



# Kuthu Ratheeb performers of Malabar and Muhammad Haji's memory of experiences of Kondotti Nercha and its ritual of Kuthu Ratheeb:

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Experiences of Kondotti Nercha and its ritual of Kuthu Ratheeb in Muhammad Haji's memory: A time when lot of people from Malappuram, Kozhikodu, and Palakkad come enthusiastically to take part in Kondottinercha fills Muhammad Haji's memory of nercha experiences. Kondottinercha was started during the time of Shaikh Muhammad Shah Thangal. In the name of Muhammad Shah's preceptors Muhyudheen Abdul Khadir Jeelani, Mu I Nudhinchisthi Al Ajmiri, it was Muhammad Shah himself who started the nercha. During the nercha time, flags where the names of these two holy men are written are raised and thus the customs starts. Those who are of nearby region and those who are of far off regions come to participate in the nercha. On a special day with pettivaravu as a rally do they present Kuthu Ratheeb and reaches Kondotti Dargah. The flag pole where flag raising is done still exists there. When the flag is raised, from then on Quran recitation happens. In the name of Muhyudheen Shaikh and Mu I Nudhin Chisthi, the Mullas under the Taqiv in one month recites the entire Quran forty times and as a conclusion for that the Mureedhs (leaders) of the Shaikhs are invited and Khatam Dua convention (prayer convention) is done. In earlier days, it was in big Teak's wood that Kodimaram (flag pole) was. So that the place which is there is now known as 'Kodimarathingal'. In Mulliakurushi of Malappuram district also, Taqia (dargah) of Muhammad Shah's lineage is found. Because of the kodimaram (flag pole) in this dargah, in Mulliakurishi also a place called Kodimarathingal was originated and is now also sustained in the same name. Kondotti flag pole has both the big tree and young tree. When flags are newly raised, the younger tree is brought down and in that three flags are tied and are raised up. These flags which have size differences are tied up in the name of Muhyudheen Shaikh, Khwaja Mu I Nudhin Chisthi and Karam Ali Shah. If this can be called as main kodimaram (flag pole), there are flag poles as sub

branches. On the second day of nercha, flag pole in the back side of dargah (Kondotti people called the place where dargah is situated and the dargah as Kubbah) and in Melangadi, Kanjiraparamabu places also flag raising ceremony is done in the flag poles. Since sometime now, not only that flags are not raised but in some places, flag poles and kodithara (flag basement) have also become extinct. After raising the flag, people of all regions are invited to the practices of the nercha. After the death of Muhammad Shah, Ishtiaq Shah came as the leader. During his time, festivals of uroos which is seen in dargahs of northern India came. In order to proclaim the nercha which extends for four days, the practice of firing of gun also started in the time of Ishtiaq Shah. After the revolution occurred in the time of Muhammad Shah in Kondotti, the Thangal family holds the cannon. Madah songs where poets and singers of southern India take part and the question-answer games of language scholars from Tamil Nadu were also staged. With time, luxury came into nerchas and cracks started happening to the belief system of the nerchas. In the Thangal family, in Muhammad Shah's lineage, the ones who are selected as leaders are called as 'Sthanimar'. When Sthanimar encouraged the luxury and so on of the nerchas, Kondotti people were drawn in for nerchas. With merchants with different types of home machineries, advertising companies with comedians, singers in vehicles illuminated with electricity, circus, zoo, magic, swinging machine etc., the kondottinercha has become a carnival. The festival later came to be known as harvest festival, farming festival, religious companionship festival etc. Also. It is with the pettivaravu from Vellaratta, which is nearby place of Kondotti, that the events of second day end. In the pettivaravu of nearby places, Kuthu Ratheeb is presented. Along with the rally, Kuthu Ratheeb is conducted and goes till Kondotti dargah (kubbah). In rallies, Kuthu Ratheeb where many people stab using knives happen. Kuthu Ratheeb is presented even after reaching the Nercha place. In



the third or fourth day, the pettivaravu from Omannur comes. That time Muhammad Haji and group had presented Kuthu Ratheeb. Pettivaravu comes from places like Podiyattu, Pullara, Ettthara, Valluvasthram, Mongum, Morayur, Musliarangadi, Nediyririppu, Peravanna, Kadungalloor, Kuzhimanna, Valyaparambu, Kottappuram, Kolathur, Velloru, Kumminiparambu, and Puliyanparambu. Kuthu Ratheeb and other feats which make people wonder gets together at Kattakuthipadam (a place near Kondotti). In order to inform that they have come, people are sent to Taqia. When information is received, the representative of Thangal gets on top of a horse and with the accompaniment of chenda (a percussion instrument) invites each nerchavaravu in to the Kubbah (dargah). People of each land give rice, money and other stuffs they have collected to Thangal or the representative of Thangal. The place where rice is given is called 'Bandarakudil'. Starting from Arabic month 13<sup>th</sup>, on 17<sup>th</sup> morning ten o'clock from Swami Madom (Chunkam- name of the place) when the varavu comes, it marks the end of nerchavaravu. The last rite of nercha is taking the sandal. Mureedhs (leaders) grind the sandal on the floor of the Kubbah inside the Taqiaya, rose water is sprinkled in it and the sandal is poured into plates and the vessel is closed and is given to the representatives. The clothes for covering the makhbara (tomb) of Muhammad Shah are sprayed with scents and are kept safe in a plate and Thangal's representatives bring them to Valya Maliyekkal house. After that, Thangal and the representatives of the Mureedhs of Thangal's family conducts a prayer in the Taqia and starts to Valiya Maliyekkal house. Sandal, sugar and Muridha (1) which is made ready, is taken on head by Thangal and followers by chanting Dikrs and Swalath reaches the flag pole and does a small prayer there and moves with devotion to the dargah. In the dargah, prayers are done near the Makbara (tomb) of Shaikh Muhammad Shah Thangal. The old cover of Makbara is taken off and new blanket which is anointed with good scent is spread over. After that rose water is sprinkled upon those who are gathered there. When Cheerani (2) is distributed, Nercha comes to an end. As part of it, firing of three canons happens. The pettivaravu of Harijans is also very interesting one. The Chavittu kali and so on of Harijans happen during nercha days. In the leadership of Muslim old people, this varavu which happens with the complete cooperation of Thattan (goldsmith) community is called as Thattan's pettivaravu. Presently, however, because of inheritance conflicts between sthanidars, over seven

years did Kondottinercha and the Kuthu Ratheeb presentation in pettivaravu during these times became rare. In the aandunercha (yearly nercha) of Muhammad Shah, people of some locality may conduct Kuthu Ratheeb otherwise as well in these times, the presentation of Kuthuratheeb is becoming extinct. It is in Arabic month Rabee Ul Avul 14<sup>th</sup> that the aandu (yearly) nercha of Muhammad Shah happens. (Rabeeulauval is Arabic month).

1. A dish made of powdered fried wheat pathiri (a dish) and mixed with certain ingredients.
2. Sweet pastry and food items are Cheerani.

The pattern of Kuthu Ratheeb conducted by Arimbra Muhammad Shah. Another Kuthu Ratheeb performer is Arimbra Muhammad Shah. Arimbra which is a place near Kondotti is the place of stay of Muhammad Shah. Muhammad Shah is known in Kerala as Mammaisa. Arimbra Mammaisa is a believer based on the tariqat of Rifayi Shaikh. Kuthu Ratheeb ritual is practised in one's own house, his name is Muhammad Shah. Other than believing in god men, Arimbra Muhammad Shah respects the gods of all other groups. It's on the death day of Rifayi Shaikh that Arimbra Muhammad Shah does Kuthu Ratheeb. A black cloth which could be related to Shia practices was worn by him. On top of check mundu, it was tied on the waist. The date and time Arimbra Muhammad Shah chose for the practice and performance of Kuthu Ratheeb was not the date and time of Kuthu Ratheeb happens in Kondotti Dargah. Like that, there are differences in the presentation, methods and types of Kuthu Ratheeb ritual in different regions. The motives of believers also change. Based on these community beliefs, various forms of change happened in the presentation of Kuthu Ratheeb. Muhammad Shah of Arimbra chose the death day of Rifayi Shaikh. Like that, every Kuthu Ratheeb ritual practice has one holy day. To witness the Kuthu Ratheeb performance of Muhammad Shah, people of Arimbra and other places gather at night in Muhammad Shah's house. After Kuthu Ratheeb, the performance of Muhammad Shah starts. It is Arabana that Muhammad Shah used. It is elderly people about ten to twelve in number who were doing Arabanamuttu (beating of Arabana) with Arabana. Incense sticks are lit. Though there were people singing byths, it's by self chanting that Muhammad Shah reached the zenith of the performance. All the ones who come on Kuthu Ratheeb day are given Nerchachoru (cooked rice) by Muhammad Shah.



Impact of Kerala's indigenous culture in Kuthu Ratheeb. Kuthu Ratheeb ritual which is not conducted by a community or mosque also exists among Muslims of Kerala. The Kuthu Ratheeb of any land happens during night time. In the Kuthu Ratheeb that happens sometimes in parts of Palakkad, performers do the performance by using a green colour knot on the head. In the Kuthu Ratheeb conducted under the leadership of Abdul Nazar Rifayi in 2017 in Palakkad, this one difference could be seen. Differences can be seen in the presentation of Kuthu Ratheeb in accordance with the ideological differences and way of Tariqat among the Kerala Muslims. The indigenous culture of Kerala is incorporated by the Kuthu Ratheeb presentation of each region. The differences in presentation are depended on the influence of Kerala culture on the people of each land.

Ethnographical detail of Mundakkulam Vappu Haji: Mundakkulam is a place near to Kondotti. In Mundakkulam, there are famous Kuthu Ratheeb performers. One important personality among them is Vappu Haji. It is Vappu Haji's family that presents Kuthu Ratheeb. It is by running rice flour mill and other jobs that Vappu Haji runs his family. It was late in his life, at the age of fifty nine, that Vappu Haji received Bai ath to present Kuthu Ratheeb. Vappu Haji is also a trainer for Arabana Muttu. The experiences during performance time were able to be understood and communicated by Vappu Haji even very late in his life. Mundakkulam Vappu Haji presents Kuthu Ratheeb in all places of Malappuram and, thereby, challenges the constraints of old age

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