

Name of the Element: Mudi yettu: Ritual Theatre and Dance Drama, Kerala, India

Community: Marar and Kuruppu communities

Region: The performance takes place in the following four districts which once belonged to the old Princely States of Travancore and Cochin of Kerala, India.

Ernakulam

Thrissur

Kottayam

Idukki

Brief Description: Mudi yettu is a ritual theatre form of Kerala based on the mythological tale of the battle between Goddess Kali and Darika, an evil king. It is a community ritual in which the entire village participates. After the summer crops have been harvested, the villagers reach the temple early in the morning on an appointed day. The traditional performers of Mudi yettu having purified themselves by observing the ritual of fasting and offering prayers to the goddess proceed to draw a huge tantric design of Goddess Kali made of powdered rice, on the temple floor. Over a period of time the tradition of chanting the praises of Kali has evolved into a vibrant musical form that accompanies the 'panchavarna kalam' (A five colour design on the floor depicting the Goddess). It is drawn on the floor to help the performers imbibe the spirit of the goddess. The performance takes a dramatic turn when Darika, from the top of the eastern mountains, challenges Kali to a battle. Kali, born of Lord Shiva's (A Hindu god) third eye, retaliates. Kooli, the clown and Koimpada Nair, the chieftain of the 'pancha boothas' (five elements), become her allies in this battle against evil. The temple courtyard turns into a battle field and the villagers the participants in this ritual-theatre event. In the end, after a fierce battle, Kali defeats her adversaries and performs the victory dance. The devotees hail their goddess and welcome the dawn of a peaceful and prosperous new year.

Mudi yettu: Ritual Theatre and Dance Drama, Kerala – Inscribed in 2010 on the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, UNESCO