

**STUDIES ON POPULAR FOLK ART FORMS
KATHAKALI**

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Preface

Kathakali is a dramatic dance form of South India ; originated in Kerala between 16th and 17th centuries. It draws inspiration from the Ramayana and stories from Shaiva traditions. The word kathakali literally means 'story- play'. The elaborate costumes of Kathakali has the most recognized icon for Kerala. Kathakali actors convey their emotions through 'mudras' (hand gestures) and 'bhavas' facial expressions. Traditionally, Kathakali is performed exclusively by men and young boys who play the parts of both males and females. In spite of being the youngest of the classical forms and one of the most refined gesticulate dance-dramas, it remains one of the many dying art forms in India with barely any patrons left to appreciate it.

Chapter One

Introduction

Kerala, the God's own country, which is always one step ahead with its cultural grandeur and celebrations is known to be the land of innumerable art forms. There are many art forms in Kerala that can be claimed to be it's own, maintaining diversity in rituals and customs in harmony. It's arts are often able to exhibit the social and cultural characteristics of the country. Kathakali is the one of the first things that comes into the mind of foreigners when they think about Kerala. But as for the natives of Kerala the value they had given earlier to art forms are fading away.

Kathakali is a traditional dance-drama from the South-west part of Kerala, India. It is a "story play" genre of art, but it is distinguished by elaborately colourful make-up heavy costumes and face mask. Traditionally the vocal performance has been performed in Sanskritized Malayalam (Manipravaalm). In the mid- seventh century it developed into a distinct art form, drawing influence from other performance tradition. Traditionally, men played all roles, including both male and female, but women train and perform in some contemporary troupes. The stories used in Kathakali is taken from the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and from Shaiva literature. In contemporary composition Kathakali has adopted Western stories and play as those of Shakespeare.

Kathakali is one of the most unique forms of art in the whole world today. The recognition it has received even in foreign countries is a good example of the artistic excellence of Kathakali. This art form, it is the culmination of the Kala, Nrthya, Natyam, Sangeet, a modified version of the art form previously known by Ramanattam (dance of Rama) in Kerala. Kathakali music is popularly known as Sopanasamgeetham. The performance of Kathakali include a network of various ceremonies. They include

Kelikottu, Kelikkai, Thodayam, Purappad, Melappadham. Only those with perfect patience and dedication can master Kathakali. Kathakali roles can be divided into five according to the nature of the characters. Satvikaguna will be given a green costume for the main characters whose roles reflect goodness; Tamoguna will be given a black beard; those who do only evil deeds will be given a red beard, female characters will be given the minikk, Satvika character, generally calm characters will be given white beard. Kathakali costumes deserves a lot of notable accolades.

Abhinaya, or modes of conveyance of theatrical pleasure to the spectators, are four, they are; "Sattvika", conveyed by the effort of the mind (bhava or sentiment); second, "Angika", i.e. the natural movement of the various parts of the body when any thoughts is conveyed or expressed (gestures); third, "Vacika", exhibition in words (e.g. singing); and lastly, "Aharya", i.e., the dress, deportment and mise-en-scene. All these three together with "Aharya Abinaya" have a peculiar combination in Kathakali, and make it interpretation dance to the accompaniment of music. The lyrics, which has literature quality (Sahithyam) are considered to be a component of Geetha, and play supplementary to Nritham, Nrithyam and Natyam. Ilakiattam is a part of performance when the characters can demonstrate their excellence in acting (abhinaya). The poet Vallathol has done much service to this classical dance form which received a new energy and thus many new innovations are also being made to parallel with the need of a changing society.

Much earlier than Krishnattam was introduced, two older forms of dramatic representation were the Chakkia Kuttu and Kudiyattam whose history of origin dates back to the period of Permals, the imperial Suzerains of Kerala. These dramatic forms still preserve most of the ancient traditions of the art of classical drama. The use of costumes in Kathakali has been much influenced by these forms of ancient dramas.

Kathakali takes place in Koothambalam or a stage in a village during festival, in front of Kalivikku (lamp) and instruments (Vadhya). The Attavilakk (brass lamp) is lit at the front of the stage and it represents the divine presence. The play begins with Arangukeli- a drumming played on a Mandalam to invite the gods to the performance. Thirashiela (a satin curtain) is held up at the front on the stage, it represents Maya (state of illusion). It is reminiscent of the closed doors of the temple shrine. Thodayam, is the first item to be learned by a young Kathakali actor, it is performed behind the Thirashiela and it is followed by Vandana Slokam- a prayer to the gods. Purappad follows as a piece of pure dance by junior actors: to give them the experience of performing on stage in the heavy costumes and make-up. Next comes, Melappadham – a musical masterpiece where senior singers and drummers show their skills. After Melappadham, the stage is now prepared for the Kathakali play. The Thirashiela is lowered to reveal his magnificent character when the actor is ready. At dawn Dansi- a dance ritual is performed by one of the heroic character to ask for blessings on the audience.

Kathakali is generally accepted as the unique art form of Keralites. 'Attakatha' is its literary form. The visual form 'Attakatha' is defined as Kathakali and the literary form of Kathakali is 'Attakatha'.

There are different types of Attakathas :

- 1.Nalacharitham
- 2.Seethaswayamvaram.
- 3.Balivadham.
- 4.Thoranayudham.
- 5.Kirmeeravadham.
- 6.Bakavadham.

7.Kalyanasaugandhikam.

8.Kalakeyavadham.

9.Keechakavadham.

10.Uttharaswayamvaram.

Nalacharitham

The plot of Nalacharitham is taken from 'Nalopakhyana' described in chapters 52 to 79 of Mahabharata's Vana Parva. This play is written by Unnayi Warriar and its length split into four parts. It tells the story of King Nalan and his consort Damayanthi. Nalacharitham is considered as the most romantic work of art constructed on the classical basement of Kathakali.

Seethaswayamvaram

Seethaswayamvaram (Seetha's Wedding) is a Kathakali play authored by Kottarakkara Thampuran. The plot has been picked up from the first canto of epic Ramayana. This is a play in sixteen acts. The story covers the arrival of Viswamitra and confrontation between Sreerama and Parasurama following Sita's marriage to Rama. Nowadays, only the sequence depicting Parasurama's confrontation with Lord Rama is normally staged.

Thoranyudham

Thoranyudham (The Battle at the Entrance) is a Kathakali play authored by Kottarakkara Thampuran in Malayalam. It is believed that Kottarakkara Thampuran was the originator of Kathakali. This story is based on Hanuman's journey to Lanka to find Sreeraman's wife Sita, is quite popular among Kathakali aficionados.

Bakavadham

'Bakavadham' (killing of Baka), usually starts with the circumstances of Bhima's marriage to Hidumbi and how they got separated after the birth of their son

Khatolkachan. This story is taken from the Sabha Parva of Mahabharata. This play is written in Malayalam by Kottayam Thampuran.

Kirmeeravadham

Kirmeeravadham (the slaying of Kirmeera), begins with Dharmaputra and Panchali entering the Kamyakavanam after losing their kingdom to Duryodhana. This is based on a story in Mahabharata and penned by Kottayathu Thampuran. The play has fourteen scenes.

Kalakeyavadham

Kalakeyavadham (killing Kalakeya), is based on the Mahabharata's Aaranya Parva. The play describes the events encompassing the Pandava prince Arjuna's visit to his father Indran after attaining the 'Pasupatha Astram' (divine arrow) from Lord Siva.

Kalyanasougandhikam

Kalyanasougandhikam is a story known for its unique blend of elements that highlight the classicism of Kathakali. This play is based on events in Mahabharata, during Pandava's vanavasa (exile in the forest) at Kamayaka forest. Bheema goes in search of the flower named Kalyanasougandhikam to please Panchali.

The four plays of Kottayam Thampuran such as Bakavadham, Kirmeeravadham, Kalakeyavadham and Kalyanasougandhikam are particularly favored by orthodox artists and their patrons. They are considered very important in the Kathakali repertoire because they are meticulously conform to the strict rules of Kathakali and are a combination of conventional structure (chitta) with intermittent possibilities for improvisation (manodharma).

Chapter Two

A Glimpse into the Art of Kathakali

Content

History

The origin of Kathakali (part-dance and part-mime), may be traced to the Tantric (or ritualistic) period of the Vedic Age, but it took a unique form between the 1st half of 16th century and 17th century, around the same time as Shakespeare. At that time, it was given its present name and took on its modern-day characteristics. However, its roots go back much further into ancient folk arts and classical dances in Kerala. These ancient folk dances were performed at religious festivals by actors wearing colourful headdresses, costumes, and elaborate, even ornate, headpieces. The earliest mention of Kathakali can be found in Natya Shastra by Bharata Muni.

Kottarakara Thampuran, the Raja of Kottarakara was the first composer and originator of the Kathakali. Under his regime there was a revival of the ancient folk dance-drama in a new garb and improved form. The new interpretation of the dance was borrowed from the old text of Ramanattam (for the earliest themes theatrically represented were the stories of Sri Rama, one of the Avatara, incarnation of Lord Vishnu) with new modification. The Raja of Kottarakara composed eight incidents of Sri Rama from his birth to coronation after killing Ravana. In acting, these themes were based on Bharatha's Naty Shashtra principles. Thus, the art of Kathakali developed under his regime that combined the folk-lore of Malabar and highly artistic technique of Bharatha.

The history of Kathakali is rich and pregnant with its traditions. The most sticking feature of Kathakali is its dramatic quality; gods and heroes, demons and spirits who appear from another world in costumes and headgear, which are inspired by myth and

legends. Many social and religious theatrical forms which existed in the Southern region in ancient times helps to evolve Kathakali. Chakiarkoothu, Koodiyattam, Krishnattam and Ramanattam are few of the ritual performing arts of Kerala which have had a direct influence on Kathakali in its techniques and forms.

Kathakali is associated with cult of Bhagavathy (Thiyyattam, Mudi yettu, and Theyyam), and socio-economic and material dances like Ezhamattukali. A dance drama, Ashtapadiyattom, based on Gita Govinda of twelfth-century poet Jayadeva, the Zamorin Raja of Calicut, wrote Krishnagiti, a dance to be performed as Krishnattam (Krishan; attam(enactment)) on eight consecutive nights, including elements of Ashtapadiyattom and Koodiyattam. The performance of Krishnattam was strictly restricted to Guruvayoor temple, places of the members of the Zamorin's family, and temples and houses of Namboothiri Brahmins within the Zamorin's region.

The origin of Kathakali is rooted in legends. It is said that Kottarakara Thampuran, great admirer and promoter of traditional art forms, invited Zamorin to present Krishnattam to be performed at the temple for his people. But at that time performance was restricted to those of high caste and royalty. It is said that Zamorin not only refused to send the performers, insulted and humiliated the chief by remarking: It is useless to dispute the troupe because his court would be neither able to appreciate not understand anything because of the high artistic standards of the performance and it is not for the common man to see. This abusive reply was retailed by Kottarakara Thampuran, who composed seven plays, parallel mode of entrainment, the technique of Krishnattam was thrown into the enactment of Rama's story, as told in the epic, Ramayana and a new aspect of Kerala stage, which he called Ramanattam came into existence.

As to language and subject matter: Sanskrit and Malayalam were both used: drama were composed by Maharaja Karthika Thirunal and Maharaja Utharam Thirunal

and by eminent poets for the now established form of dance drama of Kerala (Kathakali and Ramanattam were frequently used as synonyms terms) . This dramatic composition has caused the first six decades of the nineteenth century to be looked as the Augustan Age of Kathakali.

Kathakali remarkably flourished between 1675 and 1743 A.D. The use of local language, Malayalam (Manipravaalm) made it popular among masses, who could not understand Sanskrit. In time, in favor of more elaborate facial make-up, masks were discarded. Around the seventeenth century, acting gets separated from singing, which helped the actors to concentrate on dramatic expression. Towards the end of the 17th century Prince Kottayam wrote four plays based on Mahabharata, liberating Kathakali from any particular Hindu epic and distinguishing it from Ramanattam. To emphasize movements of facial features, he introduced a white frame around the face, and red features on a green background.

In the 18th century, Kapplingattu Namboothiri introduced many innovation that shaped Kathakali as it is today. He borrowed Mudras from Koodiyattam. Kathakali was traditionally performed during festival seasons. Various Hindu ethnic groups participated in Kathakali performance. Kalaripayattu is used in Kathakali training and, in a mild form, on the stage. It seems from the formation and names of Mudras used in the Kathakali that they have the earliest origin from the symbolic representation of animals and tangible objects, like Pataka, the flag; Kapota, the Dove; Kartarimukha, the scissors tips, etc.. These representation were undoubtedly evolved during Tantric Period when poses had been used in the worship of God. But their modification in the forms in which they exist to-day owe to the great sage, Bharatha, who has dealt with these in his Natya Shastra (The Science of Dancing).

The art of Kathakali has drawn its existence from various sources of dramaturgy, and with the development of civilization it attained the perfection as it is today. It is the real representation of Gita (music), Vadhya (instrument), and Nrtya (dancing). It is a histrionic art of great technique. Today Kathakali is no longer restricted to temples, places and religious festivals, but is often performed at special events and in theatres.

Etymology

The term “Kathakali”, derived from two words “Katha” (story) and “Kali” (play or performance) . The text written to perform Kathakali is Attakkatha (story of dance), in other words , Attakkatha is the literary form of Kathakali. The play used in Kathakali are derived from Hindu epic such as Mahabharata, Bhagavata , Purana and Ramayana. The dance form symbolises the eternal fight between good and evil.

Elements of fine arts

Kathakali is the combination of five elements of fine art:

- 1.Natyam (acting or performance), the use of facial expression to convey a specific meaning.
- 2.Nrityam (enactment), the use of hand gestures “ mudras”, to convey meaning and of emotion.
- 3.Nritham (dance), the use of rhythmic movement of hands, legs and body.
- 4.Sangeetham (music) ; Song/ vocal accompaniment (Geetha) ,and instrumental accompaniment (Vadyam)
- 5.Chutti: Painting or make-up

The lyrics, which quality as literature (Sahityam) are considered to be a component of Geetha, and play supplementary role to Nritham, Nrithyam and Natyam. The Kathakali songs is rich in poetic diction and are among the germs of Malayalam literature.

Kathakali Plays

There are 101 classical Kathakali stories, initially most of which are composed to last a whole night. Today, it is shortened to two or four hours by selecting the most dramatic or popular portions of individual stories. The Kathakali draws themes of loves, and conflict of the gods and heroes of Indian mythology and Puranas. Kottayathu Thampuran, Unnayi Warriar, Irayimman Thampi, Vayaskara Moos etc.. are some of the major contributors of Attakkatha or the text of Kathakali.

The most popular stories enacted in Kathakali are

1. Nala Charitam : a story from the Mahabharata about King Nala and his wife Damayanthi.
2. Dhuryodhana Vadham : It is a story from Mahabharata about killing of Dhuryodhana by Pandava brother Bhima in Kurukshetra.
3. Kalyanasowgandhikam : It based on the story of Bhima's encounter with Hanuman when the former get out in search for the flower, Kalyanasowgandhikam for his wife Draupati.
4. Kiratham: It is about the story of Arjuna and Lord Shiva's fight, from Mahabharata.
5. Keechaka Vadham: Based on the story of the killing of Keechaka by Bhima when the Pandavas were in disguise.
6. Karna Shapadham: Another story from Mahabharata about Karna.

Kathakali is a classical art form that can be appreciated by both beginners and veteran because of its frequent use of 'lokadharmi' (the elaboration of folk elements) which the beginners are already familiar. " Natyadharmi" (the science of acting elaborated in Natya Shastra) is better understood by the professionals .The "personalization" of characters by individual actors will be appreciated since the spectators who already knows the story being enacted. Whereas the "personalization"

that each actors brings to his depiction of story by the professionals will be better in distinguishing and discussing.

Music

While watching Kathakali the first thing that strikes in it is the music. There are several instruments mixed within in order to provide the mood for the scene. Kathakali dance uses music to create mood and guide the steps and movements, and the tone of each scene. The vocalists of Kathakali sings through musical dialogue and verse (i.e; Vacika abinaya) in Sanskritized Malayalam, which the actors interpret word by word through their 'mudras' and facial expression. After that there is a period called Kalasam, when part of the first verse is repeated. Then next verses are sung and this way the whole story is told. The vocalists use variance of pitch and intonation. The orchestra is completed with two singers – they stand on the right side of the stage.

Most of the Kathakali songs are set in ragas based on microtone heavy Carnatic music. The Sopanam style- which is a distinct style of plain note rendition in Kathakali music. This typical Kerala style rendition takes its origin from temple songs which is used to sing at the time when Kathakali took its origin. It is said to be the ritual singing of the Ashtapadis on the flight of steps landing to sanctum sanctorum. Kathakali music also uses Carnatic ragas, the Raga and Tala conforming to the Bhava, Rasa, and dance pattern.

Chempada : It is the musical tone used for the depiction of the fight between good and evil and a concluding scene.

Adantha : The musical tone is played during the divine and virtuous scene.

Muri Adantha: It is played during comic and light hearted acts.

Triputa : Music to beauty the scene involving teachers and sages.

Panchari : It is used during scenes of unusual situations and Chempa portrays clash, argument, tension, dispute between lovers.

Even though Kathakali music has some similarities to South Indian Classical Music (Carnatic Sangeet) , the instrumentation is different. It gets its local colour by the use of instruments such as Chenda, Idakka, and Shuddha mandalam. It also uses Chengila, Ilathalam, and Shankhu.

Performance

A traditional Kathakali performance in Kerala begins at night and goes on until dawn, the following morning. The four instruments used in Kathakali are Chenda, Maddalam, Chengila and Elatthalam. Kathakali rituals are still remain unchanged. 'Kelikottu' is an example for this. 'Kelikottu ' is performed as a way to inform audience about the existence of Kathakali in a time when no technology was effective. Still it continues as a ritual. 'Attavilakk' will be lit after 'Kelikottu'. Before electric light came on stage, Kathakali was performed by the light of chandelier. Today there is electric light in most places. But 'Attavilakk' still shines. Next to 'Kelikottu' is 'Kelikkai'. Instruments used for this are 'Suddhamaddalam', 'Elathalam'and 'Chengila'.This is followed by ceremonies such as 'Thodayam' and 'Purappad'. Then enters into the story.

In Kathakali, 'Mudras' (hand gestures) are adopted from Bharatamuni's 'Natyasasthra'.There are 24 basic 'Mudras'. These are used as a substitute for spoken Language. Actors can vividly convey their emotions by facial expressions. They express both subjective and objective emotions.

Kathakali Characters

Kathakali characters represent the Mythological beings of the three worlds; upper deva (Gods), middle (humans) and another world of asuras (demons). There are three types of characters in Kathakali : 'Satvika', 'Rajasika' and 'Thamsika'. The striking

make-up and costumes are used to transform the actors into the types of characters they are to portray.

'Pacha' (green) is for those with 'satvik' qualities. This role reflects goodness. Gods and kings generally wear 'pacha'. 'Rajasika' qualities are imparted by 'katthi' (knife) and 'thadi' (beard). 'Katthi' are of two types : 'Nedumkatthi' and 'Kurumkatthi'. Duryodhana and Ravana belongs to 'Kurumkatthi'. 'Ghatolkachan' and 'Kalakeyan' are part of 'Nedumkatthi'. There are three types of 'thadi' (beard). Generally calm characters wear 'Vellatthadi' (white beard). Hanuman is an example for this. Actors who wore 'chumanna thadi' (red beard) are evil characters. Dussasanan and Baali are instance for this. 'Karuttha thadi' (black beard) is an epitome of evil. 'Kali' in 'Nalacharitha' is ideal among this. 'Kari' plays the role of 'kattalan' (savage), 'Soorpanaka' (monster) and 'simhika' (lioness).

Acting

Kathakali is a visual art and it is considered to be a combination of three chief elements :

1. Natyam (acting), involves facial expressions to convey emotions.
2. Nrithyam , use of 'Mudras' (hand gestures).
3. Nrittham (dance), use of rhythm and movement of hands, legs and body.

These were accompanied by 'Sangeetham' (music) and 'Vadyam' (instruments). A Kathakali actor must be possessed with the powers of concentration, skill and stamina. Language of Kathakali is the combinations of facial expressions (Rasas), bodily movements and hand gestures (Mudras). Control of eye movements are also specific.

The 'Mudras' are in the form of sign language is used in Kathakali for story telling. There are 24 basic 'Mudras'. And numerous lesser 'Mudras'. These were adopted from

Bharatamuni's 'Natyasastra'.

A Kathakali artist uses nine main facial expressions which are called as 'Navarasas'. Through the control of facial muscles each actor express the emotional state of the character in the play. The nine 'Navarasas' express nine 'Bhava' (emotions). They are;

1. Sringaram (love)
2. Haasyam (humor)
3. Bhayam (fear)
4. Karunam (sad)
5. Rowdram (anger)
6. Veeram (vigor)
7. Bheebhatsam (disgust)
8. Adbhutham (wonder)
9. Saantham (peace).

Make-up and Costumes

Among the classical art forms, Kathakali has the most extensive costume with ornate head dresses, face masks and distinctly painted faces. In Kathakali costumes, ornaments and facial make-up together constitute a character type. Kathakali 'Vesham' portrays archetypal characters and several hours are dedicated for the make-up of the artists.

Types of make-up used in Kathakali are 'pacha' (green), katthi (knife) 'thadi' (beard), 'kari' (black) and 'minukku' (polished). The noble and divine appear in green. 'Katthi' represents the arrogant and evil. 'Chuvanna thadi' (Red Beard) denotes vile characters. 'Vellatthadi' (white beard) stands for divinity. 'Kari' personifies evil

personalities. Spiritual characters such as noble Women, Sages and Brahmins have yellow coloured Faces which are known as 'Minukk' (polished).

The make-up is made from various stones, mineral ores and colours mixed with coconut oil before applying on the face. A trained 'chuttikkaran', applies fine lines of rice paste and affixes bits of white paper for each character. Dancers often make their eyes red with the use of 'chundanga seed' before the performance.

Most attractive part of Kathakali is its costume. Though the costumes of all the major characters are almost identical, there are various head dresses to be worn differently. Jackets, ornamented scarves, plaited skirts, grand head dresses with long hair are part of elaborated make-up. It will arise impression among the viewers.

Styles (Sampradayam)

Kathakali style is masculine in nature. It's mainly a male art. The major original Kathakali styles are

1. Vettathu Sampradayam
2. Kalladikkodan Sampradayam ; and
3. Kaplingadu Sampradayam

Later these styles scaled down to northern and southern styles. The difference in these styles is based on their choreography, stress on dance contrasted to drama and orientation of hand gestures (mudras). In Kerala Kalamandalam, the northern style is implemented

Songs and Instruments

The language of the songs used for Kathakali is Manipravalam. Though most of the songs are set in ragas based on the microtone-heavy Carnatic music, there is a distinct style of plain-note rendition, which is known as the Sopanam style. This typically

Kerala style of rendition takes its roots from the temple songs which used to be sung (continues even now at several temples) at the time when Kathakali was born.

The play is in the form of verses that are metered and lyrical, sung by vocalists whose voice has been trained to various melodies (ragas), music and synchronized with the dance-acting on the stage. The vocalists not only deliver the lines, but help set the context and express the inner state of the character by modulating their voice. For example, anger is expressed by the use of sharp high voice and pleading is expressed by the use of a tired tone.

Many musical instruments are used in Kathakali. Three major drums found are Maddalam (barrel-shaped), Chenda (cylindrical drum played with curved sticks) and Idakka (Idakka, hourglass-shaped drum with muted and melodious notes played when female characters perform). They are played almost throughout a Kathakali performance.

Popularity

Like other Hindu forms of dance drama, such as Koodiyattam, Kathakali evolved as a ritual dance, to be performed as an offering at temples and during religious festivals. While the other forms remained relatively unknown, Kathakali reached a broad audience and achieved that status of a widely-recognized national treasure. Several factors have contributed to its popularity. The performance of Kathakali was not restricted to sacred temple grounds or palaces, making it accessible to ordinary people. Kathakali was performed in Malayalam, the spoken language of Kerala, and incorporated local folk traditions and a broad range of familiar episodes from the Hindu epics. During the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Kathakali also attracted the interest of Western audiences.

Outstanding Kathakali artists such as Kalamandalam Ramankutty Nair (b. 1925, recipient of prestigious Kalidas award), Keezhpadam Kumaran Nair (1913 – 2007, recipient of the prestigious Padmashree award) and Kalamandalam Padmanabhan Nair (1928 – 2007) not only trained young actors in the Kathakali tradition, but created new choreography and gained international exposure by taking Kathakali performances abroad. Kathakali performances have been documented in several films, including Kalamandalam Ramankutty Nair (2005) and the award-winning *Vaanaprastham* (1999) directed by Shaji N Karun and acted by Mohanlal.

Important artists

Kavingal Chathunni Panicker, a celebrated and veteran performer of this field, is a scion of the famous Kavungal family associated with ‘Kathakali’ for six generations. Kalamandalam Gopi, a renowned name in ‘Kathakali’ with a career of over 30 years, is one of the most eminent representatives of the Kalluvazhi School of Kerala. Another famed ‘Kathakali’ actor Kottakkal Sivaraman, who portrays feminine characters emotes different nayika bhavas such as lasya nayika and vasakasajjika with great élan. Kalamandalam Ramankutty Nair is a seasoned ‘Kathakali’ performer who not only earned fame for portraying negative characters like Ravana and Duryodhana but also proved his mettle in characterising Lord Hanuman. Other imminent ‘Kathakali’ performers include Kalamandalam Krishna Prasad, Kalamandalam Vasu Pisharody, Kalamandalam Kesavan Namboodiri and Kalanilayam Balakrishnan to name a few.

Kathakali Dance

The dance movements of Kathakali consist of a comprehensive language of gestures, facial expressions, feet movements and body postures. The whole body is used in this dance style. The whole range of movements of eyebrows, eye-lids and eye-balls specified in *Natya Shastra* is used. There are twenty four basic mudras in Kathakali,

some of them having up to thirty or forty interpretations. The facial muscles are extremely crucial for a good Kathakali performance. The feet are curved and bent on the outer sides with the entire body weight on them. Rhythmic jumps, leaps and fast turning are incorporated in pure dance phases known as Kalaasams.

Kalaasam's threw light on the supreme combinations of inborn talent and rigorous training requisite for any actor to perform the classical art forms of Kerala. They fall in between the verse lines and dance crescendos at the end of the songs. Ashtakalasangam, one among the Kalaasam, comprises of eight dance types in Kathakali performed to express the enormous joy of a character. The steps are composed in the 'Champa' rhythm and require great mastery for an artiste to perform. Each performance ends in Astakalasangam of huge movements, rhythm, orchestra, dance, music and moods.

Sculptures

The temple sculpture in Kerala like the frescoes in the Padmanabhaswami and Mattancheri temple provide evidence of the fact that the basic Kathakali positions employed today were established by the sixteenth century. For Body Movements and Choreographical Patterns, Kathakali is also indebted to the Early Martial Arts of Kerala.

Training Centers

Kathakali is an art form that has been passed on from generation to generation through a guru disciple based training system. Artists cherry picked promising talents from their own families, sometimes from outside the family, and the new budding artists stayed with his guru for learning and was treated like a family member. The guru provided both practical and theoretical training to the student and the student would accompany the guru for formal performances.

In modern times various schools have been established for training Kathakali aspirants such as Trivandram Margi school and the Kerala Kalamandala. Kathakali schools are found all over India and in parts of western Europe and America.

A typical Kathakali training inspection includes examining health and physical fitness necessary to do aerobic and stage performances, body flexibility, sense of rhythm and an interview to discover how sincere the student is in the performance. A course in Kathakali emphasizes physical conditioning and daily exercises, yoga and massage to tone the body and sculpt the growing body along with learning the dance practice as per ancient Indian tradition.

Awards

Sangeet Natak academy awards- Kathakali (1965- 2005).

Nambeesan Smaraka awards for artistic performance related to Kathakali (1919-2008)

International center for Kathakali award.

Dance Forms Related to Kathakali

The theory and foundations of Kathakali are the same as other major classical Indian dances, rooted in Sanskrit texts such as the *Natyashastra*. The expression style in each are distinct and unique. Kathakali is different from the similar sounding Kathak. Though both are Indian classical dance traditions of “story play” wherein stories have traditionally been derived from Hindu epics and Puranas..Kathak is an ancient performance art that originated in northern India. With roots in travelling bards that retell mythical stories through dance and acting.

Kathak has traditionally included female actors unlike Kathakali that is performed by all male actors. Kathak has much simpler costumes, make-up and no face marks. Both dance forms employ choreography, face and hand gestures traceable to *Natyashastra*. Kathak generally moves around a straight leg and torso movements with

no leaps and jumps like Kathakali.

Kobuki is a Japanese art form similar to Kathakali, Jingju a Chinese art of dance acting similar to Kathakali presents artists with elaborate marks, costumes and colourfully painted faces. A traditional Kathakali performance begins in the evening and continues through the night culminates at the auspicious hour of dawn when good wins over evil. Keli, Arangukeli, Thodayam, Wandanasloka, Purapadu, Melapadam, Kathabhinayam and, Dhansi are the ashtangas of Kathakali.

Kathakali in Movies

Vanaprastham is a movie based on the theme of Kathakali. In the movie Mohanlal plays the role of Kunjikuttan , a low caste Kathakali artist during the 1940s era in Travancore. Subhadra (suhasini) a member of an aristocratic family falls in love with character Arjuna played by Kunjikuttan. She views Kunjikuttan and the character played by him as two separate individuals. The film was nominated for grand jury price AFI Los Angeles international film festival in 1999.

Kathakali today

This is a worrying time for Kathakali as more artists perform on a self employed basis and the ethos of the kali yogam is diminishing. It is important that Kathakali returns to its roots . The whole reason for performing is questioned. The younger artists need support for Kathakali's progress.

Chapter Three

Conclusion

Kathakali is an extraordinary fusion of the arts, in which each element pairs together to create a complete performance that exemplifies the human experience and expresses our eternal quest for spirituality. The Sanskrit poems were made accessible to the larger community by Kathakali. It is a very majestic art and the costumes portray that a good deal aesthetic values have gone into formulating of this art. The concept is of 'total theatre', where acting, music both vocal and instrumental, the colour psychology and the costumes play their peculiar roles. Kathakali, as it is known today is not more than three to four hundred years old, even though its actual roots can be traced to at least 1500 years earlier. The art of Kathakali incorporates the characteristic features of many of the dances and dramas and it is safe to conclude that Kathakali evolved out of the earlier dance forms like the Chakiyarkoothu and Koodiyattom in Kerala, various ritual dances associated with the cult of Bhagavathy, such as the Mudi yettu, Thiyyattom and Theyyattom, the socio-religious and material dances such as the Sastrakali and Ezhamattukali and the lately evolved dance – dramas such as the Krishnanattom and Ramanattom.

Although its basic components, like most other performing arts in India, can be traced back to the two-thousand year old Natya Shastra written by Bharat Muni; influences of a variety of other art forms from Kerala are evident in Kathakali. Many trace its origins to Ramanattam, librettos written down by Kottayath Thampuram, based on the life of Rama as described in the Ramayana. There are others who think it owes its roots to Krishnattam or Krishna's dance which was performed as an offering to Lord Krishna within the confines of the Guruvayur Temple over a course of eight days. However, it was only in the late 16th and early 17th century that Kathakali emerged as

a distinct genre of performance and was given its present name that literally translates into story-play (katha– story and kali comes from kala meaning art). Kathakali evoke a state, a Sthayi bhava and a rasa through a familiar story of the Indian Puranas. It has a familiar music, symbolic make-up, stylized costuming and headgear. Kathakali is apparently the only dance performance which follows the classical tradition of presenting a particular rasa as the content of a dramatic performance. Kathakali is a vital form of theatre which has its roots in classical tradition.

Katakali was continuously refined by its knowledgeable patrons, who belonged to the ruling caste, royal lineages of the Nayyars, and the highest rank of Namboodiri Brahmins. They understood the nuances of each poetic text and were able to appreciate and criticize each performer's style and approach to performing particular roles. Raikas were the original art connoisseurs whose minds were so attentive to expressions that they responded intuitively to everything they saw. Unfortunately, there are few art-lovers today who can even come close to being called rasikas.

Kathakali is known for its vibrant costumes, bright makeup, sharp and controlled movements, along with trademark eye and facial gestures that captivate the audience. It takes 3-5 hours for the face painting of most of the male characters. Primarily, the face of the artisan is painted so as to mimic a mask, where they represent a particular type of character. These can be either pacha, kathi, thadi, kari or minukku. Each has its own colours, representing heroes, villains, and celestial beings. The makeup accentuates each bodily feature, invoking characters and storylines that leave a lasting impression. The Kathakali characters were inspired by the stunning sculptures of the temples depicting the gods and goddesses of the Ramayanan and the Mahabharatha. Kathakali also draws its inspiration from the temple rituals and earlier forms of classical drama to include Koothu, Koodiyattam, Krishnanattam and various folk arts.

Kathakali music has attained a high level of perfection. The raagas of the songs have been carefully selected to suggest the relevant emotional nuance and dramatic content. The synthesis of imagery and melody is a perfect achievement. Sixty different raagas and six talas are used with supreme evocative quality by the accomplished musicians. The movement of the actor is exquisite and never obtrudes itself beyond the meaning of dance, delicately soft when necessary and extremely virile and tense at other times. The closest and most harmonious co-operation is necessary between the three artistes the dancer, the singer and the drummer to render a performance in the Kathakali dance a success. The colour effect of the triangular harmony between the Geetham, Nritham and Vadyam is supremely enchanting. The songs are long drawn. The esoteric significance of Kathakali songs has been extolled. The voices of the songster resound and carry far into the night.

Indian Kathakali dancers are the talented artists who have made Kathakali, a popular art in all across the globe. Kathakali is probably the oldest theatre forms in the world. It was originated in the state of Kerala and the Kathakali dancers perform a group presentation, in which they act upon various roles which are traditionally based on the themes from sacred Hindu mythology, especially the two epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

The Indian Kathakali dancers are experts in expressing the highly developed language of gesture, through which the artists usually convey the whole sentences and stories. The body movements and foot works of these dancers are very rigorous. However, the elaborate make up aids the dancers to a great extent in expressing their story. Apart from the facial make up, each Kathakali dancer wears a detailed costume, with a headdress and several layers of skirts, as well as heavy jewellery, anklets, bracelets and rings.

Kathakali is first presented as vigneshare its billing in traditional settings. The politics and aesthetics of the worlds of the kathakali are looked at not only in terms of their traditional, folkloric and classical development but also in contrast to more contemporary, secular and controversial dynamics that are impacting upon kathakali today. Kathakali is looked at not only in terms of their traditional, folkloric and classical development but also in contrast to more contemporary, secular and controversial dynamics that are impacting upon Kathakali today.

Among all the theatre and dance forms of India Kathakali stands out in prominence. It is an art form which reflects both tradition and modernity. It has absorbed all the regional flavours and cultural values of the land of its origin and combined it with the spirit of freedom and revolutionary thought to result in a magical and majestic form. Though the theme is centered on epics and puranas, modern themes and Shakespearean plays have been experimented in recent times. Evolution in the form and content which began since its inception and which continues is the main reason behind this thriving world theatre.

The magnificent art of Kathakali seems to be crumbling. It is starting to earn the reputation of being “a poor man’s rich art”. Kathakali artists are being forced to struggle for survival as opportunities to perform the art are dwindling day by day and the main source of income for this art remains restricted to tourism.

The 60 year old Vijayan Asan (teacher), he has performed this art for decades and has also trained hundreds of budding performers in the tradition. He says the glorious days of Kathakali artists has ended.” Artists who unabashedly make a business out of Kathakali can survive. Others who stuck to its core values face the danger of perishing” says Vijayan. During the tourist season theatres in Kerala organize daily puruna based acts.

Those who perform at theaters have a permanent income , others struggle to survive. Kathakali is a magnificent art that is facing the threat of extinction in the modern times. Lovers of the art form and government should act to presser the act. The payment of a Kathakali artist depends on seniority. The senior most ashan with at least 30 years of experience gets the highest payment which can go up to Rs. 20000 per play. Others get an average Rs.1000 per performance.

Those who do not perform for tourist audience by choice or a lack of opportunity find themselves with just two or three plays a year. Bad packages are only one angle to the story. A Kathakali costume costs upto Rs. 1.5 lakh, the crown which is an important part of the costume alone costs Rs. 75000. If the performance is booked through an agency, then the agents takes away half of the payment.

“I am in this field for the past 10 years and I am able to survive only because of theater plays. Off- seasons are a struggle. I don’t think there is a solution when it comes to job opportunities for us” says Shashidharan a Kathakali artist from Kochi.

Earlier Kathakali was a regular feature in temple festivals in Kerala. Performances through the night would draw large audience. Very few temples choose Kathakali for festivals these days and the viewers is not more than 70.

In the yore temple performances, now the younger generation is getting disconnected with the traditional arts, says Shashidharan.

Sugeendran who has been singing in accompaniment with Kathakali performances for the last 20 years in Kerala Kathakali center Kochi feels that India is losing an art of patience. Performances that lasted for 6 hours have now become capsules of an hour or two he says. The ancient art of Kathakali should be maintained and preserved by lovers of the art.

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Appendix



VARIOUS COLOURFUL COSTUMES & MAKEUP IN KATHAKALI



PACHA PAZHUPPU KATHI DUSSAANANA CHUVANNA THAADI KARUTHA THAADI KARI



SREE KRISHNA BHADRA KAALI VELLA THAADDI MINUKKU SUDHAAMA A GENTLE WOMAN VALALA



HAMSA KARKKOTAKA NARASIMHA ROUDRA BHEEMA

