameḷuttuṃ Pāṭṭuṃ ritual, we see the description of the breaking of coconuts; cf. Babu 2002: 134;

*nāyarāyi puṛappettu nālikēraṃ takarppān*  
*nāḷikamūnirupattōrāyiraṃ naltēṇṇa*  
*poṭupoṭā idipōlē takarttāḍivarumpōḷ*

of Vēṭṭaykkorumakan and his son. In the song, it is also mentioned that Vēṭṭaykkorumakan rubs out the drawings at the entrance of the fort as well (“*iṭṭa kaḷam māyiccu*”—“[He] rubbed off the *kaḷam* that is drawn [there]”); this may also be linked with the Kaḷameḷuttum Pāṭṭum ritual in which the *kaḷam* is rubbed out.

### Venerating Vēṭṭaykkorumakan through the ritual Teyyam

Teyyam<sup>36</sup> (= *daivam*) is one of the most colourful and visually appealing ritual arts through which the local deities are venerated<sup>37</sup> and is followed by millions of people in northern Malabar, which comprise the northern districts of Kerala. Though the word Teyyam denotes ‘God’, its wider significance is explained by Freeman:

In the Malyalam language of Kerala, teyyam most literally refers simply to the ‘god’ or ‘deity’ (cognate with the Sanskrit *deva* or *daiva*) whose elaborately costumed form is donned for the rites of its possessed worship. These rites themselves, and the festivals built around them, are called *teyyāṭṭam*, or ‘god-dance’. The ambiguity of this compound itself, however, points to the central ideology of possession, for the usual interpretation is not that the performers are dancing the gods, but rather that the gods themselves are dancing, through the bodies of the mediums that they have possessed for the occasion. This is borne out most dramatically at the close of

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*poṭupoṭā veṭṭiyuṃ nalliḷaṅcēkoRkaḷiyuṃ*  
*ōṟṭṭālatra kīrttiyēruṃ bāliyerikkōṭṭayil*  
*vāḷuṃ vēṭṭaykkorumakan tuṅakkaṇaṃ namukkē.*

Verses from *Torrapāṭṭ* on Vēṭṭaykkorumakan; cf. Karippath forthcoming a: 14.

<sup>36</sup> According to Kurup “Teyyam is corruption for *Daivam* or *God* and thus *Teyyattam* means the god’s dance”. He further adds that “this is made colourful and impressive by the aesthetic spirit and religious outlook of the common people. The village folk in their worship of the heroes who once lived among them organised festivals incorporating ritualism, vocal and instrumental music, dance and painting. This blending of artistic forms in a historical pageant is a good example of the aesthetic imagination of the people” (Kurup 1973: 17).

<sup>37</sup> The Teyyam ritual is performed between the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the Malayalam month of *Tulām* (mid-October / mid-November) and the middle of the Malayalam month *Iḍavam* (mid-May/mid-June).

the dance-sequence, where the teyyam (the costumed performer, we would say), walks among the gathered devotees, interacting with them, hearing various complaints, receiving offerings, and granting blessings in the direct voice and behaviour and person of the god. (Freeman 2005: 308)

According to Clothey (Clothey 1978: 10–11) and Freeman (Freeman 1991: 38–39), the term ‘teyyam’ was in usage not only in Kerala but also extensively in wider south Indian areas. Teyyam is also known as ‘Teyyāṭṭam’ (‘dance of the deity’) or Kaḷiyāṭṭam (‘play-dance’)<sup>38</sup> and, as part of this ritual, a male performer of the ritual becomes possessed and speaks as the God or Goddess, whom the devotees can ask for favours, such as health, fertility, success, and prosperity. The person who plays and personifies the deity is called ‘*kōlam*’<sup>39</sup> or ‘*koladhāri*’.<sup>40</sup> During Teyyam, one can see the possessed *kōlam* in a spectacular form involving elaborate make-up, costume, and dancing to the loud drumming and ritual songs which narrate the divine deeds (*tōṛṇpāṭṭu*), often including a demonstration of the fighting abilities of the possessed. The possessed also provides additional proofs of the divine expression and its potency, such as rolling on glowing embers and drinking incredibly large quantities of alcohol, or accepting the offering of live chickens and sucking their blood after tearing them apart with their teeth.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> It is also known as Teyyamkeṭṭu and Tirayaṭiyantiram. For a detailed study of this ritual form in Malayalam see Karippath 2012.

<sup>39</sup> Generally the person called *veḷiccappāṭu* is an institutional oracle attached to a specific temple, but in the Teyyam ritual the ‘*kōlam*’ or the Teyyam ‘performer’ (as I will refer to him in this article) and oracle are distinct. The roles of the oracle in the Teyyam ritual are well defined, such as bringing the weapons of the deity from the sanctum and passing them on to the Teyyam ‘performer’ and often dancing along with him..

<sup>40</sup> He is also often called ‘*komaram*’ or as ‘*kanalāḍi*’ (the Teyyam that dances around the glowing embers (*kaṇal*)).

<sup>41</sup> Offerings of alcohol or live chickens are not followed for the Teyyam of Vēṭṭaykkorumakan, since Vēṭṭaykkorumakan is considered as a deity having *sāttvika* personality (*bhava*). Usually, these are offered for deities such as Bhadrakālī, Cāmundi, etc.

This ritual dance is performed exclusively by male members of traditional caste groups such as Vaṇṇān, Malayan, Vēlan, Māvilan, Pulayan and Koppalan, etc. in the shrines of sacred groves (*kāvu*) or in traditional family houses (*taravāṭu*). *Kāvus* are considered as the abode of Gods and Goddesses and Freeman confirms this further:

In these pleasure gardens (*aramam*) and retreats [*kāvus*], the gods and goddesses sometimes take a wiff of air full of fragrances from flowers and groves. This is the meaning of the saying that these are places harboring a religious conception (*sankalṣam*) ... The *kāvu* is the place where they can ramble. They cannot always stay in the temple. In the pleasure garden they will swing and sport. It must be that sometimes they are only conceptually present in the temple, while most of the time they are actually in the *kāvu*. (Freeman 1999b: 262–263)

Usually in these *kāvus*, apart from the Teyyam performers who participate during the Teyyāṭṭam rituals, there will be another group of ritual performers, who rather officiate in the *kāvus* on regular basis:

In addition to the lower-caste *teyyam* performers who come to incarnate a deity during a *teyyāṭṭam*, most of the lower and middle castes have additionally members of their own particular caste who serve as priests to *teyyam* images in the shrine, ministering to them several times a month, or even daily. A class of these, called *Velīcappāṭus* or *Kōmarams*, are themselves possession mediums for their *teyyam* deities, dedicated each to his particular deity, usually for life. They undergo ritually induced possession when worshippers come to the shrine at set times once or twice a month to consult the *teyyam* deities, though a few undergo more spontaneous episodes of possession outside of the ritual context. They also frequently perform their oracular rites in conjunction with the regular *teyyam* forms during the annual festival. In contrast to the elaborate costuming and make-up of *teyyāṭṭam* dancers during the annual festivals, these priests always have only a light and standardized costume of a few ornaments, weapons, and other ritual insignia. Depending on their caste traditions, they may have special red waist-cloths for these occasions of possession. Others wear only the regular bleached cloth (*muṇḍu*) of daily wear, but in most cases there are preparatory baths and purification rites before the onset of possession. (Freeman 2005: 312)

Thus while in the Kaḷameḷuttam Pāṭṭam ritual we find only the *velīcappāṭu* or oracle as the main agent who is involved in the rituals, in the Teyyam

we see the involvement of mainly two agents, the *veḷiccappāṭu* or oracle and the Teyyam. While the oracle takes care of the rituals and also participates in the different activities related to Teyyam, it is the Teyyam performer who transforms into a deity after getting possessed. In this article, to indicate this difference, I use the word ‘performer’ till one is transformed into a deity and becomes a Teyyam.

Several scholars<sup>42</sup> have called the Teyyam ritual-form a classical art of ancient Tamil culture and Freeman relates the Teyyam of Kerala with Tamil Caṅkam literature:

This kind of institutionalized possession as a central paradigm of worship is anciently attested in south India from the Tamil Caṅkam literature of the first few centuries CE, the earliest literature of any surviving Indian vernacular language (Zvelebil 1974). Ancient Kerala was culturally and linguistically a part of this early Tamil country, and it is clear from the structural and ritual features of worship described in the Caṅkam corpus, that there are clear continuities with teyyāṭṭam and similar Dravidian modes of worship. The ancient Tamils worshipped apotheosized ancestors and fallen martial heroes whose spirits they installed into stone monuments (*naṭukal*). These spirits were then periodically invoked into costumed dancer-mediums who spoke as oracular embodiments of the deity, and received the same offerings of liquor and blood before similarly described altars that one finds in *teyyam* worship today (Kurup 1982). The principal title of the ancient oracle, Vēlan, even survives as the caste-name of one of those communities who perform *teyyams* today in Kerala, as does the caste of Pāṇar exorcist-musicians, whose title was anciently used of Caṅkam bards. (Freeman 2005: 308)

It is also said that the classical arts such as Kathakali borrow several aspects from Teyyam and *vice versa*; this is quite acceptable, as we see a close resemblance between the Teyyam and Kathakali in make-up, costume, dance, and the musical instruments that are used in both.<sup>43</sup> Scholars (Aubert 2004: 200, note 14; De Martino 2016: 26) also observe that the Teyyam ritual could be related to many other ritual performances of Kerala, as Muṭiyerru, Tirayāṭṭam and Nañṅārkūttu. Stating that the Teyyam is a performatively engaging worshipping tradition

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Kurup 1986: 39, 42.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Kurup 1986: 47.

of northern Kerala, Freeman observes that these Teyyams “have their unique costuming, make-up, and insignia, and they are danced as part of annual festivals in public rituals of worship by spirit-possessed professionals who incarnate them in thousands of family, caste, and community shrines across this region” (Freeman 2005: 307).

Though the Teyyaṃ is a very prominent ritual form in Kerala, the Teyyaṃ ritual for Vēṭṭaykkorumakan is not performed in all the temples of Vēṭṭaykkorumakan. While in the Vēṭṭaykkorumakan temples of South Kerala it is the Kaḷameḷuttum Pāṭṭuṃ ritual that is usually performed, in northern Kerala, especially in the *kāvus*,<sup>44</sup> it is the Teyyaṃ ritual that is performed to obtain the blessings of Vēṭṭaykkorumakan.

We find mention of the famous Bāluśseri fort temple of Vēṭṭaykkorumakan in the Kozhikode district of north Kerala in the songs of *Kaḷampāṭṭu* sung during the Kaḷameḷuttum Pāṭṭuṃ ritual and also in the *Tōrrmpāṭṭu* sung during the Teyyaṃ ritual; the Bāluśseri is thus considered to be an important temple of Vēṭṭaykkorumakan. Among the several temples where the Vēṭṭaykkorumakan Teyyaṃ is performed, Vellor (Kottayam District), Karivellor (Kannur District), Trikarpur (Kasaragod District), Pilicode (Kasaragod District), Madikkai (Kasaragod District), Ramanathali (Kannur District) and Nileschwaram (Kasaragod District) are the prominent ones.<sup>45</sup> The Teyyaṃ for Vēṭṭaykkorumakan is performed by members of the Vaṅṅān community.<sup>46</sup> The tradition of annual *bali* offering (Vaṭakkunvātil)<sup>47</sup> and the sacrifice

<sup>44</sup> These *kāvus* are known as *teyyakkāvukaḷ* in general. They are also known by the names *ara*, *muṇṭya*, *kōṭṭaṃ*, *kaḷakaṃ*, *paḷḷiyāra*, *māṭam*, *eṭam*, *maṭṭam*, *vātilmāṭham*, *ālayaṃ*, *kūttaraṅṅu*, *mōlōṃ*, *kaḷari*, *dēvasthānaṃ*, and *taravāṭ*; cf. Karipath 2012: 275.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Kurup 1986: 50.

<sup>46</sup> The Vaṅṅāns is a community whose traditional occupation is to wash clothes. Its members belong to the lower caste.

<sup>47</sup> This is a ritual that takes place in the temples of sacred groves (*kāvu*) once a year. On this day, the northern door of the sanctum will be kept open and the sacrifice of cocks will take place on the northern side of the temple. This northern door will be kept open only once a year for the purposes of

of cocks which are very commonly made to other deities in the Teyyam ritual are forbidden to Vēṭṭaykkorumakan.

Similarly to the Kaḷameḷuttuṃ Pāṭṭuṃ ritual, the Teyyaṃ too has certain preliminary rituals that are performed before the main Teyyaṃ. Two such rituals, the Torraṃ<sup>48</sup> and Vellāṭṭaṃ, are performed on the evening before the main Teyyaṃ. While the Torraṃ ritual is performed for female deities, the Vellāṭṭaṃ ritual is performed for male deities, and is the preliminary ritual.

The Vellāṭṭaṃ<sup>49</sup> ritual is performed on the day previous to the main Teyyaṃ ritual at dusk, against a background of lighted torches. This ritual is widely popular and attracts a large following. During the Vellāṭṭaṃ, the ‘performer’ wears special make-up, but rather simpler than for the main Teyyaṃ, including a special head decoration known as ‘*vellāṭṭutoppi*’ and certain other ornaments. Though there will be singing of ‘*torraṃ*’ songs during this ritual, they are usually short and will

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this ritual. It is believed that the furious Goddess who fought with Dārika became dissatisfied with drinking the blood of Dārika and this offering is done to please her. During this ritual, the devotees are not permitted to see the Goddess while facing her, so they have to see her while leaning. (This information was passed on to me by Karippath over the phone on 20/9/2017).

<sup>48</sup> In the Tōrraṃ ritual, the performer, called ‘*iḷamkōlam*’, with minimum make-up and head decoration reaches the entrance of the sanctum (*paḷḷiyara*), venerates the guardians of the directions and starts singing following the rhythm that is played by the drums (*ceṇḍa*) welcoming the particular deity (*jñān colluṃ torrattekkēṭṭu kaḷiccu viḷayāṭi kuṭikoḷvān varika varikaveṇam* [name of the deity] *paradevata*) whose Teyyaṃ he will be performing the next day during the main ritual. The songs that describe the origin (*utbhavaṃ*), their travel through different places (*deśāgamaṇaṃ*), their heroic deeds (*vīrakṛtyaṇṇal*), supernatural powers (*śaktiviśeṣaṇṇal*) etc. are known as ‘*torraṃpāṭṭu*’ and these songs will be sung during this ritual; cf. Karippath 2012: 220–246.

<sup>49</sup> Karippath (through personal communication) explains to me that the word *vellāṭṭaṃ* means ‘*vellāyil āṭṭaṃ*’ meaning, the dance performance that is performed while there is light or ‘*veḷḷa*’.



describe in brief the origin and myth of Vēṭṭaykkorumakan. There are various dance steps that are followed during the Vellāṭṭam ritual and this helps to show the physical abilities of the performer. This Vellāṭṭam ritual becomes a suitable preliminary ritual to prepare the performer for the next day's main performance. Karippath compares this ritual to a 'rehearsal' for the next day's grand performance, where the performer will have to dance while wearing a grand head decoration (*tirumuṭi*); the Vellāṭṭam helps the performer to obtain mental and physical stability for the main performance (Karippath 2012: 63). In some *kāvus* of Vēṭṭaykkorumakan, only the Vellāṭṭam ritual is performed and is not followed by the main Teyyaṃ. All these rituals usually take place around the small shrines that are built in the *kāvus* and these shrines are described thus by Freeman:

A typical lower or middle-caste shrine complex generally consists of a laterite walled compound, with one or more free-standing wooden shrine-rooms, slatted, brightly painted, fronted with wooden carvings of supernaturals, and roofed in tile. Each shrine room is generally dedicated to one, though sometimes more, *teyyam* deities, whose spiritual power may be installed in a full image of metal, a flat icon, a metal mirror, or simply a sword standing on a masonry platform or a wooden stool. Except for the nightly lighting of lamps outside the shrines, most *teyyam* images are activated in worship only during the *teyyāṭṭam* festivals or bi-monthly priestly rites, and so at other times these shrine-rooms are closed and locked. Subsidiary *teyyams* often have their own loci in simple stone or laterite altars, placed at other points in the compound, before which performers dedicated to those deities incarnate their gods. (Freeman 2005: 312)

The main Teyyaṃ ritual for Vēṭṭaykkorumakan is usually performed during daylight and begins around 9.30 a.m. But there are temples such as the Vēṭṭaykkorumakan temple of Manyamangalam (Kunhimangalam Village, Kannur District) where the Vēṭṭaykkorumakan Teyyaṃ is performed at night.<sup>50</sup> The following particular features are adopted for the Vēṭṭaykkorumakan Teyyaṃ:

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<sup>50</sup> This information was collected through personal communication with Karippath (18/9/2017).

The crown used by the player is a *Peelimuti* made of peacock feathers. The face looks grotesque and terrifying with intricate pattern of paintings with opposite bold colours yellow, red and green. The same colours are used for painting the body also. The waist decoration is by a ‘Vattoda’ [made out of splices of bamboos and covered by red cloth] ... A small black beard is included in the make-up. In one hand a bow and arrow and in the other a sword and a shield are carried by the player. (Kurup 1973: 50)

The Teyyam of Vēṭṭaykkorumakan often appears along with Ūrppalaśśi,<sup>51</sup> considered as a close associate of Vēṭṭaykkorumakan or Kṣetrapāla, the ‘guardian of the field’, both having the same make-up and costumes as Vēṭṭaykkorumakan. Once the Teyyam performer is ready in his costume, he venerates the lamp (*aṇiyaradīpaṁ*)<sup>52</sup> installed in the dressing room (*aṇiyara*) and also the elders who are present. Then the Teyyam will move slowly, as if an elephant is moving, known as ‘the walking of an elephant’ (*ānanaṭattam*) towards the sanctum (*tirunaṭa*) accompanied by a canopy, peacock fans (*ālavattom*)<sup>53</sup> on

<sup>51</sup> Vēṭṭaykkorumakan and Ūrppalaśśi are considered as very close friends. For details of this myth, see Karippath forthcoming b.

<sup>52</sup> This lamp is considered as a representation of the deity. The lamp will be lit from the wick that is brought from the sanctum and will be preserved till the Teyyam ritual is over. Freeman observes thus on lighting of the lamp in the green-room: “The *teyyam* festival is inaugurated by lamps in the *teyyam* shrine being lit with a flame brought by shrine priests from the temple that is associated with these higher castes. Thus the social hierarchy is mirrored in the divine energy of the gods flowing down the chain of authority, from the temple gods to the *teyyam* shrine through the medium of the flame. In any case, however, it is the flame used in worship of the *teyyam* shrine’s images that will be passed out by the priests, (and through insulating intermediaries in the case of higher caste priests) to the *teyyam* performers. This represents the actual spiritual energy or power (*caitanya* or *śakti*) of the enshrined images being transferred to the lower-caste dancers. As we shall see below, the ritual elaborations that this transfer takes are significant” (Freeman 2005: 313).

<sup>53</sup> For a detailed description of *ālavattom*, see Goodall forthcoming: 5. The *Cūḍāmaṇi* (1:15), an old Tamil literary text refers to it thus: “In one place (*ōr pāl*), on the top (*mēl*) of the hill high with peaks (*kōṭu*) on which peacock

both sides, and a small lamp that will be held in the hand (*kaiviḷakku*) of an assistant who will move facing the *Teyyam*, while a medium-paced drum playing is followed. Once this reaches the sanctum the ‘receiving of a small plantain leaf’ (*‘koṭiyila vāññal’*) ritual will take place, where the performer will receive a plantain leaf with a wick that is lighted from the main lamp installed inside the sanctum, along with rice, betel leaf, areca-nut and sandal. The ‘performer’ makes a salutation to the deity as well as to the gods of the directions by tossing the rice that he received in the plantain leaf from the sanctum in the eight directions. Once the leaf is received, the drummers (*meḷakkār*) start playing and the ‘performer’ moves towards the northern side of the sanctum and sits on a wooden stool placed there. While facing north<sup>54</sup> he puts on the crown (*tirumuṭi*). Once the crown is placed, the ‘starting’ (*purappāṭ*) ceremony takes place with the playing of drums (*meḷam*<sup>55</sup>) in different beat cycles. To this background of drums and of the songs that are sung by the assistants, the ‘performer’ moves on with different steps, while holding a mirror in his hand and looking in it.<sup>56</sup> While this is happening, the assembled devotees cheer with the recitation of *ōṃ*, and the performer slowly becomes possessed and runs towards

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feathers (*pīli*) are spread (*kōlum*) so that they have the colour of the blue *ālavaṭṭam*, every time the rumbling dark long rain-cloud roars, all the great dark peacocks dance.”

<sup>54</sup> According to the rules of the *Teyyam*, the *tirumuṭi* or the crown should be worn while facing north and should be removed while facing west. Cf. Karippath 2012: 66–67.

<sup>55</sup> The musical instruments that are used for the *mēḷam* of *Teyyam* are, *ceṇḍa*, *vikkuceṇḍa*, *takil*, *konpu*, *cīnikkuḷal*, *ilattālam*, *cēññila*, *tuṭi* and *pāṇi*. Cf. Karippath 2012: 173. For a detailed description of these musical instruments, see Karippath 2012: 172–174 and also Rajagopalan 2010.

<sup>56</sup> Freeman explains this act stating that “when he looks into the mirror, the conception will arise, ‘This is not my form—this is the actual form of the goddess that I am seeing’. [...] The act here is the seeing of the sacred face by the sacred face, a divine occasion in which they are fused through seeing each other” (Freeman 2005: 315).

the sanctum. As soon as the Teyyam of Vēṭṭaykkorumakan arrives at the doorsteps of the sanctum, the chief of the temple along with the devotees receives the Teyyam by throwing rice. The Teyyam too throws rice three times towards the sanctum. The chief members of the temple, wearing traditional clothes, move backward while tossing rice onto the head of the Teyyam and circumambulate the temple. Once this is done, the dancing (*kalāśa*) of Teyyam begins.

While the drums are played, a dance with special steps by the performer who has a small sword (*kaṭuttīla*)<sup>57</sup> in his hand (*kaṭuttīlakalāśam*), a dance with the sword (*kaṭuttīla*) and dagger (*curika*) with special steps resembling a war (*poyttukalāśam*),<sup>58</sup> and a dance with the steps of one's own imagination (*manodharma*) known as 'vēlakkalāśam' are performed. After this, the Teyyam will break a coconut on the stone named 'teñṇākkal', placed in the south-east direction of the temple, as is followed in the Teyyam of other deities too. But for Vēṭṭaykkorumakan, if there are more coconuts to be offered, the one who has the position of the 'oracle' in that temple will break them, often with both hands on the *teñṇākkal*.<sup>59</sup> Then the 'speaking' (*uriyāṭal*) ritual takes place, in which the Teyyam will recite the benediction sentences (*anugrahavākyaññal*). In this the Teyyam invites each devotee in the order of their position and caste and gives them the 'remains of the ritual' (*prasādam*), usually turmeric powder placed in a plantain leaf.<sup>60</sup> Just before the end of the 'uriyāṭal', the Teyyam even

<sup>57</sup> For a detailed discussion of the weapons used by the Teyyams, see Karipath 2012: 172–174.

<sup>58</sup> Different rhythmic beats (*tālam*) are followed for the different type of dances, such as the *poyttukalāśam*. For a detailed description of the musical instruments and the *tālam* that is followed in Teyyam, see Karipath 2012: 172–174.

<sup>59</sup> This is similar to the 'breaking of coconuts' in the Kaḷameḷuttuṃ Pāṭṭuṃ ritual, but in the Teyyam ritual it is the oracle who offers the coconuts and usually the number of coconuts is not high in Teyyam ritual, compared to the coconuts that are broken in the Kaḷameḷuttuṃ Pāṭṭuṃ ritual.

<sup>60</sup> The language and the style used for the interaction with the devotees by the Teyyam differs according to their caste, position, etc. For a detailed discussion of this topic, see Karipath 2012: 224–227.

takes care of the devotees by asking if there is anyone left to be blessed and then moves on to the next ritual item.

Then comes the ‘reciting the origin and travelogue of the deity’ (*mumbusthānam*), where the myth related to Vēṭṭaykkorumakan, in the form of a recitation beginning with the origin of the deity and his journey up to the temple where that day’s Teyyam ritual is to be performed, will be recited.<sup>61</sup> The spectators who are assembled there will be very curious to hear the story as it reaches the place (*sthāna*) where the ritual is performed. Once all these rituals are over, the formal ritual ‘announcing the separation’ (*collippiyial*) of the deity, who is present in the body of the Teyyam, takes place. This touching moment is painful for many of the devotees, especially for the chief patrons of the temple where the Teyyam is organised. The Teyyam calls each one of the office holders of the temple (*sthānika*) and announces his departure.<sup>62</sup> One can see tears in the eyes of devotees while this ritual takes place. Once the departure has been announced the Teyyam gives grains of rice to all the devotees who are gathered around and blesses them saying “*ēriyōru guṇaṁ varuṁ*” (great prosperity will come). By now the drum (*ceṇḍa*) has reached the peak of its playing (*uccasthāyi*). The Teyyam returns all the weapons to the temple chief, removes his head decoration (*tirumuṭi*) while facing west, and moves back again to the status of a ‘performer’. With this, Vēṭṭaykkorumakan’s Teyyam rituals come to an end.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>61</sup> For a detailed description of this ritual, see Karipath forthcoming a: 8–9.

<sup>62</sup> The following is the sentence that is uttered during this ritual: “*viṣeṣikkēṇḍa kāryamellāṁ viṣeṣiccu. Māripōle vannatineyellāṁ maññupōle taḍakiyoḷliccu maṭiyilum mārrattum cērttu innēvarēkkum pōrrippōrunnoracciyaṅi nilaninnu. Innu kōlaṁmukhena kāṇāniṭavannu. Ani orāṅṭu pantirumāsaṁ .... kaḷuñṇu tirumuṭi kāṇān takkavaṇṇaṁ uriyāṭippiriyān ātmaṁ koṭukkattē*” (Karipath 2012: 69). The idea is: “whatever had to be said has been said. I stood to protect as a grandmother till now by embracing you close to my chest and in my lap and made the disasters melting like ice. Today, I could see [you all] through the Kolam [Teyyam]. Let me say ‘goodbye’ and let us meet again after one year, [i.e. ] twelve months”.

<sup>63</sup> For a list of the different rituals performed during the Teyyam of various deities and their description, see Karipath 2012: 65–82.

### The ritual tradition of Kerala and its links to art and theatre

The rituals that are performed on a regular basis in the temples of Kerala are unique in their nature, since they move the devotees not only by appealing to their devotion, but also to their senses, through the actions and movements executed by the performer of the ritual (or the priest) as part of the ritual. The use of gestures, the sitting posture of the priest, his wearing the cloth in a special manner, all make the ritual especially pleasing to watch. Watching the gestures and hand movements of a priest while he makes the food offerings to the deity, the onlooker can experience the feeding performed by the priest as a reality. The richly decorated idols and the oil lamps waved during the worship make the temple atmosphere an ideal background for the performance of these rituals, uniquely appealing to sight. The singing of songs set to musical notations (*sopānasāṅgītam*)<sup>64</sup> and to the playing of a small drum called ‘*iḍaykka*’, taking place just in front of the sanctum show the importance given to music—and to hearing—in Kerala temple rituals. The worship of a wooden drum (*marappāṇi*), and the playing of it by the brahmin priest during the consecration rituals, further emphasises the significance of musical instruments. The *kūttambalam*, or theatrical building, constructed inside the temple complex, links the temple closely to Kerala theatrical traditions. Although some of the actions taking place in temple rituals could in themselves be viewed as similar to a theatrical experience, they become part of the rituals insofar as they are attended with devotion by the devotees; otherwise they are a mere spectacle comparable to any other theatrical performance.

Although, as Zarrilli puts it, “all Hindu ritual is performed (done) and is considered part of the ‘way of action’, and while rituals are an important part of virtually all genres of Indian performance, there are certain rituals which are best characterized as ‘ritual performances’” (Zarrilli 1993: 124). The two ‘ritual performances’ discussed in this paper, the Kaḷameḷuttuṃ Pāṭṭuṃ and the Teyyam rituals, performed

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<sup>64</sup> For a detailed discussion of this ritual art, see Rajendran (forthcoming).

for Vēṭṭaykkorumakan, indeed display a tighter link between ritual and theatre. Although they are performed as rituals aimed at pleasing the deity, all the actions taking place in them suggest a theatrical background. In the Kaḷameḷuttuṃ Pāṭṭuṃ ritual, the drawings of Vēṭṭaykkorumakan's image, the songs in praise of Vēṭṭaykkorumakan along with musical instruments, and the dance following the beat of drums by the performer, all concur to make the ritual a great experience for the devotees. In the Teyyam, the costumes worn by the performer, the songs that are sung during the ritual, and the different dance steps of the performer make the ritual even closer to a theatrical experience. While in the Kaḷameḷuttuṃ Pāṭṭuṃ communication between the possessed performer and the devotee happens infrequently, in the Teyyam the devotee communicates to a high degree with the performer who represents the deity. The artistic capabilities of the performer help the devotee feel the presence of deity in the former one, and at certain occasions the performer of Teyyam gets the freedom to show his expertise in the art. In both rituals, however, the performer needs to be an all-rounder of the arts: he should be capable of drawing, singing and dancing, and he should have the physical and mental strength to go through the rituals as if in a theatrical play. The costumes, the dance steps, the songs, and the dialogues taking place with the devotees, all make an actor of the ritual performer, whose role is that of mediator between the deity and the devotee, as Zarrilli suggests:

[Rituals] establish a mediating bridge between the divine and human worlds by means of specific ritual practices. What distinguishes those rituals we call "ritual performances" from sacrificial and *pijā* practice is the degree to which overtly dramatic, theatrical, and performative elements are used to establish the mediating bridge and to accomplish its efficacious end. (Zarrilli 1993: 124)

Thus, these 'ritual performances' help the devotee to interact with the deity who is present through the human body of the 'performer' or 'oracle'. This is further supported by the myths of the deity that are recounted, sung, or partially enacted. The grand costumes and ornaments that adorn the oracle make him appear to be the deity himself. It is a great help to the devotees to experience, in these rituals,

the presence of their affectionate deity granting them favours and blessings. The success of the ‘ritual performance’ is apparent when, on the departure of the deity from the actor, the devotee is moved to tears. As Pasty-Abdul Wahid mentions, these ritual performances not only provide devotees with an ultimate devotional experience, but they also allow them to feel the presence of the deity and to see them with their own eyes (Pasty-Abdul Wahid 2017: 45–46).

It may be necessary to point out here that ‘ritual performances’ such as the Teyyam were formed as a mode of veneration by lower community members of Kerala society, following the ritual formulas passed on to them by their forefathers, which are quite different from the ritual formulas usually followed in the Kerala temples since these latter are based on the Sanskrit ritual manuals produced in Kerala. The Teyyam rituals allow us to observe, in action, the history of the ritual formulas of the early period, as they were known and preserved with effort among those communities. The *kāvus*, or temples, were considered as the focal point of the spiritual activities of the laity. In earlier days, those who assembled to watch ‘ritual performance’ such as the Teyyam were not simply spectators of a performance, but were devotees who experienced the presence of the deity in the performers. But today, as Karippath observes, many people watch these rituals merely as theatrical performances, making of the Teyyam a ‘performer’ as in a theatre play and thereby lowering the value of these ‘performed’ rituals (Karippath 2012: 367). The featuring of Teyyam performances in commercial advertisements and in otherwise secular processions changes the perception of these ‘ritual performances’ into ‘theatre performances’, and gives away with their religious or spiritual value. It is understandable that the strict followers of these ancient traditions object to these ‘ritual performances’ being used outside the temple complex. It may be necessary to take steps to maintain the ‘purity’ of these ‘performing rituals’ that have been preserved and maintained with great effort and passed on to us, almost unchanged, from generation to generation until the present day.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> For a detailed discussion on this topic, see De Martino 2016.



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Fig. 1–4. Vēṭṭaykkorumakan Temple Festival of Fort, Trivandrum  
(photo by the author).







