



## Poorakkali – A Ritualistic, Martial and Melodious Musical art form of North Malabar

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### Abstract:

“Narayana Narayana Vasudeva kaithozhunnen” when you hear this beautiful song undoubtedly you can say it is *Poorakkali*, the ritual of integrating dance and music in North Malabar which become more and more popular in present day. The reason that I choose to write about this ritual art, because today this is practiced and performed by the artist without any cast of religious barriers. Once this art form was only performed within the temples of Kasargod and Kannur Districts mainly during the Theyyam festivals. It is a great pleasure to see that *Poorakkali* has come out from the shrine and to have many entertainers all over the world.

### Introduction:

*Poorakkali* is one of the most important, beautiful and sacred ritual art forms of North Malabar. It has a closer resemblance with the martial art form *Kalarippayatt*. *Poorakkali* is played in the

temple by the lower community. It can be seen that a group of captives of the upper class would automatically evolved into folkloric forms, and the art which later became rhythmic rhythms and rhythms, in this the voices and celebrities who volunteered to ease their burdens. The historical fact is that almost all folk arts are concentrated on agriculture. Poorakkali can only be seen as part of a collective effort made by working-class lifters. This art, which was made in a materialistic way, has gradually become devotional. It is a group of seven communities who are taking care of this art which has become a ritual.

They are,

1. Theyya
2. Yadava
3. Mukaya
4. Shaliya
5. Karmala
6. Moovari
7. Aashari

*Poorakkali* is celebrated in *Pooram* days of the *Meenam* month (from Malayalam calendar) in front of the temple of Goddess. From the Malayalam star *Karthika* to *Pooram*, the nine days young girls are worshiped with purity and the men perform *Poorakkali* as an offering to the Goddesses.

The notion of the Nature and Male is the basis for such practices. It is mentioned in the *Vasantha puja*, which is sung in *Poorakkali* days that only women played *Poorakkali* during the early days. According to this story, the role played by women gradually became dominated by men.

### Origin and development of Poorakkali:

The worship of Mother Goddesses started in the early days when women were shearing a respected position in the tribe and family. It says that when there was high prosperity through agriculture women started dancing and singing to show their happiness. This is where *Poorakkali* was born. In the Devi temples and at home, the practice of offering flowers to lord *Kamadeva* by young girls and producing a special sound called *Poovili* are still prevalent.

Gradually, with a male-centered culture, women were replaced by men and the added vigorous steps and rhythms.

### Origin according to Mythology:

When *Lord Shiva* burned *Lord Kamadeva* with a fiery-eyed fire and turned him to ashes, the feeling of lust in the world is gone. His wife *Rathi Devi* and other gods came to *Lord Shiva* and requested him to reincarnate *Kama*. *Lord Shiva's* advice was to worship *Vishnu*, who is the *Aditya* of the *Chaitra* month. *Maha Vishnu* comforted *Rathi* and said that make *Lord Kama's* replica with flower which is called *Poobanan* and perform fasting and put *Kurava* (a sound makes from mouth during the special occasions) from the day of *Karthik* till *Pooram* star. After hearing this, young girls from Earth-Heaven and *Paathala Looka*; they started singing and dancing by clapping their hands around *Poobanan*.

### The origin according to the historical observers:

The notion that *Poorakkali* has evolved from *Kuravai Koothu*. Kuttammath A Sreedharan Master in his article, '*Pooravum Poorakkaliyum – chila padabhedangal*' mentioned that this art form is not derived from '*Kuravai Kooth*' but '*Aaychi Koothu*' which is performed by *Gopikas*. One of the *Chilappathikaram* edition published by Kerala Sangeethanataka academy, on its 17<sup>th</sup> hymn has titled as '*Gopika Nritham or Aaychimar Kuravai*'. This supports Kuttammath's argument. According to C.M.S. Chandeera this is created by shepherds during 7<sup>th</sup> century. In Dr. M.V.Vishnunambudiri's book he has explained the relation of *Poorakkali* with Sangham time and with *Kuravai Kooth*.

*Chilappathikaram* emphasize,

1. *Kuravai* is a dance form in which ladies dance and sing in a circle.
2. The people who perform *Kuravai* are called *Kuravar*.
3. During *Sangam* period almost all communities performed *Kuravaiaattam*.
4. *Kuravayattam* is the sign of the ancient tribe.

In the book *Chndhrothsavam*, which is written during 14<sup>th</sup> century is also mentioned about the dance tradition which is performed during *Pooram* festival times.

### Performance:

After the *Kaliyattam* and *Perumkaliyattam*, before removing the pandal in front of the *Bhagavathi* temple there was a strict rule that *Marathukali* continued by *Poorakkali* should be

performed. *Muchilottu Kavus* and *Yadava* temples are still following this tradition. The famous shrines like *Udinur Kovilakam*, *Rayaramangalam temple*, *Madiyan Kovilakam* and *Monacha temple* where only Brahmans perform pujas, here *Poorakkali* is performed in a silent method which is called as *Pooramala*.

The play begins with lighting the main lamp brought by the main priest from the temple at the temple's courtyard pandal. The *Poorakkali* arts practices *Poorakkali* for a month within the pandal outside the temple wall. After this strict practice they perform *Poorakkali* in front of the temple with the ritual practice called the *Kazhakam Kayaral*.

They praise the Goddesses by singing and dancing with 18 *Niram* or colors or chapters, 18 colored flowers, 18 dancers, 18 Ragas, 18 *Praasa*, 18 *Natyakrama* and 18 *Aksharas*.

| Niram | Dancer       | Flower        | Praasam  | Ragam            | Natyakrama    | Aksharam |
|-------|--------------|---------------|----------|------------------|---------------|----------|
| 1     | Rambha       | Chenthamara   | Anushtip | Poovaali         | Neerangam     | 8        |
| 2     | Urvashi      | Venthamara    | Agni     | Poornaahari      | Eeradi        | 10       |
| 3     | Meenaka      | Ponthamara    | Agni     | Kshethaahari     | Eeradi        | 10       |
| 4     | Arundhathi   | Karithamara   | Thidhi   | Vanaahari        | Eeradi        | 15       |
| 5     | Thiloothama  | Vadathamara   | Purana   | Kanakahari       | Eeradi        | 18       |
| 6     | Chitraleekha | Neerthamara   | Purana   | Madhamaahari     | Naladivattam  | 18       |
| 7     | Rathnavi     | Cheruthamara  | Purana   | Aahari           | Erukalnatanam | 18       |
| 8     | Ahalya       | Malathi       | Agni     | Shankaravarnini  | Neerangam     | 10       |
| 9     | Draupathi    | Mallika       | Agni     | Shisadhavi       | Aadineerangam | 10       |
| 10    | Seethadevi   | Kundha        | Agni     | Bhoothanadi      | Eeradi        | 10       |
| 11    | Thara        | Mulla         | Manu     | Bhoothakarshini  | Eeradi        | 14       |
| 12    | Mandodhari   | Mandhara      | Indu     | Bhoothaleela     | Naladivattam  | 16       |
| 13    | Bhoodevi     | Chemandhi     | Surya    | Manjari          | Naaladivattam | 12       |
| 14    | Gangadevi    | Ashoka        | Indu     | Malahari         | Naaladivattam | 16       |
| 15    | Vaagdevi     | Chengazhineer | Purana   | Maargani         | Naaladivattam | 18       |
| 16    | Rathidevi    | Chootha       | Purana   | Shalini          | Naaladivattam | 18       |
| 17    | Sridevi      | Chempaka      | Surya    | Shaareeraviragam | Naaladivattam | 12       |
| 18    | Girisutha    | Chekki        | Surya    | Malavi           | Naaladivattam | 12       |

After this 18 *Nirams*, they perform *Aandu* and *Pallu* which is one of the most important performances of this event. It narrates the events of Shiva – Parvathi during their incarnation as farmers.

**Costumes:**

The costumes for Poorakkali are very simple. Above *Chellanam (Veeralippattu)* and *Chura (Kachha)* they wear a short stole known as *Urumal* on their waist and apply sandal paste on their forehead, chest and hand.

**Conclusion:**

It is a marvelous art form that combines intellect, acrobat and music. There are many different steps, Thalass, and songs that tell the story of each mythology. The *Poorakkali* is distinguished from the other art forms by virtue of the long hours of performance which includes vigorous exercises and movements by singing in a circle facing a big oil lamp. *Poorakkali* enriched northern part of North Malabar which has a rich folk literature. In the recent times, progressives have been waiting for the opportunity to learn and perform *Poorakkali* from beyond caste and gender thinking. Initially the performance was limited to the temple premises, however gradually the *Poorakkali* moved to public places.

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**Glossary:**

- Narayana Narayana Vasudeva Kaithozhunne = I bow to Lord Maha Vishnu
- Kaliyattam = Yearly Theyyam festival
- Perumkaliyattam = The Theyyam festival performed once in 12 years of more
- Paathalalokam = Under world
- Marathukali = Discourse between two Sanskrit scholars
- Praasam = Alliteration
- Chellanam = The red color cloth which ties around the waist
- Chura = Dhoti
- Meenam = 8<sup>th</sup> Malayalam month (March 16<sup>th</sup> – April 15<sup>th</sup>)
- Karthika = The third birth star
- Pooram = The 11<sup>th</sup> birth star
- Kamadevan = Lord of love
- Aadithyan = Sun
- Natya Krama = Dancing methods
- Akshara = Letter