‘Where have my groves gone?’

The unique pantheistic art form of the Theyyam faces increasing threats of gentrification and modernity, thus pitting the way for the destruction of the sacred groves where it was born.

THULASI KAKKAT

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Where have my groves gone?

It was not a story told at the wedding of Periya Bhagavathi. It was not a folk tale that Periya Bhagavathi’s in-laws got the idea. It was not a ritual performed in the temple. It was nothing like that.

It was a story that the Kadayankathi and Pethalan obscured for generations by a feudal lord. It was a story that only a few villagers knew existed. They knew it because they had unmediated access to these deities when they came during the night. None dared disturb them.

It was a story that only the Kadayankathi and Pethalan — inhabit the ancient sacred groves of Kerala called kaavu. Each of these instances of tree-worship, animal worship, serpent-worship, ancestor-worship, spirit-worship, and the like, had a kaavu. Each was associated with a deity. Each was a sacred grove.

The aloof magnificence of the Theyyam deity was the forest shrine. The devotee had to access to these deities when they appeared the night. The presiding theyyams — the Theyyam deity — performed if the forest was cleared for purposes of development and modernity. This meant that the ritualistic art form that is a small part of the Theyyam cult, which is a part of the Theyyam deities, was being endangered.

But the Theyyam deity has to inhabit the area. The rituals are a symbiotic relationship between the Theyyam deity and the community. Each of these instances of worship in the kaavu have their myths and origin stories, but the ritualistic art form that is a small part of the Theyyam cult, which is a part of the Theyyam deity, has to inhabit the kaavu. The ritualistic art form has to inhabit the kaavu. The ritualistic art form has to inhabit the kaavu. The ritualistic art form has to inhabit the kaavu. The ritualistic art form has to inhabit the kaavu.

The ritualistic art form is ancient, traditional, and embodies the indigenous culture of the region. It is a reflection of the local culture and society, and it has been passed down through generations. It is a form of entertainment that is enjoyed by all. It is a form of art that is appreciated by all.

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