



Padayani: Ritual, Resistance, and Regional Identity in Kerala

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ABSTRACT

Padayani is a ritualistic performance art deeply rooted in the cultural and spiritual traditions of Central Travancore, Kerala. Conducted annually in Bhagavathy temples, it blends Dravidian worship practices with vibrant folk elements to protect villages from diseases like smallpox and ensure agricultural prosperity. The term “Padayani,” meaning a lineup of soldiers, signifies its martial origins. The performance features striking effigies (kolams) made from areca palm sheaths, danced with rhythmic intensity to traditional instruments under torchlight. Padayani embodies multiple folk-art forms—dance, music, painting, drama—and fosters collective participation, transcending caste and religion. Its practices are ecologically conscious, symbolizing a harmonious coexistence between nature and humans. The kolams and songs carry rich historical and political references, offering insights into Kerala’s past. Rejecting superstition, Padayani confronts fears by ritualistically portraying and dispelling demonic forms. Despite modern influences, it retains a distinctly Dravidian identity, unaltered by Brahmanical dominance. As a living tradition, Padayani stands as a vibrant example of a people’s resilience, communal harmony, and cultural sophistication.



INTRODUCTION

Padayani is the annual ritualistic art form performed in the Bhagavathy temples particularly in the temples of central Travancore and is considered one of the symbols of Kerala's ancient culture and the Dravidian style worship of God offering lust, blood and intoxicants. It is also known by the name Padeni. It is traditionally conducted in connection with the harvest season. Since the purpose of Padayani is believed to be the protection of an entire village's population from diseases like smallpox (Vasoori), people of different castes and religions actively participate in it. The word Padayani or Padeni is derived from Padasreni, meaning a formation or lineup of soldiers, referring to the war formation.

During Padayani, performers carry numerous small and large effigies (known as kolams) made from the sheaths of the areca palm (Kavungin paala). Amid the rhythmic sounds of traditional instruments like the thappu (drum), kaimani (small cymbals), and chenda (drum), the performers dance vibrantly in the light of torch flames and fireballs.

Padayani mainly takes place in Bhadrakali temples and sacred groves (kaavu). It is predominantly celebrated in the central regions of the erstwhile Travancore, especially across the districts of Pathanamthitta, Kottayam, Kollam, and Alappuzha. The very spirit of central Travancore finds its appearance in padayani as that of Malabar in theyyam. Padayani indeed shows similarities with theyyam in various aspects. Padayani reflects the ancient socialist society before the Aryanization and Chathruvarnya, the four caste system. So, the whole village take active part in Padayani without any racial discriminations. Each and every Padayani Karappuram (centers or village celebrating Padayani) observe padayani in their own way, in different aspect such as observation of rituals, order of performance and span of Padayani days. Obviously, the difference noticed is huge.

There are different forms in padayani each with its own peculiar features and goals. To appease the goddess and protect against contagious diseases like smallpox, performances like Maruthakolam are enacted. For the blessing of progeny, Kalarikkolam is performed, and for the curing of night-time fear-induced illnesses, Madan Kolam is enacted. Padayani is celebrated during the months of Kumbham, Meenam and Medam (Approximately February, March and April). Kolamezhuthu,

Kolamthullal, Kolappattu, Thappumelam, Vinodam- the satire part, are the essential parts of Padayani. Kolams are folk deities drawn on well processed green areca leaf sheath with natural colours. Kolappattu (lyrics) includes prayers, admirations and requests to the deities. Thappu is the 'Asuravadya' made by covering a round frame of Jacktree hardwood with buffalohide. Kolamthullal is the rhythmic footsteps and dance, which a performer makes in tune with the Kolappattu and the Thappumelam. Vinodam includes satire and protest targeting the social evils and vanities. Bearing Palakkolam singing Kolappattu, dancing with the thalam of thappu, the whole villagers pray to God to bring in prosperity, eradicate the ill effects of wicked deities, ensure good crops and so on. It is a way of worship with no intermediary between man and God. Further, we can see a life which is friendly to the nature and worshipping it without exploitation.

Padayani Legend

Bhadrakali, who emerged from Lord Shiva's third eye to defeat the demon Darika, is the central figure of Padayani. After Darika's defeat, Bhadrakali, covered in blood from the battle, danced fiercely and returned to Kailasa. To calm her rage and bloodlust, Lord Shiva, along with the Bhoota Ganas (spirits) and other deities, deliberated on ways to pacify her. They attempted various rituals such as musical performances, dances, humorous dialogues, and symbolic acts of worship. However, Bhadrakali's fury did not subside. As she passed through the temple's tower gate, she noticed the blood-stained markings on the ground. She paused for a moment and asked her father, Lord Shiva, "Who has made these marks?" To this, Shiva replied, "Kuruppu kurichu" (Kuruppu did it). When Bhadrakali looked back at the field, her anger softened, and the ritual ultimately succeeded in appeasing her wrath. This transformation was the result of the performance that Lord Shiva, the deities, and the Bhoota Ganas had conducted to please her.

This is the legend associated with Padayani, a ritual art form still performed in Bhadrakali temples. Even today, during Padayani festivals, kolam (ritual designs) and songs are presented. According to belief, the goddess Kali—drenched in blood—is appeased by the people's annual symbolic offering of blood, which represents their devotion.¹ In earlier times, Padayani was performed over a span of twenty-eight days. However, the



duration has now been reduced to thirteen, ten, or even eight days, with some versions lasting just a single day. Comprising sixty-four different performances, Padayani is a grand ritualistic art form that embodies the divine presence of the deity.²

It is not merely a religious ritual but a composite performance that includes song, dance, and instrumental music. Typically held during the Malayalam months of Kumbham, Meenam, and Medam (February, March, and April), Padayani consists of various elements such as Kolam (ritual masks or designs), Kolam Thullal (ritual dance), Kolam Paattu (songs), Thappu Melam (drum ensemble), and Vinodha Natakam (comic or dramatic performances).³

The beliefs and philosophies shaped over time through experiences filled with hardships and moral dilemmas are deeply intertwined with the essence of the Padayani community. Classical art forms like Kathakali, Koodiyattam, Krishnanattam, and Mohiniyattam have historical contexts linked to them, often connected to royal patronage or encouragement from higher social classes. Likewise, ritual arts such as Kaliyoottu, Mudi yettu, and Mudi yeduppu also possess historical backgrounds rooted in deep-seated beliefs. However, art forms like Theyyam, Padayani, Kuthiyottam, and Thookkam do not share this kind of historical association. These rituals originated among the common people, who continue to perform and preserve them. These traditions emerged even before the era of royal rule and Vedic dominance.⁴

Padayani is performed in Bhadrakali temples. It does not take place on a pre-arranged stage but unfolds in a circular formation, with the audience seated at the center. There is no clear distinction between performers and spectators—the essence of Padayani lies in the collective participation of the people. This seamless blending of roles makes Padayani a truly expressive art form. It represents a convergence of the human soul and the divine spirit. Padayani is performed to dispel negative forces, bring prosperity to the community, ensure a good harvest, and purify both the body and mind of the participants. It is considered the people's annual offering of symbolic blood, representing their deep devotion.⁵

PADAYANI RITUALS

The first day marks the ritual of Chuttuveyp. In this ceremony, a lamp given by the priest is poured into the chutt (fire container), taken around the temple, and then offered to the sacred fire. Over the first four days, Chotuduvallat is performed ceremonially. The second day is known as Tavadithulla, symbolizing the manifestation of Kali's war-ready army. Tavadi is a ritual dance in which performers step gracefully to the rhythm of handbells. On the third day, the Ganapathi Kolam dance is performed. The fourth day features Chotuvalath, Arakuthira, and Pulavrittam. Pulavrittam is an agricultural ritual expressing gratitude to Goddess Annapurneswari Bhagavati for a bountiful harvest. During Arakuthira, the ritual only reaches the fields after the lamp has been thrust into the earth and circled around. Three or four Arakku Tiras are tied with coconut bark and green leaves, led by a Pattani in the field.⁶

The tusks of these symbolic ponies suggest early trade relations, and the songs reflect connections with Muslim monks. After Arakuthira, a Bhairavi Kolam performance concludes the day's ceremonies. On the fifth day (Medam 5), the famous Adavi is performed. After Adavi, Gandharva appears and symbolically drives away all plagues. Following this, the Walking Stick ritual takes place, along with the lively Kalama Tankolam performance. The sixth day is called Edappateni. After traditional ceremonies, vibrant performances and entertainments are staged.

On the seventh day (Medam 7), the grand Padayani is celebrated. Velakali starts in the evening. After the welcoming ceremonies, the grand procession begins. All the Padayani items are performed on this day. As each Padayani Kolam concludes its performance, it "drops out" one by one. Around 4 a.m., Kalankolam arrives at the Thirumuttam in the outer field. The Kalankolam concludes its ritual by singing the story of Markandeya. Following this is the Appindi ceremony. Appindi is crafted in the shape of a four-cornered tent using banana leaves and cloth, topped with a coconut flower, and illuminated by a lamp inside, with lights glowing all around.

TYPES OF PADAYANI

Ganapathikolam

The first to arrive at the Kalam is the Ganapathikolam. The Pishachukolam is the one that appears in many plays under the name of Ganapathikolam. This one does not have the image

of lord Ganapati in its costume. Since it is the first type of kolam in the Thullal, the Pishachukolam is called the Ganapathikolam. There are many types of kolam such as Ambishach, Pembisach, Allupishach, Mullu Pishach, Eripishach, Parapishach, and Marapishach.

This kolam has a face carved and written on a single piece of paper, and a chest necklace written on a single piece of paper. It is covered with water and worn down to the knees, and a piece of leather torn from a banana tree is worn over it like a skirt. It is carried to the pond holding a hot cloth made of banana leaves and burning it.

Bhairavi Kolam

Dairavi is a kolam that was conceived as the image of Kali and the hair of the goddess. The dairavikolam is made by drawing the back, the ears and the faces separately and then inserting them into the hairdecorations. The Bairavikolam is made in a triangular shape. The palas used for the dairavikolam are sixteen, thirty-two, sixty-four, eighty-one and one hundred and one. One-third of the palas are used for the 'back'. An elephant is drawn on one ear of the large kolams and a lion on the other ear. 'Poov' is written on the ear of the kanjiramala. The kolam painting is performed using writing devices such as pinarpambu, karinagam, pirinagam, chuzhikettu, mandaram and kath mangalalatha. The Bhairavi kolam can have up to five faces. It is believed that these depict different aspects of a human being. As the number of palas increases, the number of faces also increases. Four of the five faces are drawn on the palas. The fifth face is that of the Thullalkar. The face of the Yakshi is next to the Thullalkar artist's face. The five faces are the Vyalimukham, Ezhutu Mukham, Kimbirimukham, Pacha Mukham, and Damashtra Mukham for kolams above sixty-four palas. Ninabhairavi, Devatha, Kanjiramala, and Mangalakolam are also drawn in the Bhairavi kolam pattern. These kolams have a neck ornament with the image of snakes, large breasts (kalasham) on the chest, and a thandaya on the waist. bairavi enters the kalam carrying a torch in her hand. The color red is important in Ninabhairavi⁷.

The image of Bhairavi Amma is the embodiment of nature, and she conveys the sorrow of mother nature to man through natural disasters, crop failures, and deadly diseases. The form of Kali, who wears fire and flowers, a garland of flowers in her hair, a Madayana in her ears, a spear and a helmet, who clings to pregnant women, kills them

during childbirth, eats raw meat, and who kills the poor. Bhairavi Kolams prevents crop failures and bless all for the attainment of prosperity.⁸

Maruthakolam

The Maruthakolam is written like a face covering in Ottappala. A large garland with large Yamula on the chest, leafy branches on the waist, a stick, a scythe, a broom and a knife are also seen in the hands. It is believed that the three tears seen on either side of the middle one is the braids. A red dot is drawn inside a black circle in the face covering. This is written in the concept of smallpox. In some countries, Maruthakolam is entered into the field without wearing a face covering and is smeared with charcoal, with eyes, a scythe and teeth.

Yakshi

The Yakshi kolam has a crown-shaped structure. The eyes, fangs, and claws of the Kuruthoala are the special features of this kolam. Since it does not have a face covering, it is seen with green on its face in some countries. Mayyakshi has a crown-like kolam of Kathakali. Kalayakshi has a large kolam written using twenty-one palas. The main character is Ezhu Thanit. A skirt made of Ilanjithuppu is tied around the waist. The rare kolam "Ambarayakshi" is a specialty of Kunnanathanam Pateni.

Pakshikolam

This is a kolam written in seven layers. The face is painted in the shape of a bird. The long-curved lips and the kuruthola wings made of green kuruthola enhance the beauty of the bird. The kolam has a chest and waist necklace. The kuruthola is worn over the copper plate and the long kuruthola is torn along the waist and held in both hands. The bird reaches the stage with movements reminiscent of the activities of various birds such as walking, playing, fighting, and flying.

Madan Kolam

Kalamadaan Pullimadan Chudalamadan Vadimadan Topimadan Among the kolams, Kalamadan and Pullimadan are the most important. Kalamadan, by the order of Shiva, came to earth to kill the orphaned souls who were suffering from diseases and were not allowed to wander around, but to look at their shadows and beat them to death. Kalamadan is made of a frame five and a half meters high and covered with black cloth, and Kalamadan jumps from inside it.

Gandharvan

This is a kolam written in five lines. Although it is an elongated kolam, it is tied on the face. The face is cut off according to the size of the face. Depending on the region, it is dressed in ash, manaola. There is a talipala and arajalii. A bow and arrow are mandatory for this kolam. Although it is danced to the rhythm of the Maran song, it does not have a hood like other kolams.

Kalankolam

The Kalankolam is a crown-like kolam that is about two and a half feet tall. Fifteen lines are required to make it. The top, the crown, the two ears and the faces are written separately on the frame with the kumbanthoppi attached. First, the yellow line is followed by the red line, then the black line, and then the black dots known as 'karinchokk'. The kolam is approached with a manaola on its face, with its eyes, kukri and fangs, and a sword in its right hand and a torch and a rope in its left hand. It is also worn with a palakonda. The three faces of the kalan kolam are considered to be the images of time. In some places, five faces are written. The five faces of the Panchasya Shiva or Kala (the face of a person who is throwing one) may be visible in this kolam. In some countries, instead of a manaola, the face that is not covered is written with charcoal and oil. Although Markandeyacharita is generally adopted for the kalan kolam, in some places, Ajamilamoksha and Shivamahatmya are sung⁹

Mythology of Kolams

The main purpose of mythology in kolams is to establish certain cultural values. Mythology is primarily used to strengthen people's belief in God through the presentation of supernatural and unforeseeable events, thereby convincing them that they can get rid of God's anger, misery, plague, etc. Over time, new beliefs were offered to the kolams tied to appease Kali's anger. Today's role of the soldier is to please the forces that disturb a prosperous life and save them from their harm. There are various beliefs associated with each kolam in the army. Kolams can be used to seek solutions to evils affecting humans like demonic possession, heat diseases, child abuse, natural disasters and fear of death. The society has accepted the dharma of kolasapanam as the prevention and remedy for the sickness and evil in the country and the abundance of money and grain.¹⁰ As the dharma of the myths perish, the rituals and art forms associated with those myths also perish. But rituals

are restored as new beliefs are established in mythology. The present-day practices of the Kolams of Pateni are not related to antiquity and are sustained by new beliefs.

Padayani as a ritualistic art form

From dusk, the offerings are taken to the devi temple. After the procession, the Kolam Thullal continues from noon until sunrise. Some of the rituals and ceremonies are performed during the day. Most of the Padayanis are performed during the nights of the month of Medam. Even though there is a change in the festival times of some Kav(sacred grove) in Travancore, the Padayani festival falls between the harvesting and sowing season. It takes place in scorching heat and light. This has not changed even today in the evolution of time. This is because there are people of lower castes in Central Travancore, who still preserve the traditions, culture, and customs.

Padayani was an art form that was performed for forty-one days. But today, only temples like Othara perform Padayani for twenty-eight days. In some places, it is performed for sixteen days, and in most temples, it is performed for eight or ten days. The Valanchuzhi temple in Pathanamthitta is a temple where Padayani was famous. In this temple, which used to perform Padayani for a month, now it is completed in three days. Today, Valyapadeni is performed only for one day. In many temples where Padayani was not performed before, a single-day Padayani is now performed. This has made this art form more popular.¹¹

Although the change of time can be seen in many scenes of Pateni, its basic elements have not changed much. The tools and colours used to draw kolams are still made from naturally available materials. There has been no penetration of artificial colors there yet. It is common to see arts like Theyyam being replaced by the ceremonial aspect and made into a part of processions. This art form has not faced such a decline. However, some political parties have started using the designs of Padayani kolams for programs and advertisements. Not only has the ceremonial aspect of Padayani not diminished much, but a large increase in the number of people offering Padayani kolams as offerings can be seen in each temple where Padayani is performed.¹²

Padayani is an art form that is filled with the soul and outlook on life of the primitive people of Padayani is an art that can claim a higher position



culturally and socially than any other art. The beliefs, worships, rituals and arts related to them were formed by the primitive man for his survival and to build a disease-free, healthy and prosperous life. The people who lived with emphasis on the agricultural system led their lives on such beliefs. These beliefs and rituals are behind the formation of the art of Padayani. It was also his need to maintain and protect nature at the same time. This concept can also be seen in the performing art of Padayani.

In Kerala there are echoes of active tradition. The upliftment of a country is also the upliftment of its people and society. This is possible by instilling values in the society showcasing a strong cultural symbol and artforms like padayani can do this to some extent. People's enthusiasm towards life can be seen through Padayani. Padayani expresses the identity of a people and carries out identity development. This is a social lifestyle in itself. Therefore, a gradual spread of culture through the ages can be seen in it. This art form has also experienced some declines and ups and downs according to the ages, but it still serves as an art form that embodies the soul of a people.

Different groups and cultures can be found in a habitat. The art of Padayani combines these different cultures and people into one creating a casteless society. Therefore, it can be said that this is the ritual art of the casteless tribal society. Although it is the art of the basic classes, everyone participates in it. The role of the Namboothiri is only to light the fire from the shrine. All the rest belongs to the basic classes. Padayani is the art of religious friendship and popular unity. Only love and harmony can be seen here. This casteless unity is what sustains the art form of Padayani in Central Travancore even today. Here, man and God become one. People wait in front of the Urali (basic classes) with awe and respect for his words. People see every word of the Urali as the word of the goddess. Devotees request to forgive their sins. This is also the only moment when the upper caste stands in front of the lower caste as subordinates. Padayani is a performance art form that clearly has a Dravidian touch: staging, costumes and the materials required for the kolams. The ancient Dravidian customs and practices really enrich this art form.

The participation of all sections of the society can be seen in the presentation and enjoyment of this art. There are characters in padayani that is comprised of various sections of the society from namboodiries to the pulayars. Hindus,

Christians and Muslims are the characters in the entertainment scenes. Criticisms against the caste system can also be seen in the performance. As the myth follows the spirit of God can be directly experienced through the kolams. Along with keeping away the fear of gods, it recognizes the spirit of God in all humans. All religious believers come as spectators to all the temples where this art is performed. It is also believed that the Kallooppara Devi Temple in Pathanamthitta district and the mother of the nearby church are sisters. Here, all religious groups take part in the procession. Even people of other religions dance the kolam and make offerings. This shows the trust that this art has gained in the community and its social impact.

Padayani has undergone changes in both entertainment and kolam writing. In the early days, even human sacrifice was performed with the kolam, but later it changed to goats and chickens. Over time, this ceremony called Kuruthi has been symbolically performed using kumbalangam and aratham. In temples like Kadammanitta, these have been completely abandoned. However, in temples like Kurambala, even today, when the kolam is taken out for the kolam for the kolam, a chicken is also taken along.

The lack of skilled kolam makers is evident in Pateni today. The new generation is experimenting with kolam writing, which has led to its loss of originality. Some changes have also been made in the thullal as well. In addition, many kolams that were performed in the past are not performed today. The writing methods and songs of the yakshi kolams like Erinagam, Paranagam, Ayali, Muyali, Kolana, Kodyana have become alien to the Padayani community today. However, Padayani groups in some areas like Ilanthur have introduced some new kolams. These are not the ones that existed in the early days. At least some people are making such reforms in the matter of kolams with new expressions and changes in form. The absence of the old masters can be seen in all the Padayani fields. Today, except in rare places, the new generation is taking it over in all places. Therefore, the thullal artists who were as flexible as before are few today. Experienced Padayani masters have raised the objection that even the tapa melam is not played properly in many places.

Padayani once had about eighteen instruments. Today, only four or five instruments are used in their place. The style of singing has also started to change. In some places, the classical style of singing

is also making inroads into it. But today, the biggest challenge facing this art form is the lack of availability of kamukin pala. Many areas have to go up and down to procure the pala needed for this. The increase in the number of kolams every year and the extreme heat due to climate change sometimes cause a shortage of green pala. However, kolam writers say that they are able to procure the required pala with the help of local residents. As time passes, the imagination and concepts of the people of that time can create transformations in any art. This is also true of the Padayani, which highlights the variations that have occurred in this performing art form from its early days.¹³

The language of Padayani is a vernacular that has been passed down from generation to generation. Linguistics is not the point here. Today, Padayani songs, Padayani music, and oral songs have begun to be written. Since it is a folk art, changes are inevitable. This written form is a reflection of the changes in the 'song' from that of the ancient tribal language. 'Padayani' songs are songs that have been refined by adding pure Malayalam words, Manipravala elements, and Sanskrit forms. With the change in time there are also major changes in the padeni songs as well with the major influence of modern dialect. The presence of dialect and style of language of ancient tribal people can be seen in comedy characters of padayani. Special preference towards the protection of this style of language is necessary in protecting the authentic cultural essence of these art forms.¹⁴

Padayani has become the cause and inspiration for the origin of many art forms. Padayani was the basis of Kunchannambiar's Thullal movement. Nambiar was very close to the Padayani and the Padayani Aasan. During his stay in Ambalapuzha, Nambiar, who was a regular visitor to the Thakazhi Shastakshetra (Ayyappa temple), maintained a close relationship with the Padayani performers there. The oil and Padayani of the Thakazhi Shastakshetra were very famous. Later, the Padayani of the Thakazhi temple, like many other places, ceased to exist. The costumes of the Thullal are very similar to the costumes of the Padayani.¹⁵ The crown of thullal is made by modifying the hair of the crown of the Kalankolam of the Padayani. The neck ornament of the Thullal is equal to the chest decoration of the Padayani. Similarly, the presence of red in the Thullal costume is also likely to have been transmitted from Padayani. Nambiar

himself refers to Padayani at many places in his Thullal story. The main purpose of the entertainment kolams in Padayani is to reduce the emotional intensity of the other kolams and also to carry out social purification. Criticism and ridicule are seen in such entertainment kolams. Through this, the aim is to implement social justice. This is the same as the role of the Thullal that came later. It can be assumed that Nambiar has also assimilated this aspect of Thullal, which brings about social reform by subjecting all types of people in the society to criticism, from Padayani.¹⁶

Regional Variations in Performance

There are some regional variations in the performance of Padayani. Mainly in terms of the kolams and in the day of performance. The days on which the kolams like Adavi, Kurathi, Nayattum Nari etc. are performed vary. Adavi is performed on any one of the third, sixth or ninth day depending on the peculiarities of each region. 'Adavi, the main attraction of Kurumbala Padayani, is different from other places.'¹⁷

There may also be regional variations in the performance of the sub-categories of each kolam. The horse kolam itself is called 'Poykuthira, Arakkuthira'. In some places, only one of these is performed. Two people with a moustache and a whip are also seen performing with the kolam, as if they were controlling a horse. In Yakshi kolams, apart from the kolams described above, kolams like Erinagayakshi, Karinagayakshi, and Padanagayakshi are also rarely performed. Of the thavadi and pannathavadi, pannathavadi is not performed in some places. Different forms of madankolam are also not performed in most places. Apart from the maruthakolams like karimarutha, tallamarutha, and pillamarutha, in some places, kolams like pachamarutha, pandamarutha, ishanthan marutha, and kalakeshimarutha are also performed. There are many songs for a kolam. There are places where the same songs are sung regularly. Different songs are performed in stutis and Ganapathimpadivattom. There are differences in food offerings between the inland and coastal regions.¹⁸

Major temples of Padayani performance

Padayani is primarily performed in temples dedicated to goddess bhadrakali, particularly in the southern region of the state. It includes:



- | | | |
|--|---|----------------|
| • Kadamannitta Devi Temple | - | Pathanamthitta |
| • Kottangal Devi Temple | - | Pathanamthitta |
| • Neelamperoor Palli Bhagavathy Temple | - | Alappuzha |
| • Puthukulangara Devi Temple | - | Pathanamthitta |
| • Elanthoor Bhagavatghi Kunnu Temple | - | Pathanamthitta |
| • Chenganoor Mahadeva Temple | - | Alappuzha |

Padayani in Malayalam Literature

Literary works play an important role in preserving the essence of tradition and culture. Many poems have been written in Malayalam based on the Kali concept in Padayani. Kadamannitta Ramakrishnan, Idasherry are important personas in this field. The poems of Kadamannitta Ramakrishnan, are the dedication to black goddess (kali) who expresses primitive strength. In his poems like Kiratham, Kattalan, and Kurathi, the burning image of Raudramurti can be seen. The poetic sculpture of Kadamannitta's poems prepared in Kadamannitta helps us see the concept of wild, primitive beauty. The beauty of folk literature is present in the 'Kavileppattu' of Itassery Govindan Nair. The sculptural beauty of the Puthapad is extremely beautiful. The pure expressions of the true village life are the soul of padayani literature. If folk literature cannot be preserved, a frozen society will be created that has lost its ancient culture and unity.

CONCLUSION

Padayani stands as a vibrant embodiment of Central Travancore's rich cultural heritage, blending ritual,

art, and history into a unified expression of communal identity. As a holistic performance art, it harmonizes dance, music, drama, and visual artistry, showcasing the creative ingenuity of rural communities. Rooted in Dravidian traditions, Padayani preserves ancient cultural practices while remaining untouched by external religious influences. Its deep connection with nature reflects an ecological wisdom that emphasizes the harmony between humans and the environment. The art form also serves a social function by dispelling fears and superstitions, empowering people through symbolic performances. Through its kolams and songs, Padayani captures and transmits historical and geographical narratives, making it an invaluable source for cultural and historical studies. The collective participation of villagers underscores its democratic nature and reinforces the values of unity and inclusivity. Padayani's survival over centuries illustrates its enduring relevance and transformative power. More than a performance, it is a cultural movement that fosters identity, memory, and resilience. Ultimately, Padayani is not merely a ritual—it is a living testament to the rhythm of life, rooted in nature, history, and the soul of a people.

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