Theyyam: The dance of Gods, a once in a lifetime experience

Description

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It was the second week of April, and I planned to go to my hometown, Payyanur, from my university. I invited one of my photographer friends to come. He is always eager to learn about different cultures and festivals. He had heard about Theyyam before, and once, he also documented that. This time, he was going to experience Kelan Kulangara Bhagavathi Theyyam.

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Performer is dancing wearing full getup | PC: Priyanshu Shekhar

Kelan Kulangara Bhagavathi Theyyam (à´?àµ?à´³àµ»à´?àµ•à´³à´?àµ•à´?à´° à´à´?à´µà´¤à´¿à´¤àµ?à´¯àµà´¯à´?) is a powerful theyyam performed in many Tharavadu, Kavu, and temples in the Kannur and Kasaragod districts of Kerala. She is the daughter of Paramashiva. She saves her devotees and punishes those who perform adharma.

It is said that the Mother Goddess took this ferocious form to annihilate a group of people belonging to the Kelan Kulangara family. It seems the virgin form of the Goddess was harmed and destroyed by the male members of the Kelankulangara family. The virgin then shed her kind and innocent form and took the ferocious form of Bhadra, Kali and Mahakali, Bhadrakali, and Parameshwari. The unimaginably ferocious form of Kelankulangara Bhagavathi emitted fireballs from her eyes and killed all the male members of the Kelan Kulangara family.

She then destroyed the entire house of Kelankulangara. After destruction, she made the Tharavadu or house her abode.

It is believed that she is a powerful mantra murti and thus blesses devotees with divine powers, wealth, and magic. She protects the orphaned children.

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Her form is depicted with fire and ferociousness. It is believed that when in anger, she performs the ferocious Tandava dance. The person performing this theyyam can, at times, go uncontrollable.

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Lead performer standing Surrounded by other performers | PC: Priyanshu Shekhar

We took a train from Pondicherry to Payannur. We learned that on 13th April, the performance would start at 2:00 a.m.

We didnâ??t want to miss that, so we reached by 11:00 pm.

When the time was getting close and the performers were getting ready with makeup, our excitement grew more. We were disappointed when nothing happened at 2:00 a.m., and we waited till 5:30 a.m. Then the real thing started: two performers came out wearing huge headgear, and their makeup was so colourful, they started dancing with a yell. We were watching them with our mouths open, and my friend started taking their pictures.

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Lead performer in a different costume with fire in his hands | PC: Priyanshu Shekhar

After some time, a few performers lit some coconut bushes and smashed them on the feet of the performers. It was intense. After 15 minutes of dance, they started blessing people who were standing around them as people believe that God comes inside their body during Theyyam.

After the dance, we were silent for a while. Then I asked my friend about his experience, and he couldnâ??t say much; he just looked at me and said, â??It was a once in a lifetime experience,â?• and I couldnâ??t agree more.

â??*Written by Krishna Sukumaran*

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