

PERFORMING ART FORMS OF KERALA

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ABSTRACT

Kerala is one of the most Colourful and culturally rich states of India. Dance and artforms are integral parts of a religion's culture. "God's own Country" Kerala boasts of its several forms of dances and art. Some of the folk dances which are native to the state have gained popularity. In Kerala, the folk dances are accompanied by splendid costumes and ornaments Perfectly adorning the performers. There are nearly fifty dance forms performed in Kerala, prominent ones are Thiruvathiraikali, Theyyam, Koodiyattam, Chakyar Koothu & Ottamthullal. Kerala is renowned for its two indigenous forms of classical dances "Kathakali" and "Mohiniyatam".

Keywords : Kerala, Dance, Trissur, Kathakali, Mohiniyattam.

Art is a diverse range of human activities in creating visual, auditory or performing artifacts(art works), expressing the author's imaginative or technical skill, intend to be appreciated for their beauty or emotional power. Art is a global activity which encompasses a host of disciplines , as evidenced by the range of words and phrases which have been invented to describe its various forms. The oldest documented forms of art are visual arts, which include creation of images or objects in fields including today painting, sculpture, printmaking, photography, and other visual media. Examples of such phraseology include, "Fine Arts", "Liberal Arts", "Visual arts", "Decorative Arts", "Applied Arts", "Design", "Crafts", "Performing Arts", etc.,

Kerala is sandwiched between the Lakshadweep sea and the Western Ghats. It's a bustling little green and silver , Coconuts and water state on the west coast of India. It is bounded by Karnataka to the north, Tamilnadu to the east and the Arabian Sea to the west. Every district in Kerala has its own Unique culture and characteristics. Trivandrum is known for its beach kovalam, the SriPadmanabaswamy temple and various museums and Palaces, Alapuzha for its back waters, kottayam for its ancient churches and Trissur – the Cultural Capital.

The Phrase “God’s own Country” is Perhaps the most apt way of describing Kerala. Kerala with its crisp and fresh air, its absolutely pure and green environs and the nature trails that take to a strikingly beautiful world , as though God picked up his painting brush and palate and created this wonderful and soothing painting for you to realize and appreciate the fact that ‘ Life is beautiful’. Kerala one of the meeting place of many cultures. Kerala has a particularly rich heritage of dance and drama (Kathakali, Koothu Mohini attam and other temple arts originated here).

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KATHAKALI

Kathakali is the most popular sacred dance drama of Kerala. Kathakali evolved across the last 400 years. Kerala owes its transnational fame to this nearly 300 years old classical dance form from which combines facets of ballet, Opera, masque and the pantomime. It is said to have evolved from other performing arts like koodiyattam, krishanattam and kalarippayattu.

Kathakali explicates ideas and stories from the Indian epics and puranas. Presented in the temple precincts after dusk falls kathakali is her aided by the kelikottu or beating of drums in accompaniment of the chengila. The riches of a happy blending of colour, expressions , music, drama and dance is unparalleled in any other art form.

MOHINIYATTAM

Mohiniyattam is usually performed as a solo dance and is very lyrical in its rendering. The origin of Mohiniyattam is rooted in Hindu mythology. Once the ocean of milk was churned by the gods and demons to Lord Vishnu came to the rescue of the panicky gods and assumed the female form of an amorous celestial dame mohini. Captivating the demons with her charms, mohini stole the elixir from them and restored it to the gods, slow , graceful , swaying movements of the body and limbs and highly emotioned eye and hand gestures are unique to this dance form. The simple, elegant gold filigreed dress, in pure white for ivory, akin to the traditional attire of the women of Kerala. This dance was adopted by the Devadasi or temple dances, hence also the name Tjasiattam which was very popular during the chera region from 9th to 12th century.

THULLAL

Thullal is a classical solo dance form of Kerala, which comes closer to contemporary life and is market for its simplicity, wit and humour. Staged during temple festivals, the performer

explicates the verses through expressive gestures. The themes are based on mythology. This satiric art form was introduced in the 18th century by the renowned poet Kunchan Nambiar. Make up, though simple, is very much akin to that of Kathakali. The Thullal dancer is supported by a singer who repeats the verses and is accompanied by an orchestra of mridangam and cymbals. There are three related forms of thullal ottanthullal, seethankathullal and parayanthullal of which the first is the most popular.

KOODIYATTAM

Koodiyattam literally means ‘acting together’. This is the earliest classical dramatic art form of Kerala. Based on sage Bharatha’s “Natyasastra” who lived in the second century, koodiyattam evolved in the 9th century A.D. Koodiyattam is enacted inside the temple theatre, there are two or more characters onstage at the same time, with the chakkars, providing the male cast and the Nangars playing the female roles. The nangars beat the cymbals and recite verses in Sanskrit, while in the background nambiar play the mizhavu, a large copper drum. The koodal manichyamb temple at Irinjalakkuda and the Vadakkumnatha temple at Trissur are the main centers where Koodiyattam is still performed annually. Ammannoor Madhava Chakkari is an unrivalled maestro of this rare art the leader of the group sings the lead, while the others form the chorus and move in circles. Duffumutu can be performed at any time of the day and has no fixed time limit.

KALARIPAYATTU – MOTHER OF ALL MARTIAL ARTS

“Kalaripayattu” is a school of martial arts derivative of the Sanskrit word ‘Kholoorika’ meaning of military training centre and “Payattu” the fight. It is a form of martial arts practiced by Hindus. It is believed that sage Parasurama who built temples along south India introduced this art. There are historical evidences of kalari dated back to the 12th century and historians believe that it is the oldest form of martial art in the world. Kalaripayattu training is imparted inside the kalari, which is rectangular in design and always aligned, east west, with idols of all the presiding deities of the art each corner of the beginning of the practice with all rituals singing of hymns as in a temple.

This art includes seven shastras (sciences) like Vastu, Jyothi, Marma, Ayurveda, Asana, Tantra and Mantra. The pupils are trained in self – discipline and physical culture. Initially the student body is toned pliable, agile and versatile by regular massage by feet and hands with medicated oil. Then trained to wield Kuruvadi (short sticks), spear, dagger, sword, shield, etc. The most advanced course of training is wielding of “Urumi” a thin springy three – meter long double –

edged sword worn around the waist locked like a belt. It can be drawn unwounded in a flick of a moment when required. It is highly lethal for an adept wielder can aim it to swirl around the neck of the opponent and, at the slightest jerk, the head will roll on the floor of the arena. Flying feats daring onslaughts and dodging with dexterity are the ways in combat. Defensive and offensive strikes with lightning speed are its peculiarity. There are customarily eighteen 'adavu'(tricks) in this warfare. Seventeen, fighting with all the weapons one by one, the eighteenth being Toozhikkadakah, a feat producing a cover of whirlwind of dust around the combatant by stamping the earth and swift circular movement to camouflage him from the opponent and to take him by surprise with sudden retaliatory death blows.

MARAKKAM KALI

It is a counterpart of Thiruvathira Kali played by women belonging to the Christian community. The dancers attired in traditional white mundu (dhoti), chatta (Jacket), rich jewellery including Mekkamothirm (an ornamental ring worn by the Christian ladies on the upper lobe of the ear, now considered old fashioned). The dancers sing in praise of Jesus Christ to the varying rhythms of drum beating.

PULIKALI – TIGER DANCE

Pulikali or 'Kaduvakalai' (the dance of the tiger) is usually performed during the Onam festival. Groups of three or more dancers with pastes smeared over their energetic dances. The Pulikalai once performed all over the State is now seen only in some parts of Trissur and Palakkad districts. The scenes enacted include the tiger catching a goat, being hunted down and so on. This dance is accompanied by the loud beating of traditional percussion instruments like the udukku, thakil and chenda.

PAANA

This art form is popular in the district of Trissur, Palakkad and Malappuram. Paana is performed to propitiate the goddess Bhadrakali. It is a part of three – day festival. A canopy is made supported by 64 poles cut out from Paala tree (*Alstonia scholaris*) and adorned with tressed palm leaves. A stump of paala tree is ceremonially brought to the site and planted. A non – figurative Kolam (rangoli) is drawn in the centre using coloured powders. A ceremonial sword is placed on a

red cloth under the tree stump to signify the Presence of the goddess. At the last stages of rites, the oracle arrives and moves in a trance around the canopy. The Para, a variation of the Chenda (drum) is the main percussion.

MUDIYETTU

Mudiyettu is a ritual dance performed in Kaali temples of Ernakulam and Kottayam. This dance is to celebrate the victory of Goddess over the demon Daarikan. This dance is performed by Kuruppu and Marar community of Kerala.

The performers of Mudiyettu are all heavily made up and wear gorgeous attire with conventional facial paintings, tall headgears etc, to give a touch of the supernatural. The wooden headgear has a mask of Kaali. An ornamental red vest and a white dhoti complete the attire.

KUMMATTIKALI

Kummattikali is a mask dance popular in some of the northern districts of Kerala. The dancers, wearing painted wooden masks and sporting sprigs of leaves and grass, go for dancing from house to house. A popular Kummatti character is Thalia or the witch; the others represent various Hindu gods and goddesses. The songs deal with devotional themes and are accompanied by a bow-like instrument called Ona-villu. No formal training is required to perform the Kummattikali, and often the spectators join the performance.

KRISHANANTTOM

A spectacle for both the scholar and the simple rustic. The visual effect is enhanced by varied and colourful facial makeup with larger than life masks, made of light wood and cloth padding for certain characters. The characters who do not wear masks have specific facial colours applied within the frame of a white chutti. The predominant colours used are dark green, flesh tint and deep rose. The characters of Krishna, Arjuna and Garuda wear dark blue vests. The traditional performance lasts for eight days and covers the whole span of Krishna's life from his birth to 'Swargaroham' or ascension to the heavens. Orchestral accompaniments are Maddalam, Uthalam and Chengila.

Kerala is an established tourist destination for both Indians and non-Indians alike. Tourism contributes to nearly 10% of the state's GSDP. Tourists mostly visit the performing arts and folk dances. It will increase the economical level of Kerala tourism. Kerala has always been a melting

pot of various cultures. Being ruled by several dynasties, it adopted different lifestyle patterns and evolved with a unique colourful and vibrant culture.

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