

Notification No: 592/2025

Date of Award: 31 December 2025

Name of the Scholar: **Thomas Monteiro**

Name of the Supervisor: **Prof. Deepak Kem**

Name of the Centre: **Dr. K.R. Narayanan Centre for Dalit and Minorities Studies**

Topic of Research: **Bhuta-Kola Spirit Possession Ritual: Gender, Caste, Class and Power Relations in Rural Mangalore**

FINDINGS

The study finds that **bhuta-kola** in rural Mangalore is not merely a religious or folkloric performance, but a living social institution where caste, gender, class, and power relations are actively produced, negotiated, and reinforced. The ritual functions both as a structure that preserves hierarchy and as an anti-structure that temporarily allows marginalized voices, especially lower-caste ritual performers, to express grievances and claim symbolic authority. Through participant observation, interviews, and textual analysis, the thesis shows that bhuta-kola serves as a medium of moral arbitration, identity politics, and community governance.

A major finding is that although the ritual creates moments of inversion, everyday social inequalities remain largely intact after the performance. Bunt landholding lineages continue to control shrine administration, while lower castes perform essential ritual labor. Women's participation remains restricted by customary norms, ritual purity rules, and male-dominated institutional structures. Thus, bhuta-kola reflects not only sacred belief but also the lived realities of rural social stratification and political influence.

The future scope of the study lies in expanding research to urban and commercialized bhuta-kola performances, non-Bunt-administered shrines, and women-centered spirit possession traditions such as Siri. Further studies may also examine the participation of Christians and Muslims, changing media representations, and the impact of modernization on ritual meaning, identity formation, and local power structures.