

Muthappan A Living God of Northern Kerala

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to unfold cultural aspect one of the major folk deity of Northern Malabar Sree Muthappan. This is understood by taking case study of two major temples (Madappura) of Muthappan that is Parassiniadavu and Kunnathurpadi. It deals with different forms of Muthappan, his legends, dressing pattern and the offerings made to him by the devotees. There is lack of proper understanding of this folk form. Secondary sources are mainly used in this research.

Muthappan is seen as the living God of Northern Kerala. It is unique in its character as it is performed through out the year without any seasonal differentiation(except Kunnathurpadi). It was attracted by number of devotees not only a particular caste or community instead it is given importance by all people with out any discrimination. It is highly unconventional and transgressive. Muthappan temples are present through out Malabar. Each had its own legends. But Parassini Madapura and Kunnathurpadi where among them attained more significance.

Better apprehension of this topic helps us to give better attention to these folk form.

Keywords: Sree Muthappan, Madappura, Parassini madappura, Kunnathoorpadi, Northern Malabar.

Introduction

Muthappan is a hunter God of Kerala, he used native language as a medium of communication. He is seen as the God of common man of Norther Kerala.Malabar region give much importance to the art forms named Theyyam. Muthappan is one among them which are commonly performed in parts of Kasargod, Kannur, Kozhikode, Malappuram and also some parts of Coorg region in Karnataka (India). Muthappan is seen as a culmination of two major deities that is Thiruvappana or Valiya Muthappan as form of Vishnu and Vellatom or Cheriya Muthappan form of Shiva. ¹There are various temples dedicated to this deity major among them include Parassiniikkadavu, Kunnathoopadi, Nileshtar Muthappan. Muthappan where mainly worshipped in a shrine called Madappura. The temple rituals followed in such shrines view the distinctive path of worship that Malabar people had in connection with varied deities². The ritual is known as Shaktheyam in this Panjamakara were offered. This mainly include Madyam(toddy) and Maamsam(flesh fish). The daily ritual performance along with the enactment of Muthappan performed daily in Parassinikadavu temple. ³

The religious liberty that it provides make Muthappan the most distinct one among all. In almost all the temples in Kerala not allowed the entry of Non-Hindus but in parassinikadavu there is no such restrictions.

¹ Sree Muthappan Seva Samiti, Surat, *Story of Parassinikadavu Muthappan*, March 10,2010.

² Sreekumari Ramachandran, *Tales of Malabar – Lore, and Legends of Northern Kerala*, 2020.

³ <https://parassinimadappurasreemuthappan.com>

Muthappan is enacted by Vannan community of Kerala. The ritual practices were done by Theyyar community⁴. Major guard of Muthappan were always dogs. Dogs are given sacred positions. There are number of dogs seen in and around Parassini madappura. There are two bronze carved dogs in the entrance of the temple this symbolise the bodyguards of God. The prasada were always first served to dog inside the temple complex.⁵

In Parassinikadavu temple an annual festival connected with harvest season called as Puthari Thiruvappana. Two days (sixteenth and seventh of *Vrischikam*) this festival is held. This begins with customary rituals in Madamana illam. This include rituals like *Muthappan Vellattam*

(evening) *Kalasang Ezunnallathu*(night). The very next day *Muthappan Thiruvappana* is held with colourful processions and traditional concert and other cultural programmes. In this the devotees and farmers will offer with newly harvested rice crops (puthari) to *Madappura*. A grand feast were given to all present there. Parassinikadavu is the only temple with daily *theyyam* held.⁶

Major offerings made at Parassinikadavu includes *Thiruvappana* it is the major offering done early in the morning, *Thiruvappana Adiyanthiram* is the celebration of the combined images of both *valiya muthappan* and *cheriya muthappan*. *Payamkutti* is another ritual done by offering Muthappan toddy, fish, cooked grains and coconuts, Adiyar, Thiyyar and Vannans have the legitimacy to do it. *Karimkalasam* is a ritual performed by the person who do the role of Thiruvappana. He offers entire cask filled with toddy to Muthappan. This is done only at *Madappura*. The prayer or thottam sung during this time will remove all the troubles due to one's enemy. *Oottum Vellattam* this is done as a part of *Thiruvappana Adiyantharam*. The major offerings were Vechootu, Vecharingat, Neekari, fish, grains that are boiled along with toddy. The devotees dance along with Madayan and will listen to the problems and provide with blessings.⁷

Kunnathur Padi Muthappan is a folk Hindu deity in a historic centre. This is seen as the *Arodam* of Muthappan. This is situated three thousand feet above sea level a top *Udambamala* in Sahyadri Mountains. It's a divine and pure place with greenery and beauty. The festival is seasonal thus a temporary *Madappura* is erected which is called *sreekovil*. There is a stone, a rock stand and mud platform on west side of *madappura*. One east side there is a palm tree.

Spring called *Thiruvankadavu* in north side and after that is *Aadipadi*.⁸

From *Dhanu* to *Makaram* (December to January) a one month long festival is conducted. Some of the major purifying rituals are done under *Thanthries* this include *Shudhi*, *Pashudhanam*, *Ganapati Homam* and *Bhagavathiseva*. *Malayirakkal* is done from *Puralimala*.

This is a special feature of Kunnatturpadi. Muthappan takes place in a natural setting. No

⁴ <https://chayilyam.com>

⁵ Seena Antony, Parassinikadavu Muthappan: Kannur's elegant deity, Jan 28 2019

⁶ Anjana Menon, *Muthappan devotee gather for festival*, Jan 9 2019.

⁷ www.travelkannur.com

⁸ <https://keralatourism.org>, Department of Cultural Affairs, Government of Kerala.

brahmanical forms of worships were followed. The mode of worship is also differed no idol worship instead the followed ritual enactment of Muthappan. Fish is the major offering, people from all sections of society can be a part of it. The Muthappan is enacted by tribal community. This shows that all the sections of society like upper caste, lower caste and tribals equally contributed in worship of Muthappan.⁹

In very first day of festival four forms of Muthappan will appear that is *Padi Puthiya Sree Muthappan*, *Puramkala Sri Muthappan*, *Naduvazhissan Daivam* and *Thiruvappana*. The concept of Vannan in Muthappan is of Eiver Muthappan(five Muthappan) this include *Puramkala Sri Muthappan*, *Puralimala Sri Muthappan*(Thiruvappana), *Nambala Sri Muthappan*, *Sri Muthappan (Vellattam)*, *Thoovakkally Sri Muthappan* and *Andu Muthappan*.

Pudiya Muthappan is the all about his infant stage. This form does not include beard and moustache. *Varavili* and *malayirakkithottam* is sung. No toddy is used instead offered flattened rice and coconut pieces. The *thottam* sung include his growing stages. Bow and arrow are the major tools. *Puramkaal Muthappan* is the childhood phase with out beard. No *payyankutti*. Flattened rice offered with bow and arrow as tools. The difference in *thottam* and *uriyattal* make it different from *Pudiya Muthappan*. Hunting related *thottam* sung in this case. *Naduvazassin divam* deals with the adolescents period. Long beard and moustache were given. Bow and arrow as tools. Before his movement from *Ayyangara illam* to mountains. The *tottam* includes the situation of downtrodden and the feudal rule that existed. This form is only enacted in Kunnathurpadi. Thiruvappana is the complete form of Muthappan. During festival season it is enacted everyday. Black long beard, moustache and silver eye cover part of it. Thiruvappana is given the title of *Chakravarthi*. On *Dhanu* second all these forms are enacted one after the other. One of the major form of Muthappan is always Thiruvappana. Muthappan is also know as Thiruvappan.¹⁰

In between this enactment there are fascinating rituals that happens. Muthappan does *Pallivetta* and accept *veethu* (madhu) this act depicts lords writing on granite stone with his arrow. This was called *moola mantra* (writing). This act is also trying to show the customary rules and regulations that the generations has to follow. Thiruvappana and Vellttam performed with

difference in time. Thiruvappana usual happens at night. After the divine performance Muthappan sits on the mud platform in front of him Nayanar was made to sit. Then Muthappan recite the *tottam*. This is the history and relationship with *Vanavar* (Nayanar). *Bhandaram* (coffee) kept in front of him but the offerings are not made directly but given to the hands of Muthappan. Offerings like *roopam oppikkal* are done by the devotees at this moment by giving the froms to Muthappan.¹¹

Dressing pattern

There is an elaborate and colourful dressing pattern for this folk god. The basic colour are the culmination of red and white which are more similar to kadhakali art. The Thirumudi, a fish shaped headgear studded with wooden embellishments, mirror chips and tinsel are some of the highly evolved forms. Thiruvappana have different dressing style he is adorned with harmless, upper armbands, tasseled mirror work

⁹ <https://www.southexplore.in>

¹⁰ Janardhana Poduval, Sree Kunathoorpadi Muthappan, Dec1 2006.

¹¹ ibid

waistband, also they wear heavy anklets with sound, they also have long beard and *pozikkannu*(eye mask). All together it is it's an enormous clothing. The make up is conscientiously done which takes around four to five hours. This is called *Thiruvathu Oppikkal*. Vellattam also have a distinct pattern the headgear of Vellattam is layered upon with planned straw decorated with *Chekki poovu* and *thulasi* with many decorative ornaments pinned to it, Lord Shiva's matted locks, Goddess Ganga and the crescent Moon. He also carry a bow and arrow in hands. It is believe that after wearing all this the person who wore this will deeply think about the power of God(*oroyal*) and gradually turns in to a state of divinity. The brisk movement become light and soft to show the love and compassion and by showing sword and making quick move to show the changes in mood. The *chenda*, *chinchilam*, and *koralu* are the major background players for this performance they also change the beat based the difference in dancing.¹²

By evening solo performance of Vellattam is solemnized in the dim lights of oil lamps. Muttappan sit on *peedam* a stool made out of wood with special style. The Madayan (helper) will offer him with pawns betel leaves and natural toddy given in a *kindi* (bronze mug with spout). *Oottunchor*(boiled rice with coconut scraping a, ghee, pepper and fish) called *koppad* placed in a banana leaves before Muthappan this is called *Payyankutti*. By mid night devotees

sing *Kalakkapaattu* which prolonged to dual performance of Thiruvappana and Vellattam. Major myths and the legends of Muthappan sung in a folk rhythm with specific modulation in between. This given a occasional link to narration. Thiruvappana generally happens before dawn, eyes are covered with silver shell(*poykannu*). Then he walks along with Vellattam (guide). The *Kalashakkaran* carry earthen pot covered with layer of leaf stalks which contain madhu toddy with a towering outfit decorated with Champakam flowers walk backward facing Thiruvappana and Vellattam. This is called *Kalasham Ezhunallathu*/ solemn procession.¹³

Legends

The major legend behind this begins from *Ayyankara illam*. A childless *Numbudiri* Brahmin found a abandoned infant in river side of *Thirunetti Kallu* after a long decades of prayer. When the child started growing he started mingling with all caste and involved in hunting and eat meat. He moved around with *Neelakkarimapana Villu* Now and *Neelathil Mukkiya Ambuarrow*. He hunted number of animals and brought meat to illam and started eating.

The illam got polluted by the atmosphere. His foster mother *Paadikutty Andarjanam* disturbed by all these. During the interrogation Shiva appeared in his hunter's manifestation. His foster mother enjoined upon him to remain blindfolded to avoid fits of anger. He prayed for strength to fulfill this task and blessed his foster mother, He assured everyone his presents in the river side and left. Thus the present Parassinikadavu temple is in that spot in river bank. The combined form of Vishnu and Shiva depiction is shown through Thiruvappana and Vellattam in Parassinikadavu temple.¹⁴

¹² ibid

¹³ <https://templesofindia.org>

¹⁴ Latheesh Keezhallur, *Sree Muthappan Aithiyavum Charitravum*, 2016.

Another legend about muthappan is about that his worship of the tribals in Western Ghats Kunnathurpadi. In this area the Adiyaanmar, Aalaayattu Moothoran Chandan and his wife Kallayidodi Adiyathi worshipped Muthappan with palm toddy, boiled pulses, fish, coconut pieces in reverence and piety. Muthappan mainly belong to *Kunnumal Tharavadu* of Thiyan. The kshetram and the deity belong to this family. The most important representative of Muthappan known as Madayan. Normal days the Madayan the member of Thiya family perform the pooja rites. Tantric practices are done by members of Poondattam illam. On

Sankramam a vaishnavite brahmin perform *punyaham*. Till the end of this pooja no meat or toddy brought to Madappura. ¹⁵

CONCLUSION

Muthappan were always seen as path breaker in all sense. As all other deity in kerala Muthappan *Madappura* stayed exceptional by allowing all the caste and sections in to temple. This is a big step against discrimination that people faced. According to the legends he is said to have existed during feudalistic phase but still he made his move. This makes him the living

God in every heart. Parashinikadavu and Kunnathurpadi had formed it's own mark. The ritualistic practices are more or less the same but there are exceptions as well. The cultural varieties that Kerala holds are best portraits through this. Also these folk god attained importance and credits all around the world. And still continuing its strong cultural hold. It is important to make a proper documentation of all these to understand our culture in detail.

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¹⁵ ibid