

Daughters of Tradition and Negotiation: A Culture-Gender Critique of Devakooth

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by

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Abstract

Devakkooth, also known as the dance of the goddess, occupies a distinctive position within the patriarchal strictures of *Theyyam*, as the sole ritual performance exclusively performed by women. This thesis titled “Daughters of Tradition and Negotiation: A Culture-Gender Critique of Devakkooth” examines the negotiation, resistance, and subversion inherent in the performance of Devakkooth within the broader *Theyyam* tradition. Employing a multifaceted approach, the research addresses several key objectives. Firstly, it analyzes the power dynamics inherent in *Theyyam* performances by dissecting the ideological underpinnings of associated myths. Through structural analysis, the study uncovers the beliefs and power structures shaping the ritual landscape. Secondly, it examines the female body as a locus of cultural expression within Devakkooth, exploring how gender is inscribed, contested, and redefined within performative spaces. Thirdly, the research investigates whether Devakkooth systematically raises subversive inquiries through its enactment, identifying moments of resistance, negotiation, and subversion within ritual practices. Additionally, the study explores the contemporary landscape of Devakkooth, examining its status amidst disruptions such as the pandemic. Utilizing interviews and fieldwork, it explores the intersection of the socio-political upheavals with ritual practices, documenting the evolution and adaptation of Devakkooth over time. Finally, the thesis contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage by digitally archiving Devakkooth, ensuring its longevity and accessibility. The thesis consists of three chapters: "Devakkooth: An Overview," "Gender and Devakkooth," and "Ruptures and Resurrections: Performance during Hard Times," each providing a comprehensive exploration of Devakkooth's cultural significance, gender dynamics, and resilience amidst socio-cultural and political challenges. Through its interdisciplinary approach, this research enriches our understanding of Devakkooth as a site for cultural transformation and preservation within the broader landscape of ritual arts.