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## Myths and Cultural Identity: Exploring the Construction of Cultural Memory in the Backdrop of *Kalamezhuthupattu*

**Abstract:** *Kalamezhuthupattu, like other ritual performances among the Hindu communities in Kerala, is deeply linked with myths. Since the right to perform or facilitate the ritual is vested in certain communities, the mythological narratives play a significant role in the identity formation of the communities concerned. The current study analyses the role of myths in the construction of cultural identity and its maintenance through the cultural memory of certain communities in the context of the practice of Kalamezhuthupattu in central Kerala. The paper explores the myriad ways in which mythical narratives function as a tool of cultural identities and repositories of cultural memory that distinguish communities. Making use of socio-functionalist myth-ritualism, the study analyses how mythological narratives legitimise cultural practices, social structures, and facilitate social cohesion. Further, the paper addresses how they continue to serve as significant harbours for community identity and belonging. The study focuses on the origin myth of the ritual offered to Bhadrakali, and the links established through mythological narratives with the communities that have rightful roles in the performance of the ritual, such as Kallatt Kurupp and Mannan.*

**Keywords:** Myth, Cultural Identity, Ritual Performance, Cultural Memory.

## Myths and Cultural Identity: Exploring the Construction of Cultural Memory in the Backdrop of *Kalamezhuthupattu*

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### **Introduction**

Myth has been a subject of academic inquiry since the classical Greek era. From Plato to contemporary scholars like Wendy Doniger, they have defined, redefined, and analysed myth from various perspectives. Beginning from its literal meaning, “story,” scholars moved on to elaborate definitions, considering the significance and complexities of the phenomenon in the societies and cultures concerned, including that proposed by William G. Doty:

A mythological corpus consists of a usually complex network of myths that are culturally important imaginal stories, conveying by means of metaphoric and symbolic diction, graphic imagery, and emotional conviction and participation, the primal, foundational accounts of aspects of the real, experienced world and humankind’s roles and relative statuses within it. Mythologies may convey the political and moral values of a culture and provide systems of interpreting individual experience within a universal perspective, which may include the intervention of suprahuman entities as well as aspects of the natural and cultural orders. Myths may be enacted or reflected in rituals, ceremonies, and dramas, and they may provide materials for secondary elaboration, the constituent mythemes having become merely images or reference points for a subsequent story, such as a folktale, historical legend, novella, or prophecy. (33-34)

Though they differed on how they are interlinked, myth-ritualists like William Robertson Smith, Jane Harrison, James G. Frazer, Bronislaw Malinowski, Walter Burkert and others highlighted the link between myth and ritual. Since myths are primarily the constructs of particular individuals, communities or societies, what they reflect can be the characteristics of their source and context. Therefore, having global generalisations on their patterns or behaviours can be erroneous as G. S. Kirk critiqued Levi-Strauss’ concept of structural mythology, he excluded certain myths that served different functions from his analysis (80). Here, the socio-functionalist approach put forth by Malinowski and others becomes more relevant. This approach explores myths in terms of their “functional ability to provide social solidarity, to transmit cultural values, to provide stability in a threatening world, to reduce anxiety, to show relationships between cultural values and particular objects, to explicate origins, and so forth” (Doty 133-34). Despite deficiencies, all the approaches lead to the fact that myths are multilayered and multifunctional in the societies where they exist.

Being a land of diverse cultures, India is a treasury of myths. From the Vedas and epics to the regional accounts, myths continue their dynamic and influential existence, reinforced through various media including rituals. *Kalamezhuthupattu* is one of such rituals practised among various Hindu communities in Kerala. Its performance is a spectacular blend of various art forms like floor drawing, vocal music and percussion, and dramatic dance. Like most of the ritual performances in the region, *Kalamezhuthupattu* also has embedded mythological narratives that claim its antiquity. The ritual has three parts: preparing the image (*kalamezhuthu*), music (*thottampattu*), and dramatic dance and possession. *Thottampattu* unveils the mythical narratives associated with each instance. Though the ritual is offered to various deities, the most popular and common among both the dominant and lower communities is that of Bhadrakali. This paper looks into the same and the mythological narratives associated with the practice, the deity, and the communities concerned.

### **Bhadrakali, Thirumandhamkunnu, and Kallatt Kurupp**

Kallatt Kurupp is one of the dominant communities that perform *Kalamezhuthupattu* in central Kerala. Among the numerous myths associated with their practice of Bhadrakali *Kalamezhuthupattu*, some are directly linked with the ritual, while others relate the community to the practice. The myth is centred on the legendary battle between Bhadrakali and Darikan.

As per the narrative documented by Babu Mundekkad, the Asuras were defeated in the legendary war between Devas and Asuras. Following the conflict, four Asura women, namely Dinapathi, Danapathi, Vanika, and Vamshika, escaped. Dinapathi and Danapathi, with their fervent prayers, successfully invoked Brahma. Brahma bestowed upon Dinapathi a son named Pilladanavan and upon Danapathi a son named Karakan. Dinapathi married King Bheekara, whereas Danapathi married King Bhadra. Karakan, son of Danapathi, asked her what his food should be, and she told him that he may have fruits and berries. Karakan, having mistaken the rising sun for a fruit, attempted to consume it; however, Surya struck him down with his arm. Dinapathi, in the meantime, birthed Pilladanavan on a Tuesday during an inauspicious time. On Pilladanavan's inquiry regarding his relatives and enemies, Dinapathi clarified that the Asuras were his kin and the Devas enemies, advising him to seek Brahma's blessings to conquer the Devas. Pilladanavan invoked Brahma through intense austerity. Brahma granted him a blessing, proclaiming that from every drop of his blood that fell to the land, sixteen thousand Mayadanavas would emerge, each endowed with the strength of sixteen thousand elephants. Brahma bestowed upon him a chariot named Dushtarakshasam and a weapon called Brahmadandu, subsequently renaming him Darikan. Furthermore, he was granted two potent mantras, Vishwapathi and Swahapathi, accompanied by the admonition that his demise would ensue only if these mantras were revealed to anyone other than himself or his wife. Darikan requested a boon from Brahma, requiring that no man could ever kill him. Upon Brahma's observation of his omission of

women, Darikan arrogantly asserted that no woman could ever win over him in warfare. Brahma warned that Darikan would be killed by a goddess due to his disdain for women. Subsequently, Darikan met Goddess Karthyayani and Vethalam in the forest. Upon being offered boons, he contemptuously declined, asserting that he would not accept blessings from women or devils. Goddess Karthyayani warned Darikan with a death threat, while Vethalam threatened him with the intention of killing and eating his flesh. Ignoring their warnings, Darikan returned and commanded Mayan and Vishwakarmavu to construct a palace for him and he resided there. Subsequently, he married Manodari, the daughter of King Kalakeyan, and began his expedition to conquer Devalokam, the world of the Devas. In response, the Holy Trinity created six goddesses, namely Brahmani, Vaishnavi, Maheshwari, Koumari, Indrani, and Varahi, and assigned them the mission of eliminating Darikan. Nonetheless, they failed in their mission. The Trinity reconvened and contemplated strategies for defeating the demon. Shiva positioned the poison, Kalakoodam, in his third eye, with the essence of the Trinity. The ferocious goddess Kali emerged from Shiva's third eye. Shiva bestowed upon her arms and assigned Vethalam as her vehicle. Bhadrakali arrived at Darikapuri with her army and commenced war with the demon. Karthyayani Devi, disguised as a Brahmin woman, skilfully sought the mantras from Manodari, who consented. Darikan's power waned immediately upon the revelation of the mantras to a third person. Bhadrakali subsequently conquered and eliminated him in battle. After slaying Darikan, Bhadrakali returned to Kailasam, still engrossed in wrath. Shiva, observing this, instructed her to descend to Karmabhoomi (Kerala) and accept the role of the family deity for the people there. He also said people would pay homage to her by making a sacred image using five-coloured powders. In accordance with Shiva's instructions, Bhadrakali departed from Kailasam and settled herself at Thirumandhamkunnu (77-78). The narrative of Darikavadham is detailed in the *Bhadrolpathi Kilipattu* also.

Manikandakkurupp, a ritual practitioner himself, has provided a further elaborated version of the myth in his work *Bhadrakali Kalamezhuthum Pattum Anushtanangalum* (31-40). As per his account, Vishnu led the Devas in the battle against the Asuras. Since he was the key force in defeating Asuras and almost exterminating their race, Asuras had intense angst towards Vishnu. While detailing the pregnancy period of Dinapathi and Danapathi, a ceremony called *pulikudikalyanam* practised among certain Hindu communities in the specified region is mentioned. It is conducted during the fifth, seventh, or ninth month of pregnancy for the birth of a male child. By mentioning in a mythical narrative, the ceremony is legitimised with sacredness and also establishes proximity between the celestial and the terrestrial. According to this version, Pilladanavan performed penance to please Brahma at Gokarnapuri. Gokarnam is a coastal town in Karnataka renowned for sacred temples of mythical significance. Several place names can be seen in the narrative ranging from Kailasam to Thirumandhamkunnu in the narrative that reflect human migrations and the consequent cultural influences. Darikan's fort is also a reflection of a modern construction.

Kali's birth is more specific in this version. It was while Narada informed Shiva about Darikan's arrogance and his mistreatment of the Devas, anguished Shiva released a force from his third eye. Kali was born on the fifteenth day in the *Medam* zodiac on *Visakham* star, possessing the potency of the three Kalakoodam poisons: Kalakantam, Karakantam, and Thiruneelakantam. She is depicted as a giant black mountain with sixteen arms, furious eyes, and elongated canine teeth. Following the legendary war, Bhadrakali killed Darikan with her sacred claws, neither inside nor outside, at twilight, neither in daylight nor darkness, neither in the sky nor on the earth, but while lying on Bhadrakali's lap, and without the use of a weapon.

Despite performing the propitious act of slaying Darika, Kali's rage remained unmitigated. Shiva recognised that if Kali's anger remains unrestrained, it will result in misery for the world. Expecting her arrival with unrestrained anger, Shiva assigned two boys, namely Veerabhadran and Kshethrapalakan to drink from Kali's breasts upon her arrival at Kailasam to calm her. Since the mission failed, Shiva began to dance before Kali without uttering a single word. To eliminate her rage, Shiva removed his clothes and continued to perform as Digambara. Kali, feeling embarrassed by her father's nudity, ceased dancing and bowed her head. Shiva didn't allow her to offer Darikan's head to him due to Darikan's affinity with the element of Brahma and insisted that it must be held in her left hand as a weapon. Appreciating her achievement, Shiva enquired if Kali's anger and thirst were gone; she replied that her thirst hadn't reduced. He suggested that she drink the seven oceans. She asserted that they are inadequate for her single mouthful. Shiva then asks her to show the skull so that he may fill it with blood by wounding his own little finger. Blood flowed like the Ahalya River. Kali and her army drank the blood, immersed themselves in it, and danced in a state of ecstasy. Upon satisfaction, Kali expressed her intention to reside in the left part of Kailasam. But Shiva asserted that Kali should not reside in Kailasam, but rather go to *Malanadu* (the land of mountains) to serve there as the deity of the residents. With Shiva's consent, Kali departed to *Malanadu* i.e., Kerala. The origin myth of the deity and her entry to Kerala ends here.

This myth is supposedly found in the Markandeyapurana. At the conclusion of the Darikavadham song, it is mentioned that the narrative is recounted by Markandeya. Though it is impossible to find this narrative as such in the Markandeya Purana, the story of Bhadrakali is narrated in it and can be seen profoundly woven into the literature, songs, and rituals of Kerala. Darikan, Bhadrakali's rival, is absent from other mythological legends. Furthermore, it is absent in the Sanskrit version of the Markandeyapurana itself. The Sanskrit rendition of the Markandeyapurana presents the origin myth of Bhadrakali (*The Markandeya-Puranam* 359-406). Various components of the Kali-Darika myth can also be traced in distinct narratives in the Purana, where Darikan is not present. For instance, one of the blessings bestowed upon Darikan by Brahma is that each drop of King Darikan's blood that touches the earth will give rise to sixteen thousand Darikans, which parallels the account of

another monster named Rakthabija. The band of mothers, formed from the energies of Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, and others, is similarly observable; however, it is not intended to kill Darikan. Kali and the group of mothers kill Shumbha, Nishumbha, Chanda, Munda, Rakthabija, and others from the Asura army. The Kali-Darika myth represents an amalgam of many narratives found in the Sanskrit version of the Markandeyapurana. Hence, it is clear that the narrative associated with the ritual is a regional myth. It can also be argued that the attempts to link the story to Puranic texts is to make it part of the 'great tradition' and thus to claim antiquity and supremacy.

The mythical narrative that links the Kallatt Kurupp community to the ritual is the Thirumandhamkunnu legend. The Thirumandhamkunnu temple is situated in Angadippuram, within the present-day Malappuram district. Angadippuram was the commercial capital of the ancient princely state of Valluvanadu. Valluvanadu has a historical lineage dating back to the Second Chera Empire. The dynasty was established by Rajasekharan, who reigned in the 10th century. This dynasty was also known as Arangottu Swarupam. The king of Valluvanadu was also renowned as Valluvakonathiri, Vellattiri, Arangodu Udayavar, and Vallabhan. Angadippuram was also known as Vellattangadi in earlier times.

The tradition of Thirumandhamkunnu Bhagavathi's *Kalamezhuthupattu* is often called *Vellattirichitta* (Vellattiri style). While invoking the goddess during the ritual, she is invited to dwell upon Valluvakonathiri's garments, umbrella, and sword. The hymn dedicated to the Goddess in *Kalamezhuthupattu* mentions that cloth from Vellattangadi is worn draped. This shows that the sovereigns of the Valluvanadu kingdom were devotees of Thirumandhamkunnu Bhagavathi (Manikandakkurupp 41-42).

Sage Mandhathavu is believed to be the mythical founder of the Thirumandhamkunnu temple. The legendary figure of the Ikshaku dynasty, Mandhathavu, is mentioned in various texts, including the Rigveda, Padma Purana, Devi Bhagavatam, and Uttararamayana. He is the son of a king named Yuvanashya, of Surya lineage. After a prolonged reign, Mandhathavu performed austerities to Shiva following the handover of the kingdom to his sons. Feeling pleased with austerities, Shiva manifests and enquires about his desire. Mandhathavu wanted to inherit Shiva's most cherished Shivalinga for worship until the demise of his material existence. Shiva bestowed upon the devotee the distinctive Shivalinga in Kailasam, treasured by Parvathi and worshipped by her. Mandhathavu reached the hill in the forest, now known as Thirumandhamkunnu, bearing the divine Shivalinga on his head. Overwhelmed by its weight, he placed it on the ground. The Shivalinga got installed there.

Parvathi was bathing while Shiva gifted the Shivalinga to Mandhathavu. She became anxious at its disappearance. She wanted Shiva to get it back. Then Shiva informed her that it had been given to Mandhathavu. But Parvathi insisted on getting it back. Shiva repeated that it is inappropriate to ask a devotee to give back the boon he has received, and he would consider finding a means to repay the

goddess if feasible. Parvathi immediately commanded Bhadrakali to assemble her ganas urgently to retrieve the Shivalinga by whatever means required. Bhadrakali arrived at the northern side of Thirumandhamkunnu, accompanied by Ganapathi, the *Sapthamathrukkal*, and Shivaparshadas such as Veerabhadran, Nandimahakalan, Bhringirati, along with innumerable bhoothaganas.

Bhadrakali and her army faced difficulties in reaching the top of the hill due to the strong magnetic radiation that was emitted from the Shivalinga worshipped by the Sage and his disciples. As per Bhadrakali's orders, arrows and an array of weaponry were sent upwards. The disciples attempted to obstruct them with whatever they got including the fruits of the Attanga tree. Through the strength of the sage's ascetic practices and that of Shiva, each seed of the Attanga fruit transformed into magical arrows and fell onto Bhadrakali and her army. The fight lasted for fifteen days. This event is signified by the *Attangayeru* ceremony (throwing of Attanga), conducted on the first day of Thulam month and on the morning of the new moon, before the ritual called *Pantheeradi pooja*.

Realising there was no escape, Bhadrakali revealed her true form, adorned with an elephant in her left ear and a lion in her right, having a body resembling a black mountain, with burning eyes, a piercing laugh, and an array of weapons in her hands, causing the sage's disciples to faint. When seeing Bhadrakali atop the mountain, the despairing sage Mandhathavu embraced the Shivalinga and engaged in meditation on Shiva. As Parvathi wished, Kali attempted to seize the Shivalinga. The Shivalinga split into two, revealing Shiva and Parvathi.

Parvathi told Mandhathavu that though the idol is invaluable for her, she doesn't have the strength to reclaim it from his piety. Since she cannot abandon it, she desired to merge herself with it. Since Kali came there before her, she wanted him to install Kali near to her, facing towards the north, and perform pooja. Then she merged into the split Shivalinga. The name Sreemoolasthanam derives from the presence of Moolaprakruthi (Parvathi). The Shivalinga at Srimoolasthanam remains split even today. Unniganapathi (Baby Ganesha) was also said to be present on Parvathi's lap when she revealed herself before Mandhathavu. Unniganapathi, as well, has been consecrated at Srimuloosthanam. Following Parvathi's instructions, Bhadrakali was consecrated facing north, along with the band of mothers as well as Veerabhadran and Ganapathi. This space is known as *Mathrushala*.

Mandhathavu stayed for a prolonged time in Thirumandhamkunnu as a penitent. When he recognised his time to accomplish moksha, he met two Brahmins unexpectedly, whom he considered dignitaries to manage the procedures without disruption to the rituals he was performing. An attendant from the Nair community was also with them. He instructed them on the guidelines for the pooja and other rituals. The attendant also learnt those without their knowledge. Then Mandhathavu entered the Kukshippara forest near Sreemoolasthanam and sacrificed himself through yoga. The region remains conserved as a forest. No one had ever crossed this thicket till the astrological event held in 1959 which suggested daily worship of Mandhathavu, installing his idol. Special poojas occur there on the first

Thursday of each Malayalam month. The annual pooja to Mandhathavu is significant on the Chithira day of Midhunam.

One of the two Brahmins cleared the forest within the area, transforming it into a yard; consequently, his family got the name *Kattillamuttam* (forestless yard). The second Brahmin provided the *panthal* (canopy) to the deity and his family became *Panthalakkode Mana*. The heirs of these two families continue to serve as the Tantris (high priests) of this temple even today.

Kallatt Kurupp's legend evolved as a continuation of this narrative. It is said that once in Kailasam, one of Shiva's bhoothaganas was creating a picture of Shiva using various powders for amusement. He became anxious about Shiva's impending arrival and feared Shiva's anger upon viewing the illustration. Bhoothagana hid the image to prevent Shiva from viewing it. Though Shiva urged him to step aside, he declined due to fear. Finally, Shiva compelled him to move and saw his image. Shiva cursed him to descend to Earth and sustain themselves by drawing deities for worship for hiding his beautiful portrait. The bhoothagana expressed regret and fear, praying for liberation from the curse. Shiva, pleased, provided him the opportunity to return to Kailasam once he could perform his earthly duties flawlessly. It is said that Kallatt is a contraction of Kailasam, while Kurupp denotes one who draws. The community asserts that they are the descendants of Shiva's bhoothagana. This community is not yet liberated due to the inevitability of minor errors during the performance of the ritual since it is observed with the involvement of many people.

The Brahmins, designated by Mandhathavu, began performing poojas at Sreemoolasthanam and Mathrushala, but, despite their efforts, they couldn't make out Bhadrakali's image as stipulated in the manthra throughout the rituals. Consequently, they became upset, insomniac, and fearful. As this continued for days, the attendant invoked the goddess as depicted in the manthra he had learnt from the sage, reciting it. However, worried that describing this vision to the Brahmins may displease them, he sought an alternate way, avoiding direct communication. The following day, prior to the arrival of the Brahmins for pooja, he drew the goddess's image on the rock using a red stone. After recognising that it was the image prescribed by the sage, they conducted a pooja with satisfaction. Impressed with the attendant, the Brahmins permitted him to perform pooja by drawing the image of the goddess near the temple. The Nair attendant is believed to be the bhoothagana cursed by Shiva. They have been conferred the title of Kurupp and have been following to the Ampalavasi (temple dwelling) tradition, engaging in *Kalamezhuthupattu* as a hereditary vocation. The attendant was elevated to a higher level than the Nairs. According to the legend, Kallatt is an abbreviation for the individual who sculpted an image on stone (Manikandakkurupp 53). The community is also believed to be descended from the Thumpurunaradas appointed by Shiva (Mundekkad 33).

The song recorded by Manikandakkurupp states that Shiva advises Kali to proceed to *Malanadu*, founded by Parasurama (328). Kerala is said to have been founded by Parasurama, the sixth

incarnation of Vishnu, exemplifying an integration of regional mythology. It can be argued that the link drawn by the song reinforces the dominance of the Brahmin community. According to *Keralolpathi (The Origin of Malabar)*,<sup>1</sup> Parasurama created Kerala and, to inhabit the country, he brought Brahmins from various regions; however, none were able to stay due to the overwhelming presence of serpents. Subsequently, he brought Arya-Brahmins from Aryapura of the northern region (1).

The final verse of the Darikavadham song signifies *Kalamezhuthupattu* as the most sacred ritual. With this, unconscious attempts are made to secure community recognition for this ritual art (Mundekkad 79-80). Another narrative concerning the Kallatt Kurupp community's practice is associated with a major element of the ritual performance, *kalampooja*. It is said that in ancient times, Kurupp himself performed the *kalampooja*. One day, when Kurupp went to bathe in Parakkadavu after preparing the *kalam* at Thirumandhamkunnu, a Brahmin priest started pooja without placing any ornamental arrangements. In the final phase of the pooja, following the priest's instructions, Marar played the Chenda quietly to avoid Kurupp's attention. At the end of the pooja, Marar amplified the sound. Hearing the drumbeat, Kurupp sensed alarm and hastened to the spot of the performance. The Brahmin priest informed the disheartened Kurupp that only the pooja for Bhadrakali had concluded and he can perform poojas to *Sapthamathrukkal* and *Ashtadikpalakas*. The priest added that from then on, *kalampooja* shall be performed by Brahmins. Since that time, Brahmin pooja began in the *kalam* of Kurupp in central and northern Kerala. Achuthamenon perceives this occurrence as an attempt by Brahmins to take over ritual authority from Kurupp (57). Mundekkad rejects this assertion, stating that drumming quietly is a method employed in Brahmin tradition, known as *pooja kottal* (52). It is noteworthy that to the south of the Thrissur district, *Kalampooja* is performed by Kurupp, rather than a Brahmin priest.

These narratives allow the community to identify itself as the descendants of heavenly bhoothagana. At the same time, their internal conflict can be seen in the attempt to attain a higher position than Nairs in the caste hierarchy by asserting that they came to the place due to Shiva's curse. As per the existing caste hierarchy, the position of the temple-dwelling communities including Kallatt Kurupp, is between Brahmins and Nairs (Namboothiri 22). Through the legend, they assert that the Brahmins have elevated their social status by allowing them to do pooja outside the temple, under the title of Kurupp. The narrative affirms the dominant position of Brahmins and legitimises the caste hierarchy. The power hierarchy is reflected in the narrative as the legendary king turned sage gets the idol in hand from Shiva and assigns two random Brahmins to look after the worship tradition, transferring his knowledge. Descendants of both continue their 'rightful' roles in the temple and their

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<sup>1</sup> An ancient semi-mythical work of unidentified authorship, recovered and published by Hermann Gundert, outlines the lineage of Namboothiri Brahmins and other castes in Kerala. It primarily expands upon an earlier Sanskrit text titled *Kerala Mahathmyam*, which is classified within the Hindu Puranas as an *Upa Purana* of the *Bhoogola Purana*.

identity is also backed by the narrative. Though the Nair attendant gains the knowledge, he is not allowed to perform pooja inside the temple. Nairs' position is maintained as attendants to the Brahmins and are not permitted to do pooja. Social status is maintained in parallel to the proximity of access to the divine or the inner sanctorum of a temple.

### **Kannaki, Bhadrakali, and Mannan**

Kannaki is often linked to the Hindu goddess Kali. In his work *Keralathile Kaliseva*, Achuthamenon opines that Bhadrakali was metamorphosed into Kannaki especially in the southern region of Kerala (93). However, this assimilation can be seen in the central and northern regions as well. There is a reference to the Kannaki story in the *Kalamezhuthupattu* of the Kallatt Kurupp. In the ritual offered to Kuttippurath Bhagavathi (Bhagavathi at Kuttippuram), the song recounts: 'She pierced her right breast with the sword that killed the Pandyan.' It is a reference to the Tamil epic, *Chilappathikaram*. In the *Kalam*, Bhagavathi is depicted with four arms, holding a ceremonial sword (*pallivaal*), disc (*vattaka*), mirror with handle (*valkannadi*), and skull (*kapalam*). Darikan's head is not portrayed. A figure named Nambyath Gopalan is also depicted in the *Kalam*, carrying an anklet (Mundekkad 56-57; 65). Iyer opines that the name "Kovalan" is derived from "Gopalan" (51). Moreover, the concept of *Ottamulachi* (single-breasted woman) may have originated from the connection between Bhadrakali and the concept of Kannaki (Mundekkad 66).

*Kalmezhuthupattu*, offered to Kali among the lower castes, interprets the deity in distinctive manners. The myth depicted in the accompanying songs, especially in coastal areas, is derived from *Chilappathikaram*. As per the myth, there existed a divine daughter in the South, 'ponmakal,' and a divine son in the North, 'ponmakan.' Both were also considered children of Shiva. The girl, who was swept away by the sea in a wrecked wooden ship, was raised in *Thekkum Kollam* (South Kollam). She was named Perumdevi and thereafter became known as Kandankali. In parallel, the king of *Vadakkum Kollam* (North Kollam), who was childless, appealed to Shiva and was granted a son, whom he named Gopalakrishnan. When the boy turned sixteen, the search for a bride began. They went to *Thekkum Kollam* and met Perumdevi. Despite their mutual respect, their horoscopes were incompatible. However, the wedding happened at the behest of Perumdevi's foster mother. Subsequent to the wedding, she was taken to *Vadakkum Kollam*. The couple remained childless. In a time of significant hardships, the husband, Gopalakrishnan, went to the Pandya kingdom to sell an anklet gifted to Perumdevi by her father as a wedding gift. At the same time, the anklet of the Pandya queen mysteriously disappeared. A goldsmith alleged that Gopalakrishnan had stolen the queen's anklet and informed the king. Gopalakrishnan was falsely accused of theft and executed by decapitation. Kandankali sought her husband in the Pandya kingdom and, upon finding him executed, employed the strength of her honesty and virtue to bring him back to life. A member of the Mannan community did

the process of reviving Gopalakrishnan through song (*thottampattu*), in accordance with her instructions. This act establishes a connection between the Mannan community and this ritual. Later, in her fury, the goddess destroyed the Pandya kingdom, threw away her anklet, and eventually resided in Kodungallur, a place of historical and religious significance in central Kerala. The link between this ritual and the Mannan community is expressly mentioned only in the *Kalamezhuthupattu* of Kali.

In these narratives mentioned above, the central characters of the Tamil epic *Chilappathikaram* – Kovalan and Kannaki – are reimagined as Gopalan or Gopalakrishnan and Kali or Kandankali. In the narrative that exists among the lower castes, Kali is elevated to a goddess from her human existence. Kandankali or Kannaki was a normal human being and later metamorphosed into a superhuman through the legendary fight against injustice. Socio-cultural elements such as matching horoscopes of bride and groom before marriage, giving wedding gifts in the form of ornaments on the wedding, etc., are also reflected in the narrative.

### **Conclusion**

As the majority of the scholars acknowledged, myths exist and serve to satisfy specific needs; however, these needs might vary in kind and can include anything from the need for sustenance, knowledge, or hope to the desire for a connection with the divine. An urge to connect with divinity to authenticate cultural identity is evident in the narratives associated with the practice of *Bhadrakali kalamezhuthupattu*. As Doty pointed out, ritual and related myths are the visual and performative media that the communities use to reinforce and make apparent their values (130). Mythical narratives in general and in the context of this particular instance, with all of their distinctive characteristics and localised settings, are usually imagined to take place in a timeless past. It's a systematic approach to claim antiquity and authenticity for a particular cultural practice as heritage. Underlying social structures can also be evident in such narratives. The myths associated with *Bhadrakali Kalamezhuthupattu* reflect the deep-rooted elements of the Hindu culture of central Kerala, especially the social structure. It can be seen that there are no direct links between most of the myths popularised in the context of the ritual and the practice of the ritual. Further, they function to establish a link between the communities involved in the ritual performance and the divinity associated with the practice. Cultural identity of the communities concerned is constructed through the narratives and made alive through the annual performance of the ritual and is carried over to generations. Annual gatherings of family and community members for the observance of the ritual become events to nurture cultural memory. The narratives entwined with divinity legitimise the cultural practice and social structure.

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