

**Mohiniattam as Proto-Performance: Life and Dance of
Kalamandalam Kalyanikutty Amma**

**Dissertation Submitted to the University of Kerala in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the Degree of Masters of Arts in
English Language and Literature**

**University of Kerala
Thiruvananthapuram**

2022

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Preface

Performance studies is an interdisciplinary field of research that draws from social sciences, humanities, and arts. It incorporates theories of drama, dance, art, anthropology, folkloristics, philosophy, cultural studies, psychology, sociology, comparative literature, communication studies, and increasingly, music performance. Richard Schechner coined the term ‘Performance Studies’ in his work *Performance Studies: An Introduction*.

The dissertation titled “Mohiniattam as Proto-Performance: Life and Dance of Kalamadalam Kalyanikutty Amma” studies Kalyanikutty Amma’s contributions to the Mohiniattam art form. This interdisciplinary analysis primarily uses performance studies and life writing methods to examine the historical, literary, and performance references in Mohiniattam. The study employs an analysis through the proto performance, one of the three performance processes described by Richard Schechner. The goal of this study is to place Mohiniattam as a performance and Kalyanikutty Amma as an advocate of proto performance. The study demonstrates how she did this to establish her identity as a Mohiniattam artist.

This project is divided into four chapters. The introductory chapter discusses the theory of performance studies as propounded by Richard Schechner and provides a brief description about the art of Mohiniattam. The second chapter entitled “Life of Kalamandalam Kalyanikutty Amma” gives a biographical description of Kalyanikutty Amma. The third chapter titled “Dance of Kalyanikutty Amma” presents the artist in Kalyanikutty Amma and how she used proto-performance to reconstruct Mohiniattam. The concluding

chapter gives an overview of the entire project and identifies her as the advocate of Proto-performance

Chapter One

Introduction

Literature is the ‘body of written works’, which in recent times also includes traditions of the oral word. If literature is indeed the elevation of the written or spoken word to an art form – something that has the potential to last more through the ages, gains in value for what it gives in insight, and is representative of the state, the thoughts and the concerns of the person, society, culture or even a civilization that it sprung forth from, then one has to understand how effective, or indeed essential the embellishment of literature via other art forms are for its longevity and propagation. The author, the poet, the playwright, the screenwriter, the reporter – all the storytellers who tell tales of reality and imagination, may very well be but the starting point of literature, people who bring forth the words in ways that are remarkable, memorable and rememberable, but it is the continuing work of the painter, the sculptor, the dancer, the actor and the special effects team that push much of literature into the psyches of the common person, and help it in its march towards posterity. Knowing and understanding the deep link between literature, which can be a snapshot of a particular time-space in our continuity, and the performing arts and artists, can yield a deeper and more nuanced appreciation for how art and life mutually enrich and shape each other.

This study is on the contributions of Smt. Kalamandalam Kalyanikutty Amma to the art form of Mohiniattam. Studying the cultural history of Kerala and the other historical happenings in the early twentieth century along with the performative aspects that shaped the art form and the role of Smt Kalyanikutty Amma in the evolution of the art form is the core subject of

study. This is an interdisciplinary analysis of the history, literature and performance references in Mohiniattam mainly through the methodologies of life writing and performance studies.

According to Ervin Goffman, a performance may be defined as “all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way, any of the other participants” (Schechner 29). Performance is present in every field of life - business, sports, sex, arts etc.

Richard Schechner in his work *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, puts forward that there are four aspects in ‘to perform’. According to him, “To perform” can also be understood in relation to being, doing, showing doing, and explaining “showing doing”. He says:

“Being” means existence itself. “Doing” is the activity of all that exists, from quarks to sentient beings to super galactic strings. “Showing doing” is performing: pointing to, underlining and displaying doing. “Explaining ‘showing doing’” is performance studies. (28)

Performances mark identities, bend time, reshape and adorn the body and tell stories. All performances are “restored behaviours” (Schechner 28). Restored behaviour is a physical, verbal or virtual action that are not the first time, prepared or rehearsed.

A person who performs a ‘restored behaviour’ will not be aware of it. It is also referred to as “twice behaved-behaviour” (28). Each performance is crafted from ‘restored behaviour’ and each of them will be different from the other. Each and every aspect of performance or ‘restored behaviour’ includes nuances of mood, tone of the voice, body language, specific occasions and

contexts (30). All these elements have their own uniqueness. This uniqueness of an event does not depend solely on materiality but also on its interactivity. The interactivity always changes. A performance occurs as an act, an exchange, and a connection. That means, to treat any object, work or product as performance such as painting, novel, shoe or anything, means to investigate what the object does, how it interacts with other objects or beings and how it relates to other objects or beings. Therefore, the three main characteristics of a performance are actions, interactions and relationships.

Performance occurs in eight separate and overlapping situations including everyday life, arts, sports and other entertainments, business, technology, sex, ritual and play.

Many cultures help in creating performances and aims at demonstrating highly developed aesthetic sense. It is commonly called art. Art occurs everywhere. People, all around the world, evaluate an art and distinguish good from bad. Such an assessment happens in dancing, singing, orating, pottery, painting and all sorts of performances. But what makes something good or bad varies greatly from time to time and even from occasion to occasion. Sports including gymnastics and skating are also close to fine arts like dancing and singing as it also needs to be performed. There is a big difference between various genres of the performing arts. For instance, going to church and watching football game are two different things.

Without considering certain cultural contexts, it is impossible to define what 'is' a performance. Acceptance of a performance does not depend on an event in itself but on how the event is received and placed. For example; today, the enactment of dramas by actors is a theatrical performance. But

earlier, it was not. For instance, the tragic dramas of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides were more of a ritualistic performance infused with competition for prizes rather than a theatrical performance. Even maps depicting political, physical features, routes, climate etc undergo performance. They perform a particular interpretation of the world.

Every performance has a boundary between the action and reality. It can have two dimensions. One is “make-belief” and the other one is “make-believe” (Schechner 42). According to him, ‘make-belief’ performances intentionally blur or sabotage that boundary while ‘make-believe’ performances maintain a clearly marked boundary between the world of performance and everyday reality. In simpler terms make-belief performances get merged with social realities or everyday realities and make-believe performances strictly keep a distinction between what is real and what is pretended.

Performance is the storehouse of knowledge and a powerful vehicle for the expression of emotions. It also helps to inform, entertain and educate. It gives courage to the coward and energy to the brave. It teaches right against wrong. Performance also purifies who are ill-behaved and promotes tolerance in well-behaved. It brings rest and peace in sorrow, grief, fatigue and helplessness. The end result of a performance will be happiness.

Through various sources and researches, Schechner combined the ideas and abbreviated them to seven functions of performance. They are: to entertainment, to create beauty, to mark or change identity, to make or foster community, to heal, to teach or persuade, to deal with the sacred and demonic (Schechner 46).

Performativity can be defined as the accomplishment, execution, and carry out or working out of anything. Performativity is a concept introduced by the philosopher of language, John L Austin, in relation to linguistics. The terms 'performance' and 'performativity' are similar. The concept of performativity has multiple applications in diverse fields such as anthropology, social and cultural geography, economics, gender studies, law, performance studies, history and philosophy.

Performativity in performance studies, according to Schechner, points to a variety of topics. It is an unavoidable aspect of performance studies. It covers a whole range of possibilities including social, political, economic, personal and artistic realities. It enhances the quality of a performing art. Performativity discusses the construction of social reality including gender and race, 'restored behaviour', quality of performances and complex relationships of performance practice to performance theory. Performativity, in performance studies is closely related to post modernism. It is no longer confined to the stage, to the art and to the rituals. According to Lyotard, power depends on the optimization of performance, a kind of performativity that is self legitimating (Schechner 129). Recognizing, analyzing and theorizing the convergence and collapse of clearly demarcated realities, hierarchies and categories is at the heart of post modernism. Thus, performance theory took a divergence from traditional to modern.

Post modernism is a practice in the visual arts, architecture and performance art while post structuralism and theory of deconstruction, is an academic response to post modernism. All together, they constitute practices and theories of performativity.

The construction of gender and race is also a type of performativity. From Simone de Beauvoir's statement in the essay *Second Sex* which says, "one is not born a woman but rather becomes one" (Schechner, 151), one can infer that one's biological sex, i. e, male or female is a raw material shaped through practice into socially constructed performance, i.e, gender. Here a change from female to woman or male to man is a socially constructed performance. Every person learns at a young age how to exhibit gender-specific vocal inflections, facial expressions, gestures, walks, and amorous behaviour as well as how to choose, alter, and use perfumes, adornments, clothing, etc. Thus, Judith Butler points out that there are "nuanced" and "individual" (Schechner 152) ways of playing one's gender and each individual performs his or her gender in accordance with already inscribed performatives.

Similarly, construction of race is also a sort of performance. Adrien Piper theorizes race both in her writing and performance (Schechner 156). According to her, Immanuel Kant, a conceptual artist, uses his performance art and installations on racism, racial stereotyping and xenophobia. For example, a person who is black, dressed in dark clothes, a string of pearls around her neck, seated in the corner of a room at a table, hands folded, looking directly at the camera is a performance and it depicts race.

Performing is an integral part of performance studies. Performing means to perform something. One cannot avoid the process of performing from performance. The broad spectrum of performing is a continuum of acting or doing. Thus, acting is an important sub-category of performing. So, there is an element of acting in all performing arts including dance, music, rituals,

sports etc. Performance theorist, Michael Kirby, proposed five types of acting. They are non-matrixed performing, symbolized matrix, received acting, simple acting, and complex acting (Schechner 174).

According to the notion of impersonation, five types of acting are included. They are “realistic”, “brechtian”, “codified”, “trance” and “performing objects” [masks and puppets] (Schechner 175).

Here, ‘Codified’ acting refers to performing according to a semiotically constructed score of movements, gestures, songs, costumes, make-up and stage designs (183). This core is rooted in a tradition and is passed down from teachers to students by means of rigorous training. Codified acting is widespread throughout the world. There are many different codified systems of acting. Ballet, Kathakali, Mohiniattam, Jingju and Noh are part of codified system of acting. In Asia, codified acting has been theorized for more than ten thousand years. One of the best examples is *Natyashastra* written by Bharatamuni which is a Sanskrit treatise on theatre dance and music, presenting the details of hand and eye movements, body gestures, dance steps etc. Mastering codified performing takes years of rigorous training. Each genre has its own vocabulary. In codified form, one must acquire flexible body and mind.

According to Richard Schechner, a complete performance process is a time-space sequence composed of proto-performance, performance and aftermath. These three phases are further divided into ten parts. Proto-performance consists of training, workshop and rehearsal. Performance consists of warm-up, public performance, events or contexts sustaining the public performance and cool down. And finally, aftermath include critical

responses, archives and memories. Performance processes can also be studied as interactions among four types of players. They are sourcers (authors, choreographers, and composers), producers (directors, technicians, and designers), performers and partakers (spectators, fans, and juries) (Schechner 225).

All these processes are applied to all kinds of performances such as performing arts, sports and other entertainments. And these processes are applicable to the subject of this study, i. e, the performing art of Mohiniattam.

Mohiniattam is an Indian classical dance form that developed in the state of Kerala. The term 'Mohiniattam' translates as "dance of enchantress" (Rele 74). The aesthetic forte of this art form is the "lasya" ("Mohiniattam" *Cultural India*) mode of dancing according to the *Nayasastra* which is characterized by the gentle, delicate, sensual and feminine movements and expressions. 'Lasya' is an element of dance which depicts beauty, happiness and grace. Mohiniattam expresses the essence of grace through gentle footsteps, undulating body movement, elaborate and poignant yet subtle facial expression. Mohiniattam originated as a female solo dance form, but in the twenty first century it is also performed irrespective of gender and is performed both solo and as group choreographies.

The term "Mohiniattam" could be adapted from the myth of Mohini in Hindu mythology. The term Mohini has two different contexts in Hindu mythology. The first context is that Mohini is a historical enchantress avatar of the Hindu god, Vishnu, who helps the good prevail over evil by developing her feminine powers. According to the myth, Vishnu took the form of Mohini, a young charming woman to distract the "asuras" or evil who won the "amrit"

(“Mohiniyattam” *Kerala Tourism*) or the nectar of immortality. She uses her charisma to gain the amrit from the evil force and gives it to the good after retrieving the amrit from them and deprived the evil from becoming immortal and saved the universe from destruction.

The second one is the myth of ‘Bhasmasuranigraham’- the story of killing the demon named Bhasmasura. Through great meditation and prayer, Bhasmasura, an evil demon, gains a terrible boon from lord Shiva; according to which any being that comes underneath his hands would be burnt to ashes. The power intoxicated asura desired to ascertain the potency of the boon on the nearest being in sight – Shiva himself. After being chased by him, he takes refuge at the feet of Maha Vishnu. He was requested to appear as Mohini once again so as to enchant and cast a spell by her dance on Bhasmasura so that he himself could put his hand on his own head and fall prey to his own boon. And Mohini was successful in doing so and once again managed to protect the world from destruction (Rele, 74).

The art form Mohiniyattam has nothing to do with these mythical characters. The term Mohini in Sanskrit means one who invokes Moham or desire or a beautiful feminine form. “Attam” is a Malayalam word meaning rhythmic motion or dance. Thus the name Mohiniattam denotes to the dance of an enchantress, a beautiful woman.

Kerala, where the dance form of Mohiniattam developed and is still popular, has a long tradition of lasya style dances. The temple sculptures of the state are considered to be the earliest reference of Mohiniattam or other dance forms similar to it. The many female statues that adorn the Kidangur Subramanya temple and the Trikodithanam Vishnu temple, both built in the

eleventh century, likewise exhibit Mohiniattam positions (“Mohiniattam” *Cultural India*).

From the text-based records of the 12th century Malayalam literature, ‘a graceful dance’ was a theme incorporated by Malayalam bards and playwrights. The first recorded use of the term ‘Mohiniattam’ in reference to a sum owed to a Mohiniattam dancer is in the 16th-century book *Vyavaharamala* by scholar, poet, author, and astrologer Mazhamangalam Narayanan Namboodiri. In his work *Gosha Yatra* from the 17th century, great poet Kunchan Nambiar discussed the many performing arts styles of Kerala and referenced Mohiniattam. The 18th century Sanskrit treatise *Balarama Bharatam* on the different performance aspects of natyam written by the king of Travancore Karthika Thirunal Bala Rama Varma (considered to be a significant secondary work on *Natya Shastra*) refers about ‘Mohini Natana’ among various other dance styles (*Cultural India*).

In eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Mohiniattam grew as a dance form, particularly, in the nineteenth century. Swati Tirunal, who is known as “the artists among kings and king among artists”, was the first person who tried to revive Mohiniattam with ‘kacheri’ format including ‘varnam’, ‘padam’ and ‘thillana’ and to systemize Mohiniattam. Unfortunately, he passed away at the age of 33 and Mohiniattam slipped into a miserable condition again (Kalyanikutty Amma 61).

Swati Tirunal, who became king in 1829 at the age of just 16 years old, supported the beautiful arts, but especially music and dance. During his reign, there was a flow of artists and scholars from all parts of India to Travancore region of Kerala. It was during that time, Swati along with his court musicians

(Kilimanoor Vidwan Koyil Tampuran and IrayimmanTampi) was engaged in developing Mohiniattam. Vadivelu, one of the Thanjavoor Quartet who contributed to the development of Carnatic music and Bharatanatyam, structured Mohiniattam with a proper repertoire that included Chollukettu (the first invocatory item in Mohiniyattam, Jatiswaram, Padavarnam, Padam and Tillana. The dance was then performed by the Devadasis. Padams, written by Swati himself in Malayalam, Telugu, and Sanskrit, were enthusiastically embraced by dancers (Kalyanikutty Amma 61).

As British colonial rule spread in the 19th century, different classical dance genres were subjected to mockery and discouragement which led to their demise. Such systems were eventually shamed by the social and economic realities surrounding the Devadasis of South India and the nautch girls of North India, as well as the disdain and nasty attitude of Christian missionaries and British authorities who regarded them as harlots. In order to put an end to this behaviour, Christian missionaries started the anti-dance movement in 1892. The sensual motions and attitudes made during temple dances were caricatured in Marcus B. Fuller's 1900 book *The Wrongs of Indian Womanhood*. All Indian traditional dance styles, including Mohiniattam, which experienced a fall in the princely states of Cochin and Travancore, were stigmatised by this turmoil ("Mohiniattam" *Cultural India*).

According to Dr. Justine Lemos, a Mohiniattam and Odissi dancer who focuses on embodied culture in South Asian contexts, conducted extensive research on the dance and inferred that Mohiniattam was outlawed by the Maharaja as a result of pressure from colonial administration and his subjects. Furthermore, it makes no mention of temple harlots or devadasis among the

Mohiniattam dancers. Lemos does, however, bring up data that suggests that Mohiniattam dancers received scholarships, awards, and cash. While not specifically mentioning Mohiniattam, she also makes reference to rules that were in effect from 1931 to 1938 and forbade temple dancing, devadasis, and any other kinds of ‘lewd dance or theatre’ for as long as the princely states of Kerala were ruled by the British. Part of the prohibition that allowed ‘voluntary dances in temples’ was lifted in 1940. Voluntary dances were permitted, but without any payment, according to a new law that went into effect the following year. The state of Kerala did not pay the Mohiniattam performers despite their demands that they be paid by the government or the audience (“Mohiniattam” *Cultural India*).

Some female performers of this art in Hindu temples carried on in the middle of these unrests, oblivious to the political developments affecting the art form. Indians made efforts to resuscitate national culture and custom and rediscover the country’s rich past as the early 20th century's Indian freedom movement advanced, hoping to revitalise the very soul of the country. Numerous individuals who advocated for the rebirth of classical art, like Rabindranath Tagore, Dr. V. Raghavan, E. Krishna Iyer, Rukmini Devi Arundale, etc., raised objections to such prejudice and came forth to support the revival of the old classical dance styles. Among them, Malayalam poet laureate Vallathol Narayana Menon, who was regarded as one of the ‘triumvirate poets’ of contemporary Malayalam, played a significant role in not only helping Kerala lift its ban on temple dancing but also in reviving and reconstructing the state’s traditional performing arts. In 1930, he founded Kerala Kalamandalam, a dance academy. Mohiniattam, Kudiattam, and

Kathakali—the three primary classical performing arts of Kerala—were all revived thanks to Kalamandalam from the very beginning (*Cultural India*). Kerala has its own “abhinaya kalari” which is used in different art forms. It includes the movement of eyes, hand and body. It is a vehicle of performing arts and has its own unique decorum. Thus, one can come to a conclusion that the various art forms of Kerala including Kathakali, Kaikottikali, Mohiniattam, Kudiattam and its tradition have been evolved from this kalari (It is a gymnasium or training space primarily associated with the martial art of Kalaripayattu). Therefore, it can be said Mohiniattam has an inter relation with Kathakali and others rather than it being developed under the influence of those forms (Rele, 77).

Vallathol Narayana Menon started Kerala Kalamandalam to give training for Kathakali artists and to revive the dying traditional performing arts of Kerala. Mohiniattam became a part of Kalamandalam kalari with one teacher and one student. Peringot Kurishi Orikkiledath Kalyani Amma was the first guru and Thankamani was the first shishya. In 1935, Thankamani was married to Guru Gopinathan and from 1935-37, there were no classes for Mohiniattam. Later, Korattikara Appuredath Krishna Paniker Ashaan was appointed in 1937. Ramankadathuvalappil Madhavi Amma was also appointed along with Krishna Paniker Ashaan. There were a number of students and one of them was Karingamanna Kalyanikutty Amma, whose contributions for Mohiniattam is the subject of this study. She is known as the mother of Mohiniattam. She has done significant contributions in the revival and evolution of Mohiniattam we see today. During the period of Kalyanikutty Amma at the Kerala Kalamandalam, the famous dancer Shanta Rao came to

learn Kathakali who also ended up in learning Mohiniattam. Though Shanta Rao and Kalyanikutty Amma got training from the same master, Krishna Panicker Asaan, their dancing styles were different. Shanta Rao's dance had forceful movements while Kalyanikutty Amma's were slow and graceful. After her marriage to Kalamandalam Krishnan Nair Ashaan in 1940 she left Kalamandalam.

In 1940, there was a ten year break for the Mohiniattam kalari at Kerala Kalamandalam due to the lack of students and teachers. In 1950, Chinnammu Amma, a faculty of Kalamandalam and disciple of Kalamozhi Krishna Menon and Krishna Panicker was found and appointed as the tutor at the Kalamandalam Mohiniatta Kalari. She brought her own style of Mohiniattam and this style is being taught in Kalamandalam even today. Until 1940, Mohiniattam was called the Kerala version of Bharatanatyam but later developed as a more systematic form. By the 1950's it created a unique identity of its own and it distanced itself from the influence of Bharatanatyam, Kathakali and Kaikottikali. Systematic research was done in Mohiniattam when non native dancers like Kanak Rele, Bharati Shivaji came and learnt the art form and various other allied art forms from Kerala Kalamandalam. By the 1980s, four distinct schools of Mohiniattam viz. Kalamandalam style, Kalyanikutty Amma style, Kanak Rele and Bharati Shivaji, all came into place, the common thread being 'lasya', i. e, the aspect of grace.

1) Kalamandalam style, i. e, Chinnammu Amma's style was soft and lyrical with rounded movements but firm footwork.

2) Kalyanikutty Amma's style was stronger, with firm footwork and is marked by sharp execution and powerful expression.

3) Kanak Rele, who is a Mohiniattam lover, was the student of Guru Karunakara Panicker. Her style developed a set of basic dance movements on her theory of kinetics.

4) Bharati Shivaji is a famous artist from Tanjavor who practices Mohiniattam. She is a dancer who who internalizes the movements of dance rather than presenting it to the audience. (Nedungadi 19:95)

Even though there are four traditions of Mohiniattam, all have the same root – the Kerala Kalamandalam Kalari. Kalamandalam Kalyanikutty Amma was the only source to understand the first Kalamandalam style that was practiced in the Mohiniattam kalari by Krishna Paniker Asan and Madhavi Amma. Later, Chinnammu Amma started a fresh style. But later various techniques were adapted in to the new Kalamandalam style from Kalyanikutty Amma. She even sent her student Kalamandalam Satyabhama to Kalyanikutty Amma to learn the techniques and academic aspects of Kalyanikutty Amma and to analyse her performances. The non-native dancers like Kanak Rele and Bharati Shivaji also developed their unique styles by absorbing and adopting the style and techniques of Kalyanikutty Amma and Chinnammu Amma. Thus, it can be concluded that Kalamandalam Kalyanikutty Amma forms the basis for the four traditions and can be rightly called the mother of Mohiniattam.

The purpose of this study is to show how Mohiniattam was revolutionized through the life of Kalamandalam Kalyanikutty Amma. An analysis through the proto performance, one of the three performance processes proposed by Richard Schechner, is used to conduct the study. In this study, Mohiniattam is attempted to be positioned as a performance and

Kalyanikutty Amma as a proponent of proto performance. The study illustrates how she anchored her existence in the Mohiniattam art style by doing so. It also highlights her value as a dancer describing the dancing style of Kalamandalam Kalyanikutty Amma.

Chapter Two

Life of Kalyanikutty Amma

Life writing is a term used to describe all written non-fiction, recording of memories. These include biographies, autobiographies, memoirs, diaries, blogs, personal essays and collection of letters. In simpler terms, life writing is writing about lives. In a broader sense, life writing is a generic category encompassing diverse topics on personal narratives. In the act of life writing, individuals are encouraged to comprehend the specific facet of their identity. It prompts an individual to evaluate themselves personally. It is regarded as an outlet for “self collection” (“Life Writing” *Oxford Research*). As a whole, life-writing presents the self and has served as a private form of resistance for an individual. It is also has been used as a generic outlet for an individual to explore and evaluate their emotions. Life writing enables individuals to place history within their own perspective. By recollection of the past, life writing preserves traditions, events and experiences. It permits an individual to adopt an outsider’s perspective on their past experience.

There are psychological and cognitive benefits to life writing. As individuals involve in writing their own lives, they reduce the mental and associated physical burden by transferring the emotional weight and cognitive load on paper. The individual becomes in sync with one’s authenticable selves allowing themselves to heal from within.

Life writing has occurred both in solitude and collaboration. It provides a better understanding of the purpose to a person, they have in the world. It mediates between past and present and creates a future which will be a continuation of the self that can further be improved. Through analyzing life

writing we can build a shared understanding of the world and a shared humanity. Memory is an integral part of life writing. Vulnerability and precarity are central concerns of life writing. Trauma has become a sub genre of life writing. It often proves to be a crucial factor in judgement and restoration.

Kalamandalam Kalyanikutty Amma's *Mohiniyattam: Charithravum Aattaprakaravum* provides a glimpse into her life and her journey towards dance. It is considered as an earliest, elaborate and authentic documentation on Mohiniyattam. In this work, one can trace the way she used her life infused with dance as a form of resistance. The portrayal of her triumphant past also illustrates how she preserved her values, tradition and experiences.

Kalamandalam Kalyanikutty Amma (1915-1999) was born in Thirunavaya in Malappuram district of Kerala. She was born to Sri. Panangat Govindha Menon and Smt. Sridevi Amma. She was taught Music and Sanskrit within the household. She had a passion towards literature and later published her own poems and dramas under the name, Karingamanam Kalyanikutty Amma.

Kalyanikutty Amma entered the dance field purely by accident. Later she became totally immersed in the learning of this once disreputable dance form, striving to gain its respectability in society. She was born to strictly orthodox parents. Belonging to a patriarchal high class family and being a girl, she had restrictions. But she was a revolutionary from her young age and chose to be a tomboy who took part in sports and tried yoga and kalaripayattu. She enjoyed her life in the company of boys though she was imposed restrictions. She wanted to be independent and acquire knowledge.

Kalamandalam Kalyanikutty Amma is a significant figure in reviving Mohiniyattam from a dismal near extinct state into a main stream Indian classical dance, giving it formal structure and ornamentation. She was one of the early students of Kerala Kalamandalam and was trained under Krishna Panikar Ashaan. Later, she left Kalamandalam after being married to late Kathaali maestro Kalamandalam Krishnan Nair.

Seeing her passion for art and literature, her elder brother took Kalyanikutty Amma to the house of the renowned poet Mahakavi Vallathol. They went to collect Sanskrit texts for reference which led them to visit Kerala Kalamandalam too. Since dance was not a favoured artistic form of the time, she did not see any dance performances until her visit. The first visit to Kalamandalam was mesmerizing and memorable for her. Vallathol, saw the fire of passion in her eyes and invited her to learn the art. He saw this as an opportunity to rekindle public interest in the art form. He also wanted to make it respectable for girls to take up dance and thereby making them independent and develop their own identity. Kalyanikutty Amma, who had strong opinions of her own, accepted the opportunity and enrolled for Mohiniyattam classes in 1937.

With her keen interest for poetry and music, Kalyanikutty Amma entered into the world of movements, beauty, and grace, when she was only twenty two years of age. Her admission for Mohiniyattam at Kerala Kalamandalam inspired more girls to think differently and they too were initiated in to the dance form. Until then, there was only one student, Thankamani, at the Kerala Kalamandalam, who left the institution after her

marriage with Guru Gopinathan. Thus, the enrollment of Kalyanikutty Amma gave a fresh start to the Mohiniyattam Kalari at the Kerala Kalamandalam.

Krishna Paniker Ashaan, who was seventy eight then, was the teacher of Mohiniyattam at Kerala Kalamandalam. He was a hard task master.

Kalyanikutty Amma was trained rigorously under him. The kalari started at 3 am in the morning and continued till 9 at night. She had to undergo a very intense physical training process and thus blossomed from a plump girl to a slender graceful dancer. She was so immersed in Mohiniyattam that she even danced in her short sleeps during the intervals.

Kalyanikutty Amma was an excellent student who keenly learnt all her lessons; not only Mohiniyattam but also Kathakali and Mridangam. She also learnt Sanskrit, English and Hindi. She had her Kathakali training from Pattikamthodi Ravunni Menon and performed with him a couple of times. She had her debut in 1939. She, later, did many programmes in different places. Becoming a performing artist was not a respectable career in the society at that time. For that precise reason, she was rejected by her family and was prohibited from attending her sister's marriage. But Kalyanikutty Amma was bold and determined to pursue her chosen path as she understood her potential and had conviction to lead the art form as it was the call of the time.

During her training period at Kerala Kalamandalam, she met many dignitary artists, cultural activists, politicians and art promoters across the globe and had fruitful conversations on the richness, growth and development of art and culture in India. It was during this time, she met the legendary Kalamandalam Kathakali artist and teacher, Krishnan Nair. They fell in love and married in 1940. Since marriage among school members was not

encouraged, they kept the matter secret for a year and left Kalamandalam at the end of that year.

After leaving Kerala Kalamandalam, Kalyanikutty Amma and Krishnan Nair Ashaan moved to different places. She taught for a year in Guru Gopinathan's school, Sreechithrodaya Nritha Kalalayam at Poojappura, Trivandrum and took a three year break from artistic career for her family. As the spouse of a performing artist, she found it difficult to settle down in one place and went around different places to teach the dance form and during this time she gave birth to two daughters and five sons. Even though she started teaching Mohiniyattam after a gap of three years, the family had to relocate to different places until 1958. Meanwhile, they founded their own school in 1952 at Aluva named Kerala Kalalayam. This school gave Kathakali, Mohiniyattam, Bharatanatyam, Music and Mridangam lessons.

While living a life dedicated to dance, she also had great interest towards planting, weaving, crafting and clothing. In the early 1950s, while she was at Vellarappilly in Ernakulam district, she established a forum called 'Sthree Samajam', for uninitiated women in the society. Through this platform, she supported and empowered women, by giving them training in different traditional handcrafts and looms, dance and music and thereby making them self- dependent and self -sufficient. Simultaneously, Kalyanikutty Amma acted in a few plays and some movies, namely, *Rarichan Enna Pauran*, *Asuravithu*, *Gandharva Kshteram* and *Randu Mukthangal*. But this did not satisfy her as she was passionate about dance. In 1956, Kalyanikutty Amma taught at the Darpana Academy in Ahmedabad for a while. But she had to return home to her younger children. In 1958, the entire

family shifted to Thrippunithura as her husband got a permanent position in the Fine Arts Academy. Kalyanikutty Amma continued her dance teaching at her institution, Kerala Kalalayam.

The year 1958 was an unforgettable year for Kalyanikutty Amma. In the same year, Vallathol on his death bed expressed his hope in the reformation of Mohiniyattam and elimination of the inappropriate terms concerned with the art form. Kalyanikutty Amma remembers her conversation with Vallathol Narayanamenon. He said:

It is for a special purpose that I wanted to meet you. I promoted Kathakali to the position I dreamed of. But I could not do much for Mohiniyattam. I have missed many portions. Find it out and complete it. Give brightness and publicize it, so that Mohiniyattam could reach its heights. I entrust the responsibility to you. (Kalyanikutty Amma 31)

Thus, Vallathol entrusted Kalyanikutty Amma with the vision of securing Mohiniyattam its place of pride in the world of art world.

She worked hard and conducted many research works; even analyzed the Chera, Chola, and Pandya periods tracing the antiquity of Dasiattam, Thevidichiattam and Sadirattam.

The Mohiniyattam kalari at Kerala Kalamandalam was stopped due to the lack of teachers and students after Kalyanikutty Amma left the institution in 1940. The Mohiniyattam kalari was restarted in 1950 with Chinnammu Amma, who was in her fifties, as the mentor and Kalamandalam Satyabhama, Kalamandalam Haimavathy and Kalamandalam Clara as students. As Kalyanikutty Amma was the only available link in the Mohiniyattam

envisioned by Vallathol and Krishna Panicker Asan at Kalamandalam, these students were also sent to Kalyanikutty Amma to learn the finer aesthetic aspects on the techniques of Mohiniyattam.

When Mohiniyattam was introduced in Kalamandalam in 1932, it did not have a proper pedagogy or a performance structure or a definite aesthetic condition which is mandatory for a classical form of dance. Most of the adavus or steps were mere walks but had some mudras. Much of the repertoire (Govindan *Sahapedia*) of Mohiniyattam had been lost. With the insight of the essence of the aesthetics of Mohiniyattam she imbibed from Krishna Panicker Asan and other learned connoisseurs at Kalamandalam and with her deep research in to the traditional texts on Natyam, Kalyanikutty Amma has introduced new movement vocabulary as adavus/steps, charis etc and restructured the pedagogy of Mohiniyattam into a systematic and organized pattern. She has formed a distinct repertory for full length Mohiniyattam performances and has penned a number of compositions for Mohiniyattam to enrich the repertoire.

Kalyanikutty Amma wrote poems such as *Atmarodanam*, *Atmambili*, *Poovadayil vachu*, *Dagdahrudaya* and *Vanamala* which was published in Mathrubhumi. She is also credited as a playwright after publishing *Thrayambakam*, a collection of Dance dramas. Her own productions include *Bhaktiyum Premavum*, *Nammalonnayaal*, *Kalavum Jeevithavum* etc.

Kalamandalam Kalyanikutty Amma's contribution to Mohiniyattam is indispensable. It is the very reason that she is called the mother of Mohiniyattam. Kalyanikutty Amma spread the principles and beauty of Mohiniyattam beyond India through her brilliant disciples. She trained several

students of Mohiniyattam including natives and foreigners, in the style she learned from Krishna Panikar Ashaan and her own innovations. Her daughters Sreedevi Rajan and Kala Vijayan, artists like Mrinalini Sarabhai, Deepthi Omcherry Bhalla and Smitha Rajan are some of her noted disciples. She was awarded Kerala Sangeeta Nataka Academy award and Kendra Sangeeta Nataka Academy award. She was also honoured with prestigious Kalidasa Samman in 1997-98. She was given the title “kavayithri” (Kalyanikutty Amma 27) by the famous poet Vallathol himself. In 1998, she got Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Academy Fellowship for Mohiniattam(32). She also received the “Keerthi Shankhu” (33) given by Kerala Kalamandalam. The mother of Mohiniyattam passed away on 12 May 1999 at the age of 84.

The personal and professional life of Kalyanikutty Amma was intertwined. A separate existence was impossible for her. Dance was the entirety for her. Despite taking a three-year break to take care of her family, she was compelled to return because of her love and passion for dance. After her return, Mohiniattam underwent various modifications with the help of Kalamandalam Kalyanikutty Amma. The style she created endures to this day. Her value as a dancer is demonstrated and hence, must be considered as performer and not a regular person.

Chapter Three

Dance of Kalyanikutty Amma

As already mentioned, Richard Schechner, in his work, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* discusses the processes of performance. He explains that the performance process is a “time-space sequence” (225). According to him, this sequence can be divided into three constituents, namely, proto-performance, performance and aftermath. These three components can further be divided into ten parts: Proto-performance - training, workshop, rehearsal; Performance - warm-up, public performances, events/ contexts sustaining the public performance, cool down; Aftermath - critical responses, archives, memories (225).

These processes are applicable to all types of performances, including rituals, play, and performances in daily life. They are also applied to the performing arts, sports, and other popular entertainment. The model is not mandatory. Schechner wants it to be a means of understanding rather than a constraint. An understanding of this time-space sequence requires an understanding of how various performances are created, how they are produced with precision, how they are “nested within larger events” (225), and what the long-term impacts of these performances are.

The process that occurs first or culminates in a performance is called a proto-performance. A “proto-p” (225) is a beginning or, more typically, a collection of beginnings. Very few performances begin with a single source or impulse; for example, Isadora Duncan and her dance. A proto-performance can be a set of laws, a liturgy, a storyline, a play script, a music score, a dance notation, or an oral tradition. It could also be a specific method in which a

performer uses her body to create something out of the ordinary. Eugenio Barba, an Italian author and theatre director based in Denmark, considers it as “pre-expressive” (225). A proto performance can also be a previous performance that has been revived, updated, or rebuilt, or it can simply serve as a template or launching point for a future performance.

The proto-p can be viewed as a “pretext” (226), something that not only occurs before the performance but also serves as a means of keeping important aspects of the performance process hidden from the audience. Practices and preparations are typically kept private. This unnoticed aspect of a performance encompasses the performer’s knowledge of the art as a whole, the years of practice behind each enactment. It is not only the specific role being played but also the unique pretext that shapes a given performance. According to Schechner, proto-performance can be carried out in three phases. They are training, workshop and rehearsals. He mentions that these three can also be named as “apprenticing”, “interning, “on- the- job training” (226) and so on.

Richard Schecher explains about the “performance text” (227) which is an important part of proto-performance and performance. It refers to everything that takes place on stage that a spectator experiences, from movements and speech of the dancer or actors to the lightings, sets and other technical multimedia effects. One must look into all these aspects in the process of proto-performance in order to establish desired result from a particular performance. In the present day, text refers to writing but earlier it was considered as ‘behind the scenes’ (227).

The first phase of proto-performance where specific skills are learned is called training (228). According to Isidore Okpewho, a Nigerian novelist and critic, training can be formal and informal (228). In informal training, the beginner picks up abilities over time by observing what is happening. The correction of mistakes happens as an everyday occurrence. It is because the learner incorporates what they learn into their daily lives and thus, the informal style of teaching has the potential to be incredibly effective.

Formal training refers to the training that has a structured and systematic curriculum. It gives training participants, the chance to get prompt answers to their queries either during the training or at a later time. Formal training occurs in a variety of methods. Classroom schooling is the best example of formal training in the present day. Formal training not only helps the learners to gain new skills but also to boost their existing skills. Frequently, formal and informal training co-exist. Training comprises “keeping in shape” (229). In dance, an individual starts his/her training at a younger age and when the person gets older one need to sustain their training. Schechner suggests that performances need changes with changing circumstances and realities so that traditions remain meaningful (232). This gives the performers the opportunity to merge the traditional knowledge to the new situation and thereby helps to improvise the performances with a mixture of both old and new.

The second phase of proto-performance is workshop. The “active research phase” (233) of the performance process is called workshop. Some artists use workshop as an exploration of processes which help in rehearsals and in making performances. Workshops comprise a very broad range of

activities in the performing arts. Some workshops bring people from various cultures and genres together to share methods, techniques, and viewpoints. Other workshops introduce participants to specific abilities or methods. All of these various activities are considered as workshops because they “open individuals up” (233) to new experiences and assist them in recognising and developing their own potential. The difference between workshops and training is unclear.

The third phase of proto-performance, rehearsals “a slow building-up process” (236), is different from the level of workshop. According to Schechner, Rehearsing is the “process of building up specific blocks of proto-performance materials to larger and larger sequence of actions that are assembled into a whole, finished performance” (237). It can be considered as choreography of a performance. The foundations established in training and the fresh elements discovered and explored in workshops are built upon and filled in during rehearsals. Rehearsals, often, consist of tiresome repetition and reworking. When everything falls into place, a whole act is produced that “makes sense” (236). It has a “creative moment” (236) which enhance the work of act.

Kalamandalam Kalyanikutty Amma, popularly known as the mother of Mohiniattam, can be considered as the pioneer of proto performance. Her work *Mohiniyattam: Charithravum Aattaprakaravum* is the best evidence that reveals her as a proto performer. It can be regarded as a ‘performance text’ which gives a complete guidance on the art form of Mohiniattam. She is the first one to document the technical and aesthetic aspects of Mohiniattam

which is essential for the better understanding of the art form and for posterity.

She has given detailed information on:

1. The names and the usages of Upangas
2. The technical details of Abhinaya and Bhava
3. The hand gestures and its methodological application
4. The training system
5. The adavus or the basic movement patterns
6. The costume
7. Dance literature

Being a devoted artist of Mohiniattam and to fulfill the promise given to the renowned poet, Vallathol Narayanamenon, Kalyanikutty Amma decided to strengthen the art form. She was terrified at first thinking where to start. But later she conducted ‘workshops’.

As aforesaid, she put in a lot of effort, carried out numerous research works, and even examined the Chera, Chola, and Pandya eras in order to trace the antiquity of Dasiattam, Sadirattam and Thevidichiattam (Kalyanikutty Amma 57). She deeply believed Mohiniattam to be a temple art. She read books on history, visited old temples such as, Koodalmanikyam, Kandiyoor, Bhootapandi temple, Shucheendram, where the dance form had been performed (33). She even interviewed some descendants of the devadasis like Meenakshiamma, Gangamma (35). Devadasi is a female artist who was dedicated to worship and serve a deity or a temple for the rest of her life. It literally means ‘female servant of god’. Once they were the wealth and pride of the temples. Later, they faced degradation and were labelled as prostitutes (52). She turned towards Kerala’s traditional dance forms Kaikottikali and

Kathakali. She observed and imbibed the beauty of steps of both these forms and it inspired her to mould new steps for Mohiniattam. She achieved Fellowship for Mohiniattam from both Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Academy and Kendra Sangeetha Nataka Academy for her researches. From her studies and researches she created a vocabulary for the art form of Mohiniattam.

The repertory sequence of Mohiniattam that we see in the present day is conceived by Kalyanikutty Amma. She acquired the movements, skills and techniques of Mohiniattam through rigorous ‘training’ from a younger age. Kalyanikutty Amma, who focused on ‘formal training’, structured the recital of Mohiniattam with seven different sets of items, namely, cholketu, jatiswaram, varnam, padam, shlokam, sapham and thillana (Kalyanikutty Amma 31 Rele 84). She improvised this sequence from what she learned from Krishna Panikar Ashaan.

Sapham remains specific to the repertoire of Kalyanikutty Amma’s style of Mohiniattam (Govindan *Sahapedia*). When she was training under Krishna Paniker Ashaan he only taught items like cholketu, varnam, padam etc. But he had told her about the tradition of the art form where the dance ends with a narrative story. Later, from what she heard in the classes and read in the treatises, Kalyanikutty Amma added “sapham” to the repertoire of Mohiniattam. She has choreographed *Ramasapham*, *Shivasapham* (Kalyanikutty Amma 246) inspired by Krishna Panicker Asaan’s idea of incorporating dramatic sequences from mythologies on different deities. Here, she fulfills the ‘pre-expressive’ nature of proto-performance. Thus, the

improvisation of sapham plays an important role in making Kalyanikutty Amma, a proto performer.

Similarly, the ‘pre-expressive’ notion of proto performance as stated by Eugenio Barba can be found in the formation of karanas by Kalyanikutty Amma. She introduced karana exclusively for Mohiniyattam. Karanas are the one hundred and eight key movement units in the classical dance described in the fourth chapter of *Natyashastra* titled ‘Thandava Lakshana’. Kalyanikutty Amma was of the opinion that karana described in *Natyashastra* is suitable for Mohiniyattam. Thus, she made her own practical interpretations of karanas. She also composed all the verses of Karanas in Malayalam and set it in suitable ragas to be practiced with music. She also identified the use of “navarasas” in Mohiniyattam. It refers to the nine expressions that humans often show which is described in *Natyashastra*. They include love (shringaara), laughter (haasya), kind-heartedness or compassion (karuna), anger (roudra), courage (veera), fear (bhayaanaka), disgust (bheebhatsya), wonder or surprise (adbhutha) and peace or tranquility (shaantha). The use of these expressions stays within the methodological grammar of Mohiniattam.

She composed many shlokas and kritis for the Mohiniattam repertoire as well as eighty verses on Mohiniyattam methodology. She strongly relied on the treatises *Natyashastra* and *Abhinaya Darpana* as best for the theory of Mohiniattam. These, too, depict the ‘pre expressive’ aspect which helped her to create something out of ordinary and made her a proto performer.

Kalamandalam Kalyanikutty Amma gave more importance to ‘training’ among the three phases of proto-performance; others being, ‘workshops’ and ‘rehearsals’. She wanted a systematic training and had clear

vision of the same. She knew how the body should be conditioned to attain the skills and techniques of Mohiniattam. She herself underwent a pre-requisite training which included physical exercises of hands, eyes, feet and torso to get flexibility of the body which enhances the 'training phase'.

According to her, the most indispensable part of Mohiniattam is 'lasya' the soft and gentle body movements. Having an extensive training under Krishna Panicker Asaan, her body was seasoned to the conventional movement vocabulary existed in Mohiniattam. Her own aesthetic sensibility and her innate curiosity to understand and assimilate the ideas from the traditional treatises helped her to codify a particular pattern of adavus for training students. She, who aimed at 'formal training', structured the pedagogy of Mohiniattam into a systematic and organized syllabus to teach students. It is useful for training and the following performances of students. They can acquire a thorough knowledge of it.

Kalamandalam Kalyanikutty Amma gave a detailed description of the movement of the body, hand gestures, facial expression and foot work in her book *Mohiniyattam: Charithravum Aattaprakaravum*. She categorized the adavus or the basic movements into four groups. They are taganam, jaganam, dhaganam, sammisaram.

In her book she has phrased all these technical nuances as Malayalam verse, so that it will be easier for the students to learn. The four groups of Adavus are mentioned:

Thaganam Jaganam pinne

Dhaganam Vakramennaho

Verthirichu paranjeedum

Saadhka kramamorkkuvan (141)

Kalyanikutty Amma believed that the essence of Mohiniattam was devotion. She focused on the philosophy and classicism of the art form. She was experimental in her dance form but determined to stand within the boundaries of bhakti and shringara. Kalyanikutty Amma's tradition springs from the teachings of Krishna Paniker Ashaan. Dr Neena Prasad, in her article titled, *Traditions in Mohiniyattam- a Closer Look* describes about the striking contrast between Kalyanikutty Amma's style and style of Kalamandalam which follows the tradition of Chinnammu Amma. These include basic stances, the construction of adavus and the mode of swaying the upper torso, costume and the repertoire.

In Amma's style, there are only two inches of distance between the feet. The footwork should be soft and the arms should move within a certain circumference close to the body and should be in a triangular shape. She notes:

Randangulamidam vittu
Kuthikaal vachu kondaho
Mukkonaakrithiyil paadayugmam
Nilavinullathaam (135)

She also describes how to start the dance. She remarks:

Udayaambara shobhaykku
Samamaay mukhapankajam
Smithabhaasuram aakenam
Athutaan nritha saubhagam (135)

It means that the dancer must have a countenance that resembles the splendour of the morning sky. The face should be filled with a constant smile. That is the beauty of dance.

The mudras or hand gestures are based on *Hastalakshana Deepika* in addition to the gramya and tantric mudras which existed in Mohiniattam beforehand. Hip movements, lifting the legs above the knee as well as leaps and jumps are avoided in Kalyanikutty Amma's style. She introduced two concepts "madaku" and "vritham". In "madaku", the eyes and body should move with the hand. Only then the act of performance attains completion. She opines:

Kai chalikkunidatheyykku

Kannum meyumorevidham

Vannale parioornathwam

Kai varoo nrithavediyil (191)

It was inspired by the famous verse from *Abinaya Darpana*:

Yatho hastha thato drishti

Yatho drishti thato mana

Yatho mana thato bhava

Yatho bhava thato rasa (82)

Kalyanikutty Amma was of the view that all these should be combined in unity in order to study the adavu. She made almost thirty two adavus for the vocabulary of Mohiniattam.

In "vritham", it follows a circular motion which is slow and soothe like a small paddy plant that moves during soft breeze. The movement of the dancer should be graceful and soft in nature. She comments:

Ilam kaatilulanjeedum

Pinchu nelchedi polave

Mriduvayi varanam

Dehachalanam narthakikkaye (191)

She tells that the motion should come till the last sound.

Kalyanikutty Amma was of the view that the movement of eyes is important in Mohiniyattam. Eyes are supposed to be the mirror of the soul. What one feels is instantly mirrored in the eyes. It is the eyes which reflect to a state of mind to a certain mood or emotion before any other body parts. The widening of eyes in astonishment or horror is an example which shows the importance of eyes in communication. In dance, the dancer does not make any use of her speech. Thus, her eyes have to be so expressive as to convey the meaning to the audience. This importance of emoting through the eyes was fully realized and developed by the artists of Kerala to a new height. During the training of Mohiniattam, practice and exercise for eyes is given great significance like the other art forms like Kathakali, Chakyarkuthu etc. The importance of eye movements can also be seen in the performances of Mohiniattam. Almost all the ladies have powerful expressive eyes. Mohiniattam which is more toned down for female interpretation uses eyes for effective communication and also creates a feeling of enchantment (Rele 77).

The nature of movements, madaku, vritham, hands and expression together form beauty to the art form.

Distinguishing with the tradition of Kalamandalam, Kalyanikutty Amma's adavus show a characteristic transition movement with the dancer

alternating between aramandalam and Kalamandalam positions. The dancer does not rise higher than kal mandalam positions while doing adavus.

Kalyanikutty Amma's style is marked by firm feet movement and elaborate execution of abhinaya. She was of the view that when the song is sung, meaning is to be conveyed through the mudras. Using hands and conveying expressions are imparted by different parts of the body while the rhythm is maintained by the use of legs.

The "aharya" or costume of Mohiniattam is simple but elegant which give its unique identity among the other classical dance forms of India. The attire for Mohiniattam consists of white sari, bordered with broad golden brocade which is called "kasavu" in Malayalam. The costume and hairstyle is also different from Kalamandalam tradition and she holds the view that the traditional authenticity of Mohiniattam will be destroyed if it is departed from its roots, i. e, the style of devadasis. Though, the hair style used now is that of the Kalamandalam called "kondakettu" or a side bun with the hair bunched upon the left side and is adorned with jasmine flowers, Kalyanikutty Amma adopts the "kakapaksham" or a hair style where the hair is plaited down the back and adorned with jasmine flower at the nape of neck and "etaminni" or small gold-plated discs in graduating sizes is attached to a thread and tied into the braid. "Nettichutti" adorns the forehead and "suryachandramar" or sun & moon are also worn on either side of head. She was against the "kondakettu" used in Kalamandalam as it distanced from its tradition (Govindan *Sahapedia*).

"Aharya" or costuming finds specific mention. A "cela" or sari which is eight yards long and white in colour with golden borders was worn in past.

A stitched costume is worn these days and different colour combinations can be seen. However, Kalyanikutty Amma's school strictly follows golden colour combination.

Kalyanikutty Amma believed that each dance follows its own classical and traditional dress and make up. If a person loves and worships an art form, he or she should never deviate from its classical aspect. She accepted modernized changes in dress and methods of presentation but it should not depart from its originality. According to her, when a dancer stays within the boundaries of the rules and regulations of the movements of dance, then only will it retain its classicism. She was also against the presentation of inappropriate actions like biting the lips and flirtatious expressions in order to bring out shringara.

Kalyanikutty Amma was a very strict and uncompromising teacher. There was no time limitation for the classes. She might teach an item in one sitting and wanted her students to concentrate deeply. All these shows that she gave prime importance to the 'training phase' of proto-performance.

Though Kalyanikutty Amma gave key importance to training, 'rehearsal phase' of proto-performance has significance in her dance life. It is noticeable in her choreographies.

In all the works of Kalyanikutty Amma, one can find dominant theme of bhakti or devotion. Her devotion can be seen in one of her "sthuthis" on lord Ganesha:

O! Lord Ganesh, I bow before you

O! Lord thy statue in gold, O! Merciful

Elephant faced; son of Gouri!

Will offer garland in your shrine of bells

Wake you up, early morning; offer kalabham

O! Lord I bow before you! (Kalyanikutty Amma 255)

The given “sthuthi” presents a devoted Kalyanikutty Amma. With great respect and honour, she addresses Lord Ganesha. She greets him by entitling different names. Her adoration towards the lord by giving offerings depicts her deep reverence for him. The repetition of the line, “O! Lord I bow before you shows her worship, admiration and devotion towards Lord Ganesha. This verse highly projects the theme of bhakthi and portrays the identity of Kalyanikutty Amma as a devotee in its extremeness.

Kalyanikutty Amma is considered as someone who always stuck to the theme of bhakti. But one can find a slight change from her composition of a padam *Varika Varika Sakhi*:

Come, come, dear friend

Met my lord?

Delivered my message

With love?

What spoke he?

What was his expression?

Anger in his eyes?

Or filled with

Compassion, dear friend? (258)

This padam depicts a love-lorn maiden who yearns for Lord Krishna. Here, the Nayika or the female protagonist sends Sakhi or her friend to Krishna to convey her deep love and longing for him. One can see an

impatient heroine who is eagerly waiting for the return of her friend. Upon her arrival, she enquires Sakhi's encounter with her love.

The Nayika questions her whether she was able to deliver her message. She asks about his expression when she told about her love and also inquires whether he replied to the proposal. She asks if he was happy or surprised. She also questions whether he mentioned about her love. She was also worried about spreading of rumours about this affair and that was why she enquired if someone noticed or identified her friend. Again, the maiden enquires her friend whether she confessed her love to Lord Krishna.

This extract shows Kalyanikutty Amma's deep devotion to Lord Krishna. It shows different colours of expressions of love viz- anxiety, fear. Here, the speaker shows a platonic love or a spiritual love. Again, this abstract shows the intense and eternal friendship between two individuals. She is a loyal and trustworthy friend. This particular work also presents the outlook of society. It is evident in the fear of maiden. It shows that if her affair with Krishna become public, it will, certainly, have a negative impact on her. Indirectly, it shows how a male dominant patriarchal society works. In this work, one can see bhakti in its zenith infused with friendship, love, adoration etc.

Here, the 'rehearsal phase' of proto performance can be analyzed. Every movements, hand gestures and expressions she learned are carefully used and gave poetic essence to bring multiple interpretations. In this padam, the context is shown in different ways. At first the female protagonist asks if she saw her noble Krishna using the mudra that represents nobility. Then the Nayika asks whether she had seen her lover who had a countenance of a full

moon showing the face and the corresponding gesture. Then she asks whether she saw Krishna whose eyes resembles that of a lotus. Further she asks, whether she saw him who is wearing a garland of flowers, only using facial expression. She also asks whether he saw her admirer who has the colour of clouds. The same way she uses different techniques for the remaining lines. Kalyanikutty Amma gives different images for a single line. And through this repetition she takes poetic liberty and gives multiple connotations.

These multiple meanings created through different methods which depicts the 'rehearsal phase' can also be analysed in the padam *Alivenienthu cheyvu*:

Alas! What shall I do,
lady with curly black hair?
Lotus eyed one, Lord Padmanabha
Hasn't yet arrived.
Tell me, what is the use,
If my comely one hasn't come
There is a moonlit night,
The drowning of beetles
The presence of gentle wind
And charming smell of sandal paste,
Different flowers like jasmin (226)

The given extract presents a dejected maiden who is eagerly waiting for the arrival of her beloved. But her lover hasn't come yet and shows her grievances towards her friend. The verse begins with the Nayika or the female protagonist addressing her friend. She calls her dark haired lady and asks what

she would do. She quite impatiently tells that her lord hasn't reached. She is so desperate to see him. She tells what the use of this beautiful night is if her lover does not come. Being distressed, she recalls her sweet moments with him and doubts whether he has forgotten all those. She anxiously says if he has forgotten the time they spent together and the sweet things he told her. A devastated maiden urges her friend to inform her sorrow to him and also tells her to bring him with her.

This extract presents the theme of pain, love and fear. The maiden is in extreme sadness and is missing her beloved. The sweet memories with her lover develop agony mixed with anxiety. She even thinks that she might lose him. The excerpt also portrays the beauty of nature. It describes about the night filled with moonlight and the droning of the beetles. It also depicts the beauty of the gentle breeze and even describes the fragrance of flowers and trees. But it is depicted in contradiction to fear of the protagonist of losing her beloved.

This padam shows different contrasts such as pain versus love, sweet versus sour, memory versus forgetfulness, beauty versus fear. This verse also shows the depth of friendship she has with her friend. The Nayika shares everything with her. The verse mainly shows the extreme pain one feels and is deeply connected with love and memory. Literally, in the second stanza, the female protagonist tells that her lover hasn't arrived yet. But, when the padam is performed, here also multiple interpretations are brought. Showing the hand gesture of a lotus and eyes, she presents that he did not come. For the same line, she again shows the position of Vishnu on Anathan 'the serpent' and

shows he did not appear. Then shows gesture of the navel from where the stem of the lotus arises indicating Vishnu.

Kalamandalam Kalyanikutty Amma is popularly known as someone who upholds bhakthi. But taking these pieces of literature into account, one can find her deviation from it and puts forward more abstract themes and social issues. This shows her willingness to improvise the art form and “apply the traditional knowledge to immediate contingent circumstances” (Schechner 232) so that performances will be both old and new at the same time.

The choreography of *Ramasaptham* clearly portrays the ‘rehearsal phase’ of proto-performance. *Ramasaptham* is a very brief retelling of the story of *Ramayana*. Saptam means seven. This item is the seventh and the last item in Mohiniattam. Saptas are performed based on Puranas like *Ramayana*, *Shiva Purana* and *Devimahatmya*. *Ramasaptham* is divided into four parts, namely, “kharaharapriya”, “nattukurinji”, “dhanyasi” and “madhyamavathi”.

A detailed description of the choreography of *Ramasaptham* is provided in her *Mohiniyattam: Charitrvum Aattaprakaravum*. In the saptham, the entire story of *Ramayana* is presented portraying the vigorous youth of Rama, his divine marriage to Sita, his encounter with the outrageous Parasurama, fulfillment of Kaikeyi’s boon by Dasaratha, exile of Rama, Sita and Lakshmana, abduction of Sita by Ravana, the war between Ravana and Rama, rescue of Sita and coronation of Rama. All these events are shown using different movements, hand gestures and expressions. Kalyanikutty Amma makes use of mudras and adavus like hamsasyamudra, ardhachandramudra, aramamandala, dhaganam, jaganam taganam, sammisaram and other techniques and her knowledge, ideas and views of the story to make an entity.

Thus, it can be said that Kalamandalam Kalyanikutty Amma is a pioneer of proto-performance.

Chapter Four

Conclusion

Kalyanikutty Amma is certainly the mother of Mohiniyattam. She was the only dancer of her period who spoke authoritatively on Mohiniyattam. Her choreographies surpass other dances in aesthetics and structural design. Her research and efforts helped to enrich Mohiniyattam academically and aesthetically. She was an ardent believer of classicism, fused with bhakti, grace and beauty.

The social, political, economic and cultural circumstances depict the existence, survival and establishment of a female artist in a male dominated patriarchal society. This is evident in the dance of Kalyanikutty Amma. Being a woman, she was confined in the household and was forced to do menial jobs within the boundaries of her house. Though she belonged to a family where women had no voice, Kalyanikutty Amma was quite rebellious and was determined to do something in her life. She was resolute and unswerving. At a particular point in her life, she was welcomed to the world of dance. After a lot of struggle, she emerged as a great dancer.

Though Kalamandalam Kalyanikutty Amma was a strong-willed woman, her marriage with Kalamandalam Krishnan Nair shackled her with the chains of male dominated society who was obliged to do the duties of a wife and a mother. She was an ordinary woman who was suppressed by the so-called woman responsibilities; propounded by the society; for almost three years and did not flourish as a dancer during those years.

The inner self of Kalyanikutty Amma did not accept such a life and comes out with flying colours. A woman like her could not be contained under

the walls of patriarchy. She re-entered the realm of dance. She returned as a dance teacher, choreographer and as a performer. While she was looked down by her own family and relatives in the name of the so-called morality, she achieved her freedom and became independent in her own right.

She was a social reformer in her own society. She worked not only for herself but also for other women. She helped to empower others by indulging them in handlooms and crafts, along with dance and music. Thereby, Kalamandalam Kalyanikutty Amma aided them to have their own unique identity and individuality.

Though she was tried to be crushed by the male dominated society, the resurrection of Kalyanikutty Amma can be viewed as the reflection of an evolving society. Such an evolution can be witnessed in this present world.

Through her dancing career, she was able to entertain, teach, create beauty and heal the world. She tried to bring out the philosophy and spirituality of her works rather than creating glorious and spectacular performance.

When one analyses the career of Kalamandalam Kalyanikutty Amma, one can identify that her main focus is on proto-performance. As a Student of Kalamandalam, she used to do stage performances representing the institution. After leaving Kalamandalam, she gave due importance in imparting the art form of Mohiniattam. In addition, the inspirational encounter with Vallathol in his death bed reinforced her to renovate the art. Thus, she fully diverted her focus on systemizing the art form. All the elements of proto-performance are reflected in Kalyanikutty Amma. The following performance and aftermath can be traced in her disciples.

She received honours like Keerthi Shanku, Kendra Sangeetha Nataka Academy award, Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Academy award. People may think that these titles were given due to her over-all performance. But a thorough study of Kalyanikutty Amma's life depicts that she became the recipient of these awards based on the activities of proto-performance.

Schechner says that performance can be studied as an interaction between players such as sourcers, producers, performers and partakers. As Kalyanikutty Amma went through all the four phases, she had a vision how to mould the art form of Mohiniattam. It is this ability of hers made her the advocate of proto-performance.

As a teacher, Kalyanikutty Amma has contributed a lot to the art form of Mohiniattam. Training, rehearsing and conducting workshops for Mohiniattam were the key areas of Kalyanikutty Amma.

Many changes have been made in the dance form of Mohiniattam. One can observe significant differences from tradition to modern. The dance style of Kalamandalam Kalyanikutty Amma provides an outline for the dance form. Giving prime importance to the lessons provided by Krishna Panicker Ashaan and Madhavi Amma, she deconstructed the movements and vocabulary of Mohiniattam on the basis of traditional abhinaya. Later she structuralized the form of Mohiniattam by combining all the scattered elements into a unity. She combined the physical, mental and spiritual aspects into a single harmonious form.

Her treatment of padams is significant. She gave poetic essence to it. It includes not only hand gestures but also different interpretations through

expressions. Kalyanikutty Amma gave various images for a single line and brought different perspectives.

One can infer that, Kalamandalam Kalyanikutty Amma took each item and deconstructed it after studying and analyzing the various possibilities. This dismantling again leads to systematization of a new item.

Another important aspect is that she structuralized a new item to the repertoire of Mohiniattam called sapham from her ideas and knowledge. She also had a vision of how it should be performed. She also had a view how kacheri should be arranged. She also had an idea how the song and dance should be developed.

Kalamandalam Kalyanikutty Amma had clear insight over the organization of the dance form. Academically, aesthetically and poetically, she created and choreographed new dances, after careful and deep analysis. She used perfect proportion and harmony. Her students were able to make her vision success. She also improved her style through various critiques and judgements. Even though critics see the traditional style and style of Kalyanikutty Amma as two schools of Mohiniattam, she never claimed that she had evolved a style of her own. Her contribution was only an improvisation of what she had mastered from the gurus of Kalamandalam.

Kalamandalam Kalyanikutty Amma had a clear vision on the training and exercise of the form. She knew how the body should be conditioned within the performing aspects for a performance. She gave importance to each and every element including song, literature, content, techniques, instruments and costumes. She was iron-willed in keeping up with the traditions. She

found no element unimportant. She was rigid in her views, ideas and opinions. She used it confidently in productions.

The process of learning and understanding an art form is essential because it makes the actual performance possible. According to Schechner, attaining knowledge about every single aspect of an art form comes under proto-performance. It is tiresome and time consuming. A stage performance is the product of months and years of training and practice. The phase before a performance which includes comprehension of a performing art is necessary for the sustainability and longevity of the art form and Kalamandandalam Kalyanikutty Amma belongs to this phase. Mohiniattam, which was on the verge of extinction, was restored by Kalyanikutty Amma. She structured a systematic pedagogy for the technically sound and aesthetically unique existence of the art form of Mohiniattam.

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