
Visualizing Yakshi in the Religious History of Kerala

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Abstract: *Yakshi is a female goddess associated with the fertility of earth, love and beauty. She probably originated with the early Dravidians but have subsequently been absorbed in to the imagery of Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism. She has been worshipped since pre historic times in Indian. The roles and functions of this deity went through dramatic changes over period of time. The cult is closely associated with the primitive mode of worship even before the development of philosophy and theological doctrines in the Hindu fold. This paper intends to analyse the development of Yakshi cult in Kerala and its prevalence in Kerala society. The cult points of this deity are placed along the land routes of trade leading from Karnataka and Tamil Nadu into Kerala. A detailed survey of the midlands and low lands of Kerala testifies that the cult points were located along the water highways and interior land routes starting from the Western Ghats to Arabian Sea. The cult is closely interlinked with the Gramadevatha concept and with folk deities.*

Keywords: Yakshi, Fertility, Cult Points, Jainism, Gramadevatha, Folk Deities, Kavu

Introduction

The word *Yaksha*, literally means somebody shining, may allude to human beings shining wealth and fame or superhuman beings shining with virtues. *Yakshi* may be regarded as the embodiment of feminine beauty. The terracotta and ivory statuettes featuring bejeweled female figures were produced and widely distributed throughout India. Similar figures were sculptured in stone, either independently or paired with male figures, and placed on exterior walls, gateways and railings of Buddhist monuments all over the Indian subcontinent. The figure's numerous ornaments and floral design symbolize abundance and prosperity. The common drapery and ornaments were a girdle round the hips, two types of bangles and bracelets in the forearms, plain and circular anklets over a thicker decorated anklets, pendulous earrings, scanty transparent clothing revealing the contours of her body. A circular pendant worn on her forehead has a prominent six petaled flower as its design. The lotus flower adorns most of her jewellery. A heavy, multi-chained necklace with a triangular pendant shaped like a lotus flower falls in between her breasts. Two more lotus forms protrude from the necklace immediately below each shoulder. Similar terracotta figures were discovered from Karle in western India, Kousambi in northern

India, in the sites of Bhokardan and Ter in central India (Caspers 1979; Dwivedi 1976). It is not clear whether these figures are Srilakshmi, the goddess of beauty, abundance and prosperity. *Yakshi* is also dressed and ornamented in the similar manner. A similar figure on a plaque is kept in the Asuthosh Museum, Calcutta (Saraswathi 1957). The female figure with an elaborate hair dress stands to front with her right hand akimbo and left hand stretched to her left pointing to a staff raising from a water reservoir and filled to a pole which is topped by a canopy over her head. On her feet is inscribed in Karoshti script as '*Yakshi Jirambi*', meaning the mother of jeera (cumin seed). On Paleographic ground, the inscription has been dated at 3rd century AD. The inscribed *Yakshi* clearly testifies to the concept of the prevalence of *Yakshi* cult in ancient India. One such terracotta figurine hailing from Temluk is kept in Asmolean museum in Oxford, Britain (Johnston 1988). Another terracotta plaque from Kosam is kept in the Indian museum, Calcutta. A sculptural representation of the *Yakshi* is unearthed from Didarganj, near Patna, has become the national artistic icon of India (Takurta 2002). Sculptural representation of this goddess has also obtained from different sites in Mathura, Amaravati, Haryana, etc. it is difficult to locate the exact chronology of the figures. However, by the beginning of first century AD, the colossal images of *Yaksha* and *Yakshi* disappear; small statuettes continue to be worshiped in the domestic sphere. The bulk of archeological evidences point to the popularity and antiquity of this cult.

Literary evidence also contributes to the *YakshiYaksha* tradition in the Indian subcontinent. The earliest reference to the word *Yaksha* is found in the *JaiminiyaBrahmana* where, 'however, it means nothing more than a wondrous thing' (Coomaraswamy 1971). In the later work we see them associate with Kubera (*Grahyasutra*). In the *Manavagrahyasutra*, *Yaksha* are considered as possessing spirit causing diseases to human being. In the *Satapathabrahmana*, Kubera is a *rakshasa* and the lord of robbers and evil doers. But coming to *Ramayana*, Kubera is seen as the lord of riches. However, ancient Indian literature, Hindu, Buddhist or Jaina is full of references to *Yaksha* as also to other spirits like *Naga*, *Apsara*, *Gandharva* and so on. These ideas and deities derive not from the iron tradition. "The mass of the people worshiped not of the abstract deities of priestly theology; but local genii, *Yaksha*, *Naga*, feminine divinities of increase and mother goddesses" (Shah 1953-54). These popular believes and cults were probably of non-Aryan origin, at least a large number of them appear to be Dravidian, non- Aryan or indigenous origin. Ananda Coomaraswamy (1971) also expressed the same view that Kubera and other *Yaksha* are indigenous, non-Aryan deities or genii, usually beneficent powers of wealth and fertility.

V. S. Agarwala has stated that the *Yaksha* cult gained strength during the Janapada period, the *Yaksha* cult established its authority over the whole people as find in the Pali and Ardhamagadhi literature (Agarwala1971). As matter of fact, the belief in the *Naga* and *Yaksha* was deep rooted in the soil. These deities were assimilated in the Hindu religion, and in this process of assimilation, a good deal of mutual borrowing took place.

When Buddhism originated as a challenge to the existing religious system, *Yaksha* and *Yakshi* were welcomed to the Buddhist faith. Buddhism never questioned the pre-existing cultic practices of the common people. The popular cult of *Yaksha* and the religion of Buddha had established a close relationship with each other so that the people accepted both religion and paid homage to both of them (Agarwala 1971). The earliest reference to a goddess of forest is found in Rigveda. This goddess, 'Aranyani' is echoing in the forest as the twinkling of a bell. Her arrival is followed by the sweet smell of flowers and passes through in the night; she has benign as well as uncanny quality. She may be the earliest representation of *Yakshi* in the Vedic literature (Kinsley 1987). The *Yakshi* shrine in *rajagriha* is mentioned in Mahabharatha. She is connected with different traditions with different names as Nanda, Shashti, Revathi, etc. the people of *rajagriha* painted her picture in their home in which she was surrounded by children. The Sabhaparva speaks of her as a blood thirst ogress; she was worshiped by offering flesh. In this tradition she was named as Jara. She joined the two split parts of the fetus of Jarasandha, the son of Brihadratha, the king of Magadha. It is Brihadratha who made the cult of Jara popular in Magadha as gratitude towards saving the life of his son (Agarwala 1970). Still then, Jara continued to conceal children.

When she was assimilated to the Buddhist religion, she was renamed as Hariti. When Buddha visited *rajagriha*, the people of *rajagriha* shared their fear about Hariti to Buddha. Buddha concealed her child and made her heart filled with motherly affection. Buddha preached her and she was converted to a protectress of children in the Buddhist order. Mathura developed to be a great centre for the worship of Hariti. Thus she became a trans-local deity for the Buddhists. Shrines to this *Yakshi* were not to be found in *rajagriha* alone, but wherever Buddhist monks travelled. "Hariti was an upasika, a lay devotee, who according to some accounts, attained the stage of *srothapatti*, thereby entering the direct path to liberation, an early Mahayana treatise even calls Hariti, a great Bodhisatva (Peri 1917). Thus Hariti was made portable local deity, a readymade institutionalized trans-local basis for localization. At the same time Hariti may have insulted monks from local religious pressures, she also aided in localizing a *sangha*.

A number of local deities and *Yakshi* were accommodated to the Buddhist order. But no other *Yakshi* has achieved the position of deity like that of Hariti. All others were accommodated as decorative motifs in the railing pillars of Buddhist reliquaries and monasteries. Vrikshaka, Dohadha and Shalabhanjika are some of these motifs indicating the *vrikshadevatha* or fertility goddesses. These motifs were elegantly decorated seminude figures grasping the branches of trees. It is a symbolic representation of fertility aspect. However these periods had not been raised to the realm of a worshiping deity (Coomaraswamy 1969).

A contemporary religious sect that had originated as a rival to the existing religious systems had also accommodated the worshiping deities of laymen. The Jainism welcomed the *Yaksha* and *Yakshi* as the protective deities or *sasanadevatha* to

theerthankaras. Their introduction to Jaina pantheon as attendant deities of the *theerthankaras* was due to the belief that the Jaina could not be approached for fulfillment of worldly desires, as he was himself detached from all bondages (Shah 1987). So, for the sake of attaining material benefits and to achieve the desires fulfilled these deities were accommodated secondary to *theerthankaras*. In the Jaina iconography, before the post-Gupta age, we do not find any *Yaksha* or *Yakshi* figures with *theerthankaras*. But from 7th century onwards, we obtain representations of *Yaksha* and *Yakshi* as *sasanadevatha* (Shah 1953-54).

The *Yaksha*, being the presiding deities of wealth and Jaina community being the merchants, they endeared themselves to the cult of *Yaksha* and appropriated them to the class of higher deities. Moreover, the influence of Hindu devotionism and the introduction of tantric cult paved way for the worship of *Yakshi* in the Jaina order. In the process of their evolution, the Jains developed their own institution, canons, and symbols for social appeal and popular attestation. By the 3rd century BC, the cosmopolitan and rationalistic outlooks were transformed due to royal patronage and vast number of followers. Three centuries after its formation, Jainism developed its own canons and concepts of the defied *theerthankaras* and other spiritual beings which became the central focus of the religion. They also developed a monastic tradition with a lineage of teachers after Mahaveera. They also developed a *sangha* system represented by the monks, nuns and laymen and it became a strong base for their religion (Champalakshmi 2011). Kerala being a part of early Tamilakam, received Jaina immigrants from Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Both Buddhism and Jainism gained wide popularity among trading communities and merchants. When Buddhist had established their settlements along the coastal towns, the Jains did not enter into the wider trade enterprises and networks of the period. They were confining to the interior trade routes and interior centres of exchange. The ruling families, rich merchant families, traders, craftsmen etc patronized Jainism. It was a period of intense trade activities, both inland and outside the state. The social base of Jainism was the trading community (Champalakshmi 2011).

But, post *sangam* age witnessed the decline of trade due to the development of a new agrarian order and the Kalabhra invasion. However, it did not affect the interior trade and the Jains were also little affected. By the post *sangam* period, Jainism gained considerable influence in the Tamilakam. Vajranandhi established Dravida Sangha in Madurai, which become a landmark in the history of Jainism in south India (Champalakshmi 2011). Moreover, the Jains adopted the temple as an institutional base for their survival as a socio-economic force in south India. The growth of agrarian organizations with its focus the temple, determine the faith of Jainism and made the Jains able enough to survive against the Bhakthi movement.

Jainism must have arrived in Kerala through Kasaragode, Wayanad, Palakad pass and Aruvamozhi pass. The Jaina temples and *bastis* were located along these trade routes. They dealt with the collection and sale of luxury articles like precious stones, beads,

pepper etc. When the mercantile communities settled in Kerala; they selected the hillocks and riverbanks for their establishment. The religious atmosphere of Kerala was also favorable for the Jains to accommodate themselves. The Brahmins occupied the upper strata of the society. The Brahmin religious system was imposed on a society which already possessed its own religious systems. This brought about a differentiation between Brahmin gods, the non-Brahmin deities and spirits (Lemerminier 1984). The *Nairs* were following a mixed system in which the Brahmin gods, the war goddess *Kottavai*, the *gramadevatas* and the serpents were worshiped. These deities worshiped in *kavus* and *kalaries*. The *kavus* and *kalaries* were the seats of the *Kottavai* and *Gramadevata*. The lower strata of the society including the *Ezhavas* worshipped the Kali, the cruel aspect of mother goddess. They followed Sakti worship too. It is expressed in a violent form including offerings of fish, meet, toddy, *mithuna* symbolizing the union of man with divine. The toiling class of the society – the *Pulayas* – was worshiping mother goddess and other supernatural beings.

In this context, Jainism underwent certain changes. The mother goddess being the prime deity of the laymen, the Jains also followed the goddess worship. Thus, they tended to exalt the *Yakshi*, who were regarded purely as the *sasanadevatha* to *theerthankara*. The installation of *Yakshi* images became very popular in south India, especially in Kerala. Some of the cave temples and *Yakshi* images installed in Kerala were the Thiruchenattu hill in south Travancore, and Kallil temple in Perumbavur, may be the best examples. The Jaina religious order mentions 24 *theerthankaras* and each one of them is having *Yaksha* and *Yakshi* as *sasanadevatha*. But only four *Yakshi* among them is commonly worshiped in Kerala namely Ambika, Padmavati, Chakreswari and Siddaika. Other *Yaksha* and *Yakshi* are not seen propitiated in Kerala. Moreover, the *Yaksha* cult did not gain popularity in the southern part of India.

The Jaina *acharyas* like Ajananthi, Aritanemi, Indranandi, Helacharya and the female devotees called Kurattiyar were responsible for propagating this cult in Tamilakam, including Kerala. The *Yakshi* cult became prevalent in Kerala by the 7th century A.D. the period of Cheras of Mahodayapuram was the golden period of Jainism in Kerala. The epigraphs, temple architecture and iconography prove this beyond doubt (Warrier 1974). P. B. Desai (1957) has made an elaborate study about the south Indian Jainism. Dr. Chambalakshmi (2011) has studied the history of Jainism and the centers in Tamil Nadu. Dr. M. R. Raghava Warrier (2012) and T. A. Gopinatha Rao (1992) were the authorities in Jaina *Yakshi* and their iconography. Based on their studies let us have a detailed survey of Jaina temples, structural temples, *kavus* and *tharas* having *Yakshi* as a deity of worship.

When we consider Jaina *bastis* (Table 1) for this purpose, we may group them as:

1. Dilapidated temples but have archeological evidences for its presence
2. Temples that are re-appropriated to Brahmanic fold
3. Temples used for the worship by the Jains also

Table 1: List of Jaina Temples those are categorized as per the Above Description

No	Name of Temple	Location	Description
1.	Manjeswaram temple	Kasaragode	The temple was dedicated to Parsvanatha. The features of <i>Yaksha</i> and <i>Yakshi</i> confirm that it belonged to 10 th century A. D. the five hooded serpent and the canopy denotes that the <i>Yakshi</i> is Padmavathi (Kramrisch 1970).
2.	Chathurmugha <i>basti</i> , Hosangadi	Bakramanjeswaram, Kasaragode	<i>Yaksha</i> and <i>Yakshi</i> images are discovered from here. The <i>Yakshi</i> has four arms and each hand possess a weapon. They belong to 9 th and 10 th century A.D. (Kramrisch 1970).
3.	Thalakkavu	Poothadi village near Pulpally, Sulthan Batheri. Wynad	Now this temple is used by the local people as a Bagavathi temple. Pillars are decorated with sculptures of <i>Yakshi</i> , <i>nagamandala</i> . The description obtained from here locate the date to 9 th century A.D. (Kurup 1974).
4.	Arepati	Located near Panamaram on the eastern bank of Panamaram river. Wynad	There is no trace of such a temple now. Record says that this <i>Chaithyalaya</i> was dedicated to Adinatha. This may be the <i>basti</i> at Madakki hill. A <i>Yaksha</i> and <i>Yakshi</i> image is expected to be here for whom 12 <i>kasis</i> were given in record. Neither this images were found here (Warrier 1976).
5.	Kidannanad Hannarudubidi	Sulthan Batheri. Wynad	Innes C. A. has reported about a dilapidated temple. The lime stone/ granite images were broken. A <i>nagamandala</i> pattern is inscribed on a pillar. Now this is under the department of archeology, government of Kerala (Inness 1908).
6.	Janardanagudi	Puthangadi in Punchavayal, Wynad	This was one of the beautiful granite temples born out of Jaina-Vaishnava assimilation. Both the Jaina elements of <i>theerthankaras</i> ,

		<i>dwarapalas, vidyadevi and ananthashayana</i> of the <i>vaishnava</i> element can be seen here. However the old temple built on granite slab and pillars are in a ruined position. Now this is a Hindu temple. An image seems to be that of Jwalamalini is found here (Warrier 2012).
7. Vishnugudi	Puthangadi in Punchavayal very close to Janardanagudi, Wynad	On the wall there is a figure of <i>Brahmayaksha</i> riding on horse with a sword. This <i>Yaksha</i> is the <i>sasanadevatha</i> of Sithalanatha. Another <i>Yaksha</i> is sculptured in the entrance of the Navaranga hall. It is <i>Garudayaksha</i> . Another pillar bears the sculpture of <i>Vijayayakshi</i> . There are <i>theerthankaras, vidyadevi, vinayaka, Yakshi, matsya, korma, varaha</i> etc. a beautiful <i>Yakshi</i> sculpture from this site is noteworthy but now it's not traceable (Warrier 2012).
8. Hosangadi	Manathavadi, Wynad	A new <i>basti</i> named Manathavadi <i>basti</i> or Adhiswara Swami <i>basti</i> is constructed here. The remnants of the old <i>basti</i> , a few stones slabs and pillars are scattered here. Pillar has the figure of <i>Kusmandiniyakshi</i> . She can be recognized from her cognizance, children (Mundakayam 2014).
9. Palakkunnu	Situated between Panamaram and Manathavadi, Wynad	As per a local tradition, there existed an old temple. It is destroyed during the Mysore invasion. No archeological evidence except the Varadur Jaladhara inscription (1684-85 AD) (Padmakumariyamma 2008).
10. Vennayode	Situated on the highway from Panamaram to Manathavadi,	Local tradition speaks of an ancient temple located here. The ruins of the dilapidated temple are used for reconstructing the present

	Wynad	temple dedicated to Santhinatha. One image of both Santhinatha and Adhinatha are found here. Images of <i>Yaksha</i> , <i>Brahmadeva</i> , and <i>Ambikayakshi</i> are found out from here (Warrier 1976).
11. Varadoor	This temple is near Panamaram, Wynad	The ancient temple was located on the top of Madakki hill. A white marble image of Ananthanatha and his <i>sasanadevatha</i> are found from the shores of Panamaram river. The Varadoor Jaladhara inscription is kept here. The inscriptions give us information about the dilapidated <i>bastis</i> of Wynad and their relation with Karkala, a famous Jaina <i>basti</i> in Karnataka (Padmakumariyamma 2008, 1986).
12. Pampra	Near Sulthan Batheri, Wynad	A <i>theerthankara</i> image and a female image are obtained from here. No idea about this image today (Unnithan 1966).
13. Eswarancode	18 km away from Palakad in the Palakad-Mannarkad route situated on the southern bank of Puliampullithode. Palakad	Images of Syama <i>Yaksha</i> , Jwalamalini <i>Yakshi</i> , <i>Yaksha</i> Dharanendra and Padmavati <i>Yakshi</i> , Brahma <i>Yaksha</i> , Parswanatha, chandrprabha <i>theerthankara</i> etc are discovered from here (Bhattacharya 1974).
14. Jainamedu (manikyapattanam)	Vadakkethara village in the banks of Kalpathi river. Palakad	The shrine is renovated several times and old evidences are lost. Innes C. A. has reported about this temple. The pearls and jewels marketed from here (Innes 1908).
15. Alathur <i>basti</i>	22 km away from Palakad. The compound is called Pallikulam at Kottapuram in the village Kavassery.	An idol of a <i>Yakshi</i> is found out, may be Padmavathi <i>Yakshi</i> . A broken image of female figure is found here which suggests another instance of the availability of <i>Yakshi</i> figure in the centre of Jainism in Kerala (Unnithan 1966).

		The images of the <i>theerthankaras</i> are the same, but the sculptures of <i>sasanadevatha</i> have no such rigid rules so depending on this, the ages of this sculpture can be determined. All the images of Alathur belong to 9th – 10th century A.D. (Kramrisch 1970).
16. Paruvasseri	Situated in village Kannampira on Thrissur-Palakkad route, Palakkad	The temple is at the top of a hill, now it is a <i>bhagavati</i> temple called Palliyara <i>bhagavathi</i>. The main deity in the <i>srikovil</i> is a <i>Yakshi</i>. Now it is covered with a metallic mask of Bhadrakali. A <i>theerthankara</i> image is installed outside the <i>srikovil</i>. Dr. M. R. Raghava warrier has identified the <i>Yakshi</i> as Jwalamalini and the <i>theerthankara</i> as Chandraprabha (Warrier 1978). But some scholars are identified the <i>theerthankaras</i> as Mahaveera. Dr. M. G. S. Narayanan identified this temple as Jaina centre (Narayanan 1966).
17. Kallil	Methala, 13 km south east of Perumbavoor. Ernakulam	This is an important cave temple in Kerala located on the top of a hill. There are three images. Two images are that of <i>theerthankaras</i> and third one is that of Goddess. It is made of <i>panchaloha</i>. Goddess is the main deity of the temple. The idol of Jaina <i>Yakshi</i> is behind the <i>panchaloha</i> idol. Hence the identity of the <i>Yakshi</i> is concealed. However, T. A. Gopinatha Rao has identified it as Padmavathi (Rao 1919). Stella Kramrisch also supports this view. But M. R. Raghava warrier considers the image as that of Siddhayika (Warrier 1978). There is no evidence regarding the age to which this temple is related. Being

		a simple structure, it is assumed to a period of 9 th century A. D. Stella Kramrisch, an authority is stone sculpture, remarks of the Kallil sculpture to be of 8 th century A. D. (Kramrisch 1970).
18. Thirucharanattumala	Chitharal, a village in Vilavancode taluk – south Travancore. The town Kulithura was a commercial centre open to water transportation	The figure of <i>Yakshi</i> and <i>theerthankaras</i> are carved on a polished surface. A beautiful sculpture of Ambika <i>Yakshi</i> with two children on her right side is seen here. Her right hand is in <i>varadamudra</i> , left hand is hanging freely. She has a crown on her head and big <i>kundalas</i> on her ear lobes. In the right side a lion is shown. The figure is standing on a lotus (Desai 1957). From the inscription it is evidenced that the temple was built in the 9 th century A. D. the main deity of the temple from the very beginning is Devi. The inscription mentions her as Thirucharanattu Pattaria (Padmakumariyamma 2008). The feminine gender of Pattarar. Another inscription mentions the <i>devi</i> as Varasundari (Rao 1923). The image of Padmavathi is beautiful – right hand is lifted and left hand is resting on her hip. The image also wears crown and ear ornaments. There is a controversy regarding the <i>Yakshi</i> image. T. A. Gopinatha Rao identifies her as Padmavathi (Rao 1919). P. B. Desai rightly identifies the <i>Yakshi</i> as Ambika. The lion, the female attendant and two children are Ambika's cognisance (Desai 1957). However the temple is re-appropriated to Hinduism.
19. Nagaraja temple	Located in Tamil	The image of theerthankaras and

	Nadu but once a part of Kerala. Nagarkovil	<i>Yakshi</i> Padmavathi is present here. The <i>Yakshi</i> is sculptured on the pillar of <i>mahamandapa</i> . The standing images are sheltered by five hooded cobra, now this is a Hindu temple dedicated to Aadisesha and his consort Naga <i>Yakshi</i> (Kramrisch 1970).
20. Neelamperoor	15 km to the south of Kottayam town, Kottayam	<i>Yakshi</i> is holding the mirror and applying <i>tilaka</i> with her right hand finger. Right leg is resting on an aracanut tree. During festivals, the <i>Yakshi</i> is taken out for procession. The Kukudasarpa is over the head of the image. This is identified as Padmavathi <i>Yakshi</i> . M. R. Raghava warrier quotes the <i>dhyanasloka</i> of Neelamperoor Bhagavati and concludes that the temple is a reappropriated Jaina temple. “ <i>Namami yakshim dhavalambaradhyam</i> ” (Warrier 1974). This is a strange image found only at Neelemperoor.

The ancient Jaina *basti* with the images of *theerthankaras* and *YakshiYaksha* could be seen even today practically all over the hilly parts of Tamil Nadu and in the highlands of Kerala and Karnataka. Panchapandavan Malai in north Arcot district, Ginjee hills in the south Arcot etc are famous for its rock-cut caverns. Tirucharanattu Malai in Kanyakumari district, Kallil near Perumbavoor, Kerala are already mentioned above. “Thus the percolation of Digambar Jain traditions though the followers Jain *acharya* Badrabahu is traceable from the lowest stratum of ancient Dravidian society (John 1974).

From the 8th century A.D the jains had to face vigorous challenges from various corners – mainly from the Hindu revivalist movements. The religious persecution from the Pallava king Mahendravarman forced the jains to move to the hinterlands. The Jain centres were confined to the trade routes and water ways of Kerala. The Thiruvalla Changanassery region lying in the water high ways have a number of *kavus* which are non Brahmin in their structure, rites and rituals. The river Manimala acts as a link between Western Ghats on the eastern side and the Arabian Sea in the west. The Manimalayar – Pampa and Achankovil river belt have been famous for pepper and other spices. The highland region provided different forest products. The rivers helped the transportation of commercial good to Arabian Sea and a wide system of

inland and overseas trade developed from the time immemorial (Joseph 1997). Relics of Megalithic culture like granite cellar with rusty remaining of an iron lamp, large number of burial urns etc was found out along the course of Pampa and Manimala rivers and their tributaries. A number of antiquarian objects like the foundation of old circular shrines and quadrangular houses that got buried with the advances of time and non use of the same (Joseph 1997). All these suggest that there were settlements of traders and there existed wide markets where overseas exchanges of commodities were conducted. A number of *Sasta*, *Naga* and *Yakshi* temples of this region points to the fact that there had a good number of Jaina and Buddhist followers in this region. A *granthavari* of 15th century mentions Panayannarkavu like Mahodayapattanam. This mention may be about a market town flourished in this region. A number of *kavus* connected with relics of such markets and *Yakshi* tradition are found along the river coasts of this locality (Table 2).

Table 2: List of *kavus* Connected with Markets

No.	Name	Location	Available Information
1	Tiruveran <i>kavu</i>	Tiruvalla in Pathanamthitta	A famous market known as Kaval Kambolam flourished here. A reference is given in Unnuneeli Sandesham about this market. A Sanskritised deity with Mahamaya as supreme deity. The <i>Yakshi</i> was believed to be discarded in a well with a granite slab over which the Bhagavathy or a Brahmin goddess was consecrated. However <i>Yakshi</i> is worshipped together with the goddess as Bhuvaneswary. Both this goddesses are venerated and worshipped in Srivallabha temple Tiruvalla, Parthasarathy Temple Aranmula and Satha temple Sabarimala (Nair 1981).
2	Panayannar <i>kavu</i>	Parumala	Ancient trading centres might have existed here, Mahodayapattinam meaning market town (Nambiar 1997). The connection of the legendary priest Kadamattathu Kathanar may lead us to infer the presence of Syrian Christian traders in this market. The main deity is goddess Kali. Two <i>Yakshi</i> are consecrated here. This is a primitive

			mode of <i>kavu</i> without any features of a structural temple. Shakti worship existed here.
3	Muthuttu <i>kavu</i>	Situated in the Thiruvalla Changanassery road on a hill called Thappukad.	The deity is goddess of Kodungallur temple. Rurujith mode of worship is practiced. A kala <i>Yakshi</i> is consecrated in the jasmine pavilion. Sakthi worship was followed here. Once in 12 years a festival was conducted here and together with this festival a market was also conducted. Vasurimala is consecrated here which is related with Pattini cult.
4	Poruttu <i>kavu</i>	Situated in the Mallapally taluk on the banks of Manimlayar.	The main deity is Bhadrakali. The temple was in the midst of a dense forest. A <i>Yakshi</i> and a Naga <i>Yakshi</i> are consecrated here. The <i>Yakshi</i> is worshipped with shoe flowers for curing eye diseases. The rituals like Padayani and kettukazcha were conducted here. Once it was a non-brahmanic cult point but sanskritized later.
5	Chakkulathu <i>kavu</i>	Situated at Neerettupuram	The main deity is Parasakti. The temple premise was a dense forest. The Goddess was worshipped by tribes and later it was sanskritized, <i>Yakshi</i> is the <i>upadevatha</i> . The temple is famous for <i>pongala</i> and <i>naripuja</i> .
6	Chama <i>kavu</i>	Situated at Airanikulam, on the banks of Achankovil river.	A primitive cult point in the midst of forest. Rurujith mode of worship is practiced here. Later the idol was re-consecrated and sanskritized. A <i>Yakshi</i> who was the guardian deity of the forest was worshipped under a banyan tree. <i>Kettukazhcha</i> was conducted here. A market for the agricultural products is still conducted here with the Vishu festival.
7	Ayiroor Puthiya <i>kavu</i>	This <i>kavu</i> is on the banks of river Pampa	In The goddess is Kodungallur Bhagavathy. The reference about

		at Kaithakkody.	this <i>kavu</i> is found in the Mamapally Pattayam AD 974. Rurujith mode of worship was followed here. Srichakra <i>pooja</i> , human sacrifice and animal sacrifice were prevalent here. A <i>Yakshi</i> is consecrated here in the western side of the Thidapally. A market is conducted here in connection with Bharani festival. A variety of products like jar made of china clay etc are sold here.
8	Valli <i>kavu</i>	Chengannur Taluk in Puliyur village. In the revenue records it is named as Palli <i>kavu</i> later became Valli <i>kavu</i> .	Main deity is Bhadrakali. <i>Yakshi</i> consecration is in the northern side of the <i>mukhamandapam</i> just like Kodungallur temple, the Goddess is consecrated in the secret chamber. Sakti worship is followed here. The <i>kavu</i> is inside a dense forest. Padayani, Kalampattu etc are the common rituals. Human sacrifices and animal sacrifices were prevalent here.
9	Kalkullathu <i>kavu</i>	Situated in the Vazhapally near Chengannur.	Bhadrakali is the main deity. Kalampattu and Mudi yettu are the rituals still conducted here. Marana <i>Yakshi</i> and Kala <i>Yakshi</i> are worshipped as <i>upadevatas</i> . Mode, structure and rituals point out that this was a primitive <i>kavu</i> and later made sanskritized.
10	Vettadi <i>kavu</i>	Situated in Puzhavathu near Changanaserry in the banks of river Pampa	Main deity is Bhadrakali. <i>Yakshi</i> is consecrated in the northern side of the compound wall. The lower caste people of the society were conducting some rituals like Mannarpattu here. Thukkam, Kuthiyottam etc were the other rituals. In olden days human sacrifice and animal sacrifice were prevalent here.
11	Azhakiya <i>kavu</i>	<i>Kavu</i> is situated on the banks of Pampa at Umayathukara	Main deity is Kodungallur Bhagavati. <i>Yakshi</i> is consecrated in a small shrine in North western

			corner of the <i>sreekovil</i> . Inside the main shrine there is a well covered with a stone slab in which the primitive deity is discarded and the sanskritised goddess is consecrated. Padayani, Kalampattu etc are the main rituals. No Brahmin mode of worship is followed here.
12	Cheraparak <i>kavu</i>	The location is at Kurichi near Changanassery.	Main deity is Bhadrakali and the upadevata is a <i>Yakshi</i> consecrated under a peepal tree outside the compound wall and another <i>Yakshi</i> is seated in the northern side of the temple. A Channel is flowing by the side of temple connecting Kottayam and Changanassery. Thookkam, Kuthiyottam, Fowl sacrifice, etc were conducted here.
13	Utramel <i>Kavu</i>	The temple was formerly known as Rudhiramalar <i>kavu</i> . Located at Kavumbhagam in Thiruvalla.	The main deity is Bhadrakali. There are several traditions associated with the <i>Yakshi</i> and this temple. There is A <i>Yakshithara</i> in the temple premises. Once upon a time bloody sacrifices were conducted here. Kala <i>Yakshi</i> is worshipped here.
14	Panachi <i>kavu</i>	Situated in Kottayam District near Chingavanam. Famous as Dakshinamookambika	The main deity is Saraswathy. Tradition says that the temple premises were covered with dense forest and the idol was protected by a ' <i>Yakshi</i> ' who was doing sentry duty in the forest. When the goddess was accommodated in the temple; the <i>Yakshi</i> was also consecrated with rituals and worship. Now, the <i>Yakshi</i> is first saluted before venerating the goddess.
15	Peringaraperoor <i>kavu</i>	Naduvelichira in Kavumbhagam	A Kala <i>Yakshi</i> is consecrated. Tradition connected with the temple states that this <i>Yakshi</i> is force deity.
16	Puthukkulangara Bhagavathy temple	Near Thiruvalla	<i>Yakshi</i> is <i>upadevata</i> and she is worshipped as Puthukkulangara <i>Yakshi</i> .

17	Nenmeli <i>kavu</i>	Thiruvambadi near Thiruvalla	The main deity is Bhadrakali and <i>Yakshi</i> is the <i>upadevata</i> .
18	Kadalimangalam	Venpala near Thiruvalla	<i>Yakshi</i> worship is prevalent here. Padayanikkolam is represented here. Kala <i>Yakshi</i> is worshipped here.
19	Manjadikkara	Vazhappally near Changanassery	Main deity is Bhagavathy; <i>Yakshi</i> is <i>upadevata</i> .
20	Kadappra devi temple	Mannar near Thiruvalla	The worshipping deity is Mahalakshmy. But the idol is having a resemblance to Shalabhanjika motif.
21	Durga temple Alamthuruth	Kavumbhagam near Thiruvalla	The main goddess is Durga; sub deity is <i>Yakshi</i> .
22	Pattambalam Bhadrakali temple	Mannar near Thiruvalla	The main deity is Bhadrakali; but two <i>Yakshi</i> are consecrated here as <i>upadevatas</i> . One is seated in the eastern side of the temple. This is Maya <i>Yakshi</i> . The other is seated in the North western side.
23	Oorumadam Bhadrakali temple	Mannar	<i>Yakshi</i> is worshipped as <i>upadevata</i> .
24	Thelliyur <i>kavu</i>	Situated in the central Travancore region.	An ancient <i>kavu</i> with Rurujith mode of worship. A Kala <i>Yakshi</i> is worshipped here. The goddess is in the most terrible form in the garland of human head. Padayani and Kalampattu are conducted here. The Cheruparak <i>kavudevi</i> is closely related with Ambalappuzha Sreekrishna temple.

(Interviews, Survey and field works conducted by the author in connection with the PhD thesis, 2001-2004)

These data's are collected from a locality inter connected with a network of rivers in the central Travancore area. Furthermore cult points, *mandapams* and *tharas* may be found in the interior of this region. It is interesting to note that some of the Namboodiri *illams* of this locality is worshipping *Yakshi* and *Gandharvan* as their family deities or protective gods (Unnikrishnan 1955). The Kurichi Mecheri *illam* is having the consecration of a Naga *Yakshi* and a Sundara *Yakshi*. Another family, Cheruvalli Madam worship both *Yakshi* and *Gandharvan*. The Mangattaya family temple accommodates Aiswarya *Yakshi* and Aiswarya *Gandharvan*. The Niranasseril family

temple is also having the consecration of *Yakshi* and *Gandharvan*. *Yakshi* worship is not confined to the *kavus* and family temples. Major structural temples of Kerala have accommodated *Yakshi* as *upadevatas* (Table 3). In some temples, only a conceptualization is made under a tree or as portraits on the temple walls. Most often anionic stones are used for the deity or a lamp is lighted as dedication to the deity.

Table 3: List of Some Structural Temples Having *Yakshi* Worship

1	Sreevallabha temple, Thiruvalla	Being one of the major Brahmin settlements, the <i>Yakshi</i> cult is accredited or sanskritised by accommodating 2 <i>Yakshi</i> in the entrance of the temple. In the Devaswam records they are described as <i>Maya Yakshi</i> and <i>Ayala Yakshi</i> .
2	Sri Padmanabha temple, Thiruvananthapuram	A portrait of <i>Sundara Yakshi</i> is established here.
3	Mahadeva temple, Vaikom	<i>Yakshi</i> is accommodated in a small shrine in the south western corner of the temple. A portrait of <i>Sundara Yakshi</i> is also kept here.
4	Siva temple, Ettumanoor	A rock cut idol of <i>Sundara Yakshi</i> in a pillar in the North eastern corner of <i>mukhamandapa</i> .
5	Subrahmanya temple, Udayanapuram	A small shrine is dedicated to the <i>Yakshi</i> .
6	Salagramam Siva temple, Vazhappally	In the Northern side of the temple, <i>Ayala Yakshi</i> is concentrated on a <i>thara</i> .
7	Subrahmanya temple, Perunna, Changanassery	The <i>Yakshi</i> is consecrated in the entrance of the temple.
8	Mahadeva temple, Udayamperoor	<i>Yakshi</i> is consecrated in the South western corner of the temple. An aniconic stone is the consecration.
9	Subrahmanya temple, Kulathupuzha	A rock cut idol of <i>Sundara Yakshi</i> is found here.
10	Thuravur temple	Wooden idol of <i>Sundara Yakshi</i> .
11	Kaviyur temple	Wooden idol of <i>Sundara Yakshi</i> .
12	Trikkodithanam	A portrait of <i>Sundara Yakshi</i> is seen here.
13	Triprayar	A portrait of <i>Sundara Yakshi</i> is kept here.
14	Rajaraja temple, Talipparamba	A wooden idol of <i>Sundara Yakshi</i> is found here.
15	Panayannarkavu Bhagavathy temple, Pazhavathur	The mural paintings include in the portrait of a <i>Sundara Yakshi</i> .
16	Sarkara Devi temple, Chirayinkeezhu	A separate consecration of <i>Yakshi</i> as <i>upadevata</i> .

17	Chottanikkara Bhagavathy temple	Local tradition connects the <i>Yakshi</i> with this temple. In the South western corner Naga <i>Yakshi</i> consecrated.
18	Ameda Bhagavathy temple, Udayamperoor	The goddess resembles Padmavathi <i>Yakshi</i> in the Jaina tradition sitting under a canopy of five hooded cobra, holding snakes in her hands.
19	Sabarimala temple	<i>Yakshi</i> and Erankavil Bhagavathy are worshipped near the Malikappuram temple.
20	Aaranmula Pardhasaradhi temple, Aaranmula	<i>Yakshi</i> is worshipped together with Erankavil Bhagavathy.
21	Vadakkumnatha temple, Trissur	A folk literature ‘Aithyamala’ connects a <i>Yakshi</i> tradition with this temple and a Brahmin from the Venmani <i>illam</i> . A beautiful portrait of the <i>Yakshi</i> in the wall of this temple is evoked by the Brahmin youth of Venmani <i>illam</i> and <i>Yakshi</i> shares sex with him and later became his concubine for long years.
(Interviews, Survey and field works conducted by the author in connection with the PhD thesis, 2001-2004)		

Conclusion

The acceptance of *Yakshi* as *upadevata* in the structural temples of medieval Kerala points to the fact that the popular cult of *Yakshi* has been accommodated and assimilated to the elite Sanskrit tradition.

The tutelary deity ‘*Yakshi*’ is inter-linked with the folklore tradition and the *gramadevata* or village goddess. “The folklore tradition, connected with village deities will serve to throw some light on the religious ideas of the people, the antiquity of the village deities themselves, the struggles that have taken in former years between the primitive goddess and the more modern cults of Siva and Vishnu and the efforts made in the later times to connect the ruder village deities with the more dignified gods and goddess worshipped by the Brahmanas” (Whitehead 1921). The main function of the *gramadevata* is the protection of the village. They have no relation to the universe or the forces of nature as Siva or Vishnu. In most of the South Indian *kavu* as Panachikavu, Chakkulathukavu, Erankavu etc, the *Yakshi* is doing sentry duty to the main deity and the *kavu*. As a part of the linking of the ruder village deities with the more dignified gods and goddesses worshiped by the Brahmanas, these primitive deities the ‘*Yakshi*’ is deteriorated to the position of a sub-deity or *upadevata*.

The *Yakshi* cult is also related with the spirit worship, ancestor worship and fertility cult. The primitive people “believed the world to be peopled by a multitude of spirits, good and bad, who were the cause of all unusual events and especially of diseases and

disasters". Hence, the object of their religion was to propitiate these innumerable spirits. It is for the escape from the wrath of these spirits. Their religion did not advance beyond a crude animism and belief in the village deities (Whitehead 1921).

The belief in spirits leads them to propitiate the females who have died violent or untimely deaths, such as death before marriage or death in child birth, etc are worshipped after death. The common belief is that those who die without enjoying the worldly pleasures, disturb the human beings out of jealous and frustration. Such spirits are pacified and propitiated and gradually become the protectors of the locality and people provide offerings and rituals to the deity. Neeli cult, Mariyamman cult, Yellamma cult and Ambika *Yakshi* under the Jaina tradition, etc are examples to this genre. According to A. K. Ramanujan, "It is as much a theory of emotion as a theology together they make a special recognizable genre, the myth of a village goddess" (Blackburn and A. K. Ramanujan 1986).

As far as female deities are concerned, the Vedic religion consider them as subordinates or consorts to the male deities – Siva and Vishnu; Lakshmy as the consort of Vishnu. Kali – Parvathy as the consort of Siva, etc. But in the old Dravidian religion, they worship the female principle of nature. The Dravidian deities were the goddesses of an agricultural people. All over the world, the agricultural deities are female. Moreover the idea of fertility is naturally connected with the female (Whitehead 1921). The *Yakshi* being a primitive deity is closely connected with the fertility cult. Hence in Indian mythology they are portrayed as tree spirits with corpulence and sensuous appearance. In the Kerala folklore context, *Yakshi* is female spirits with vampire image and detailed with immense sex.

The survey report and archaeological relics point to the fact that the cult of *Yakshi* is deep rooted in Kerala society. Accommodation, assimilation, appropriation etc paved her way to a Sanskritised culture worshipping shoulder to shoulder with the deities of a greater tradition.

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