

Ages come and go getting embedded english literature essay

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



As the wheel of time turns, Ages come and go getting embedded in the memories of people. As memory fades it becomes legend, and legend fades to myth and even myth becomes long forgotten. Legends are that one element that seems to permeate throughout cultures. To truly textually understand an art form it must be examined in a way keeping the socio-political contexts of the time in mind. Theatrical forms tend to be based on a text for its performance. The text serves as a roadmap of the play. The proscenium (formalized theatre space)[1] theatre productions, is based on a written text whereas the folk theatre gives importance to the oral text. Chavittu Nadakam is a combination of both these theatre traditions. The texts were documents and were handed down through the centuries. The written texts are still not completely taken into account. The plot itself isn't altered, but the way the stories are told differs in different regions. The text is seen to develop at three levels- the author's levels, the performer's level and the audience level[2]. These texts need to be examined through different perspectives. The composition of a text is extremely important, as there are always discrepancies when the text gets translated into a performance. Three things to keep in mind while doing this: Chavittu Nadakam text as chuvadis[3] are kept as records, the directors as aasaans become an important part of the transliteration of the text to the stage. The performance texts act as a symbol of the plot of the play being intertwined within various different themes. The themes act as a cultural reflection of the text and also as a looking glass into both the past and the future. The authors of the previous texts remain anonymous. It is difficult to tell exactly who the authors were. Sabeena Raphy tries to answer this question by

referring to Chinna Thambi Annavi who had composed the earlier dramas of Chavittu Nadakam. In her opinion, Birasina (pronounced as: Brijina) was the first drama, which deviated from the norm in terms of the content of Chavittu Nadakam plays. The earliest drama like Charlemagne only dealt with the heroic deeds, honor and put a lot of emphasis on war. But, Birasina deals with the story of a woman and her struggle to behave in a moral, devout way against the treachery of 'Alwan' the villain. In the last part, the truth and chastity prevails. This text gives great importance to an upright Christian way of life with emphasis on spiritual and moral chastity. The oral tradition and Sabeena Raphy both mention Chinna Thambi Annavi as the earliest author/aasaan of these plays. Charlemagne and Brijina were originally supposed to have been written in Tamil sometime in the early 17th century. There are about seventy plays in the Chavittu Nadakam literature spectrum. There are texts that are imitations and re interpretations. In recent times, the early texts like kaarlmaan are split into four texts: (1) Cinna rooltoon naatakam or koccu rooltoon (2) Parimarude Maranam (the death of peers) (3) Aanjellikka naatakam (4) Kaarlmaan (plorippus baagam) because earlier kaarlmaan naatakams were performed for their original duration i. e. fifteen days as there seemed to be no time constraint. There are many versions that have been modified to suit different geographical areas for kaarlmaan naatakam (Charlemagne). Many people have tried to claim the original authorship of some of the texts based on either geographical location or due to family ancestry. Though if one were to closely examine these claims, one would realize that they are merely scribes who transcribed these plays[4]. The ownership by the annavi over the text

created the conflict of making more versions of the same story for a single theme, because the annavis from different locations needed a text each for their use and to lay a claim on owning a slice of history. As for example kaarlmaan naatakam has more than four local varieties.[5]Latter scripts seem to be a creole of Tamil and Malayalam . The recent scripts are written wholly in Malayalam. Unlike present times where authorship has been claimed and confirmed, it is very hard to verify who were the authors of earlier texts due to the fact that was written on palm leaves and thus were easily destroyed. Thus many of the stories have been labeled as being written by anonymous. The aasaans guard these scripts closely as their own property inherited by them traditionally or orally transmitted through generations. The most performed play is kaarlmaan naatakam; the others are St. George naatakam, St. Sebastin naatakam, Marthoma Sandesham (St. Thomas The Apostle)[6], taaviidum gooliyaattum or taaviidum turbuutavum, viirakkumaaran caritam. The early themes consist of stories of brave kings, valor and brave soldiers. It then morphs to the piety of various saints and the importance of living a life of a God fearing Christian. Only after this, the performance text evolved into stories with social and moral lessons. These days there are texts, which consist of the puranic themes of Hindus[7]. This pattern of scripts implies religious propaganda, the ambitions of conversion and its development into the making of Kerala Christian society. The indigenous people adapted and personalized the texts by taking stories and homogenizing them to suit their culture and reflect their own society as opposed to purely biblical or purely European history. European influences upon this theatre form can be seen at three broad levels: The conventional

level, the thematic level and the evolution level. At the Conventional level both, Kerala Christian theatre and European theatre were almost said to be completely deviating from a naturalistic presentation and characterization, 'authenticity' did not seem to be the aesthetic goal. Rather as comes with drama, the goal seemed to be exaggeration and fitting into a conversion propaganda. The story-telling is basic, while the style and symbolic gestures form the central features of its characteristic technique. The stories have many layers which create a weave of various textures so different themes can occupy the same space. The themes of these dramas used to demonstrate a pre-determined wisdom which remains valid through time and place. Performances are seasonal, it is purely a male performance, belonging to a rural community. To study the evolution of the art form the progress over the ages need to be closely examined. The evolution of Christian theatre in Kerala took place only after the 15th century[8]. Along with the strictly religious liturgical plays, there were a lot of local, folk traditions which contributed to the development of the medieval Christian theatre. The progress of this theatrical form can be traced from the mimic representations of the ministers and jugglers through the combat traditions, dancing games and church ceremonies. The various threads in the thematic as well as traditional growth of Medieval drama can be compared with the various stages in the transition and continuum of this art form. If one were to observe and compare the evolution of theatrical themes of medieval Europe to the evolution of themes in Kerala there are many common threads and intersecting phases. There were about seven phases[9] in traditional Christian stories in Europe where parallels can be drawn with the evolution of

performance text of Chavittu Nadakam in Kerala. In Europe during the first phase there were liturgical plays with its ceremonial ritual observances while in Kerala Christian there was a performance tradition with semitheatrical ritualistic round dances. In the second phase in Europe there was a surge of plays that feature miraculous deeds of the virgin Mary. It also features secular romances with religious associations, whereas in Kerala there was an initial phase of historical/legendary themes portraying the miraculous and adventurous deeds of brave Christian heroes. In the third phase in Europe there were plays based on historical events and on the life of Saints and biblical material. While in Kerala there was a surge of naatakams with Saintlore's and old testament themes. In the fourth phase of Europe there were plays based on morality with allegorical characters representing 'moral types'. Meanwhile in Kerala the later phase was going on with the aim of imparting Christian morality with the indigenous characters and stories. In the fifth phase in Europe there was an infiltration of secular themes and more focus was imparted to the value of entertainment. Kerala he was going through the same phase. In the sixth phase in Europe there was a decline of these stories the same as Kerala. In the seventh phases both Europe and Kerala had revival attempts of plays based on historical themes due to the grandeur portrayed in them. In Chavittu Nadakam, there are folk characters that have no direct relation with the themes but have certain dramatic purposes to highlight a story or to make it seamless in terms of symmetry for aesthetic purposes. These type of characters are divided into few categories[10], in the first one, the action includes killing of protagonist or the main character and ends with the resurrection of the same. The second

category shows the recurring figures or characters in a play in similar combinations but with lesser variations. In the third category, some plays have the same character but they showcase a reversal in the fortunes. In the plays there is a pattern of boast, challenge, counter-challenge, battle and submission between two warring parties to make it more theatrical. The themes consist of various sub themes that can be interpreted in many different manners. The same text also differs due to different writers, performers, and audience interacting at different points in history. The themes need to be looked at through the lens of historical relativity. Time and space were two of the determining components of the interactions with the various people involved, guaranteeing intersections and cross connections with the others involved in the art form. Based on the performance texts in this art form, themes can be classified into following five categories: HistoricalBiblicalReligiousSocialIndian History and Mythology

Historical

A historical theme can be defined as a text that is based on historical eventsHistorical though doesn't always translate to completely factual, in fact historical plays from this art form can be referred to as historical fiction. But the main crux of the story remains the same. The plays of this category proved to be the first and foremost among others in this art form. Almost all of them seem to be directly connected with the Christian history of medieval Europe. Since some of them seem to have little traits of factual characters according to recorded history, they can be considered in this section. Some of these plays were parts of epic narratives like the Charlemagne legends. The historical category also includes the Christian legends/mythology of

Western Europe and other parts of Christendom. This forms a part of the fictional stories, handed down by ancestors and accepted in its own settings as accurate history. It was important for the missionaries to create certain religious ceremony in order to endorse the Christian way of expression in accordance to the religious scriptures. Thus for this reason cultural activities and performances were deemed necessary. The early European medieval Christian theatre also shows the evolution of liturgical dramas to the miracle, mysteries and moralities from the pagan folk traditions of mimicry, combat and dancing games of the early agrarian society[11]. Early Christian missionaries in Kerala established a new performance tradition as a counter part to the existing religious traditions. They imbibed certain aspects from the existing traditions and incorporated their biblical themes and Medieval European theatre conventions. Some of the popular plays that can be considered historical are: 1)Kaarlmaan Naatakam2) Jeenoova Naatakam3) Alpoonsu naatakam4) Napoleon naatakam5) Lucina NaatakamCharlemagne or Kaarlmaan Naatakam is the story of ‘ Charles the Great’ first emperor of Rome. It was his responsibility as Emperor to protect his people and their religion. His army consisted of 12 sub-divisions each of which had their own Majors. These Majors were the historically famous ‘ Paladins’, and Charlemagne appointed his nephew Roland the leader of these ‘ Paladins’. He was also one of the few emperors who successfully abolished slavery. Later he and his Paladins managed to conquer Jerusalem, which was their main aim. Though after this victory in 778 A. D[12]he was betrayed by one of his own Paladins Ganelon, which led to the death of the rest of his Paladins including his nephew Roland. The story as it is told in Chavittu Nadakam is

divided into five parts[13]. In the first part, it is the story of the romance between the Charlemagne's sister and one of his ministers. It narrates the obstacles encountered by Berta (Charlemagne's sister) and her husband due to Charlemagne's disapproval of the match, and also tells us about the childhood of Roland who is Berta's son. In the next part the selection of the Paladins and the appointing of Roland as their leader is depicted. The third part describes the wedding between Angelica (the daughter of Emperor Abdul Rehman) and Roland. The fourth part of the story depicts the story of Baudouin (one of the Paladins) and his wife where the wife is kidnapped by another Paladin. It also describes how the wife overcomes the attempt and manages to kill him. In the fifth and final part of the story the adventures and conquests of the Paladins are chronicled and also the final blow is delivered where Ganelon betrays the Paladins which leads to their subsequent death. Charlemagne includes themes of war, bravery, honor and love. All these elements are normally considered essential to the plot of any epic. A play like this also showcases the rewards one would get if one were to become a good Christian. Many would argue, that for the missionaries to make these stories popular was a weapon of conversion propaganda. Professor Chandra Dasan opines that even the tensions showcased between the Christians and the Muslims is a reflection of the tensions occurring in Kerala between Christians and Muslim landowners due to conflicting business interests.[14]A story like Angelica showcases the treatment and condition of women at the time of the narrative. The story showcases her marriage to the valiant Roland and her quest for greatness by association. They also show her to be the catalyst for the numerous battles that ensue and in the aftermath she

repents. Clearly in this play it is indicated that the best quality a woman can have is to be god fearing. This is also reflected in some parts of biblical texts for example:" Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: But a woman who fears the Lord, She shall be praised.[15]

Biblical:

These are plays derived from stories/themes from the Old Testament and the New Testament. Since most of the earlier plays were from the Old Testament and do not entirely stay true to the Bible, there were a lot of linked stories of other characters and fictitious elements in these plays. Most of these stories were effective means of indoctrinating the previous non-Christians. These plays helped the Christians to familiarize themselves with biblical stories. Plays from the Old Testament are still popular today as they too incorporate themes of valiance, bravery, generosity, battle etc. An example of a typical biblical story would be that of David and Goliath as it was also very prominent in the medieval ages. The play Daveedu vijayam is still popular today. It has various titles and has been reinterpreted by many different aasaans: Daveedu vijayam, taaviidum gooliyaattum or taaviidum turbuutavum. The story of David and Goliath was quite prominent in the medieval ages. The story of David is present in the first book of Samuel and it continues through the second book of Samuel in the Old Testament. David was supposed to be a great ruler, poet, musician and military commander. David's story starts with the anointing of David by Prophet Samuel. When he is in the court of king Saul, Goliath's challenge presents itself. David picks up the gauntlet with gusto and kills the giant with his sling catapult and stone.

This makes him very popular inciting feelings of jealousy in Saul. Even after David's marriage to his daughter, Saul tries to assassinate David. Finally David has to escape from Israel and he manages to hide in the caves from Saul's soldiers with his loyalists and soldiers. Even though David gets several chances to kill Saul, he waits till the death of Saul and Jonathan. Later both are killed in the war against the pagans. On his return to Judea, people proclaim David as king. A theme of homecoming is evident here, throughout Christianity the importance of a 'homeland' is stressed upon. The story continues with the wars led by David for the expansion of his kingdom. Finally he is able to defeat his enemies and make Jerusalem the capital of his kingdom. Soon Israel becomes the strongest country in that region. Even though he is a skillful leader, his family life is miserable due to the polygamy practiced by David. The family ended finally in the fighting and killing of one son by the other. Some of his practices are against the wishes of God but later he repents and becomes a God fearing citizen and builds an altar for worship in Jerusalem. Chavittu Nadakam performances preferred the early part of David's story and his confrontation with Goliath. Those performers were very keen in portraying the victory of the Christian David upon the pagan giant. They depict David in his full glory and only seem to show him in a positive light. Interwoven in this story is the glaring propagandist agenda of conversion. As David is seen to be the good Christian that shall defeat the 'evil' pagan giant, it is also the classic tale of the underdog which would appeal to the downtrodden fisher men who converted[16]to Christianity due to the restrictions of the Hindu caste system. It puts across the message that might isn't everything and that even the valiant can fail in family situations.

The evil of polygamy is also shown since polygamy in Europe was considered a 'pagan' practice and thus, considered bad[17]. Thus a biblical theme such as this alludes to many things and is set to appeal to a target group either for conversion or education. One might even postulate that the missionaries used this art form for the Latin Christians to create an identity for themselves separate of the Syrian Christians.

Religious

This part mainly deals with the texts on the life of saints. All of them are directly related with the saint lore of Europe. Some of the themes portray the influence of the native and cultural milieu. Almost all of them portray the upright Christian spiritual way of life as a model pattern set for the people by the saints. There are certain common structures to these plays, e. g.: the main structure of the saints plays follows a cyclical pattern of the protagonist commits a sin, then he/she repents for his and all this ultimately leads to the conversion of the protagonist to Christianity. Clearly though these saints are supposed to be role models, it teaches people to try and aspire to be perfect in all forms of life and to always remaining humble and devout throughout all the trials that life throws at you. Alpoonsu, Jeenoova, Birasiha are plays that show the conversion of Pagan characters and they also show many sacred rituals. The popular religious-themed plays that are known of today are : 1) Alleecu naatakam 2) Alphonsa naatakam 3) Birasiha naatakam 4) St. George 5) St. Sebastian Givargiisu The play describes the life of St. George (givargiisu) [18], a warrior who fought bravely against the evil elements and won glory for the service of Christianity. There was a terrible dragon in England who

blocked the flow of the river (the principal water supply), thus impoverishing the people of the area. Later, they reached a terrible agreement with the Dragon to sacrifice a beautiful young girl each day to the Dragon for its food. Thus, almost all the beautiful girls were sacrificed in order to appease the dragon, Finally when it was the turn of the princess- the only child of the King to sacrifice herself for the Kingdom she was taken to the dragon's lair. Where, suddenly a young man rushed into the scene riding a white horse with a big spear and in turn managed to kill the beast with his spear. As the brave young man was about to leave the princess makes a memorable mark on his upper-garment by dipping her palm in the flowing blood of the dead beast. Later when the king searched for the young man he eventually finds him due to the blood stained mark on his gown. Givargiisu was unwilling to accept the honor and presents given to him by the king as he was leading a life with pagan beliefs and its Gods whereas Givargiisu was a devout Christian. One version states the conversion of this ' Pagan' king into Christianity while another prolonged version includes the later displeasure of the king towards Givargiisus faith. This version ends with the martyrdom of St. George for the Christian way of life. This story gave birth to many successive clichéd stories of a knight riding in on a white horse and saving the fair maiden. It is considered to be popular as the theme of chivalry and the helplessness of the female is stressed upon. The text has a number of chuvadis; there are certain differences in some of them. The texts were titled[19]like (a) givargiisum perupaampum (b) givargiisu patayaali (c) St. George naatakam. (d) givargiisum turbuutavum. In one of versions of the plays St. George is introduced in the beginning as a warrior in the service of

the king. He knows about the ill fate of the princess and volunteers himself to confront the dragon. After a brave encounter with the monster, he overpowers it and kills it. Impressed and slightly awed by him the princess is desirous of his hand in marriage. But St. George is not inclined to worldly pleasures; so he leaves for pastures greener. The text is filled with adventurous tales, St. George emerges as the best warrior in the country and the captain of army as well. What is also seen in this story is the social differentiation between the people as numerous young girls died before the princess but due to the fact that she was of royal lineage more importance is given to her reflecting the socio-political conditions of the time. Apart from the stories dealing with valor, adventure and combat there is another kind of saintly drama that portrays the sacrifice of all worldly pleasures and life in favor of the strict moral path of Christian faith. Alletsu naatakam[20]- It is a play based on the life of St. Alexius. Alexius was born into a very rich family of Rome. He was the only son whose father wanted him to be the captain of the king's army. Alexius is shown to be the most handsome, well-built gentleman of Rome; so the kingdom is convinced that he deserves a coveted position in the country. But, at the same time, he is shown to be a strong believer and follower of Christ. He is shown wanting to live and follow the path of Christ as a priest. His father though a Christian was against Alexius's wishes. Thus he forces Alexius to marry. But on the same night Alexius confesses to his wife that he cannot stay and he leaves. Alexius gives away all his precious marriage attires to a beggar and in turn wears his rags. As a beggar, he travels around Italy, preaching Christian faith and way of life. Later, he became worn out, tired, and diseased and came back to Rome, on

the way; he meets his father, who doesn't recognize his own son. Alexius begs his father for a place to rest and his father grants him his wish. He stays in his own house under the staircase for more than seventeen years with prayers and fasting. Later, after his death, the family members including his wife find out that he was the one for whom they waited and prayed for all those days. Paradoxically they considered and treated him as the wretched inhabitant in that family. The similar thematic overtones of this story with the life of the Buddha are striking. The popularity of the story of Buddha might have prompted the selection of this story. The saintly themes include not only the valor and the martyrdom of saints for Christianity, but also their sacrifice of worldly pleasures for the sake of a Christian way of life.

Indian history and mythology:

After the 1960s[21], stories from Indian history and the Hindu mythology epics were introduced into the milieu as performance texts. They are mostly performed at the time of utcavam (temple festivals). Given below are all the scripts written for the limited number of performance texts based on Hindu mythology and legend: AkbarAnarkaliChandraguptan (king of Maurya)DharmaputranDharrnistanBharatha YudhattinteNandi Bahavad DoodhSwami AyyappanDuring the colonial period, religious, historical and biblical themes were popular and were most widespread and established in terms of a script and music. The Indian history and the Hindu mythological themes are latest trends reflecting the changing more secular nature of this art form. Social themes with the indigenous twists came into existence earlier to the Indian historical themes; but became popular only during the

post-independence scenario. The maximum number of plays under Historical themes shows the popularity of historical dramas with its wars and conquests and the art forms malleability while working within the parameters of such a story. Even though Charlemagne was one among the first dramas, it surpassed all the others and still exists as one of the most popular play of the genre. This theme might have influenced and attracted people to compose more plays similar in story line. The war scenes are the main attraction in Chavittu Nadakam due to the unusual amalgamation of dance with martial art; the newer authors of the scripts have chosen such histories and myths where there is a lot of scope for presenting battle scenes. It is seen that there are three stages of classification of the history and the development of vis-à-vis religion, recreation and commerce. The first stage comprises of the texts, which deal with religious[22] themes. It also hints at the propagandist agendas of the early patron, i. e., The Church. When the focus went from religion to recreation, the patronage had a shift towards the hands of the Christian community. The current phase is the phenomenon with the individuals as patrons. In the initial phase of this stage, one can observe the entries of the Hindu puranic epics into the repertoire. Later, along with the present decline in the popularity of the genre, only the popular plays remained in existence. In other words, some of the plays passed through these three stages of Chavittu Nadakam history by completely having an about face in their function. Keeping in mind the context there needs to be a comparative analysis of some of the story lines/themes from the above categories. The stories cited in the historical and saintly (i. e., Religious) category were popular in Europe and were retold

constantly. These themes have a number of similar characteristics and plot structure. Later, most of the saint lore became enriched with the local/native folk themes and some of the plays with its local interpretations become more popular among the Kerala Christians. Even though they have imbibed, portrayed and adapted the popular folk trends and taste the basic characteristics, especially of the heroes, kings and saints remain the same, both visually and the abstract characteristics attributed to them. Social Issues

As the shadow of evolution falls over every surface, even the earliest stories of Chavittu Nadakam have undergone changes with respect to content, plot, duration, costumes etc. However in recent times, apart from the changes in the pre-existing stories, there has been major experimentation with respect to the incorporation of current social issues into plays. Chavittu Nadakam seems to have gained popularity as a platform to showcase the current difficulties being faced by the fisher folk. These plays even break away from the conventional social themes of Chavittu Nadakam plays like chastity, marriage etc. these earlier plays focus a lot on the importance of how to live a good catholic life. Whereas these current plays like the one mentioned below are more secular in nature. Thirayum Theerakattum

Thirayum Theerakattum is one such play written in the year 1994 by Father V. P Joseph and Saudi Asan. It depicts how the fishermen fight for their rights. The story focuses on the current struggles faced by the fishermen community in terms of socio-economic status and rights. It describes the compulsion of the fisher folk to give up their primary source of income so as to ensure trade relations with foreign nations. It also describes the surrendering of local coastal areas to wealthy landowners for cultivation.

Another issue taken up is the forceful support that the fishermen have to provide to the apkaris in order to allow the flow of liquor through their land. Hence due to corrupt land owners the fisher folk are facing economic difficulties in terms of sources for their income. Another major difficulty faced by the community is the cultural stigma associated with them due to their excessive consumption of alcohol, which has also shown a trend with the onset of these problems. As a result all of these problems combined, this community has faced a huge threat of extinction of their bloodline. These aforementioned problems form the crux of these plays, which is also why Chavittu Nadakam as an art form is being rejuvenated in the coastal areas.